



Separatists and Russian nationalist-extremist allies of the Party of Regions call for union with Russia

Today at 17:38 | Taras Kuzio

The signing of an accord to prolong the Black Sea Fleet in the Crimea by 25 years not only infringes the Constitution again, but also threatens Ukraine's territorial integrity. If a president is willing to ignore the Constitution on two big questions in less than two months in office, what will he have done to the Constitution after 60 months in office? As somebody wrote on my Facebook profile yesterday, the Constitution is now "toilet paper."

The threat to Ukraine's territorial integrity is deeper. Since President Viktor Yanukovich's election, Russian nationalist-extremist allies of the Party of Regions have begun to radicalize their activities. Their mix of Russophile and Sovietophile ideological views are given encouragement by cabinet ministers such as Minister of Education Dmytro Tabachnyk and First Deputy Prime Minister Volodymyr Semynozhenko.

Calls, which look increasingly orchestrated, are made to change Ukraine's national anthem, adopt Russian as a state language, transform Ukraine into a federal state and coordinate the writing of educational textbooks with Russia. On Monday, Russian nationalist-extremist allies of the Party of Regions in the Crimea organized a meeting on the anniversary of the Crimea's annexation by the Russian empire that demanded a full military, political and economic union with Russia.

Russian nationalist-extremists in the Crimea were marginalized by ex-President Leonid Kuchma after he abolished the Crimean presidential institution in 1995. Then Deputy Prime Minister Yevhen Marchuk undertook measures to subvert and undermine the Russian nationalist-extremists who came to power in the peninsula in 1994.

These political forces remained marginalized for the next decade and only received an infusion of life when the Party of Regions united with two Russian nationalist-extremist political forces in the For Yanukovich! bloc in the 2006 Crimean parliamentary elections. They included the Russian bloc and the Russian Community of the Crimea (ROK), the most influential Russian nationalist group in the peninsula. The head

of ROK, first deputy speaker of the Crimean parliament, Sergei Tsekov is an out and out Ukrainophobe.

The Russian bloc and ROK supported Monday's call for Ukraine's full union with Russia and thereby backed Semynozhenko's stance for an Eastern Slavic union that he outlined late last month on the Ukrayina channel.

The Russian bloc is financed by Moscow Mayor Yury Luzhkov and has close links to Russian intelligence. ROK is financed by Luzhkov and Konstantin Zatulin, the Russian Foreign Ministry and Russian presidential administration through the Mir 'charitable' organization (Mir is modelled on the British Council but, unlike the British Council, has close links to the intelligence services).

Russian nationalist organizations "serve, consciously or unconsciously, as a rather useful tool' for mainstream political forces, such as the Party of Regions, that enables them to attract their radical supporters", according to the Razumkov Centre's journal Natsionalna Bezpeka i Oborona (no.5, 2009).

In Odesa, Russian nationalist-extremists have also revived their activities. A criminal case against Rodina Party leader Igor Markov was closed after Yanukovich was elected. The State Security Service believed Markov's activities, which led to the murder of a Ukrainian nationalist student last year, was financed by Russian intelligence.

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This evidence led to the expulsion of the Russian Consul in Odesa last summer. I wrote about this last year for the Jamestown Foundation:

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Markov has returned to Odesa and is agitating for pre-term mayoral elections where he will stand as a candidate for mayor. Other rumours suggest he may be appointed deputy governor of Odesa.

Deputy Prime Ministers Sergei Tigipko and Volodymyr Sivkovich have both defended Markov in the past. Sivkovich recently said that Rodina should be re-registered as a political party. I am sure 'Justice Minister' Oleksandr Lavrynovych will oblige Mr.Sivkovich's demand.

Separatists in Donetsk, who were investigated by the SBU, have also received a new lease of life since Yanukovich was elected. Komentarii (9 April) published 'Donetsk boomerang of separatism for Yanukovich' (<http://comments.com.ua/?art=1270743299>). The Donetsk Republic separatist organisation was legalised in 2006 and was investigated by the SBU. The investigation was closed after Yanukovich came to power. Nezavisimaya Gazeta (19 February 2010) headlined a similar article entitled "The Crimea could become a major problem for the new Ukrainian president" (http://www.ng.ru/cis/2010-02-19/1_kiev.html).

As Komentarii pointed out, both Deputy Prime Ministers Borys Kolesnikov and Viktor Tykhonov were initiators of the November 2004 separatist congress, gave support to the Donetsk separatists and both continue to back a federal structure for Ukraine. "Many experts believe the godfather of the Donetsk Republic organisation is the current Deputy Prime Minister Boris Kolesnikov", Komentarii wrote.

President Yushchenko ordered the SBU to investigate pro-Russian separatists in the Crimea, Donetsk and Trans-Carpathia but the SBU was never instructed to go after the Russian nationalist-extremist allies of the Party of Regions in the Crimean parliament. Russian separatists and extremists were investigated and banned in Trans-Carpathia, Crimea, Donetsk and Odesa.

Yanukovich has closed SBU investigations into separatist and nationalist- extremist threats to Ukraine's national security as these often come from his own regional political allies (as in the Crimea) or were initiated by current members of the government (as in Donetsk).

The Party of Regions encouraged the revival of Russian nationalist-extremists and separatists in the Crimean 2006 elections and through the September 2008 Crimean parliamentary vote to recognize South Ossetia and Abkhazia's independence. A similar resolution backed by the Party of Regions and the Communists in the Ukrainian parliament failed.

It was the height of irresponsibility for Yanukovich and the Party of Regions to enter into an alliance with separatists and Russian nationalist-extremists that are a threat to Ukraine's territorial integrity. This will backfire on Yanukovich and undermine Ukraine's national security.

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