

# FAR RIGHT POLITICAL PARTIES IN CONTEMPORARY UKRAINE: THE AFTERMATH OF THE REVOLUTION OF DIGNITY

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## Abstract

The Revolution of Dignity, annexation of Crimea and outbreak of military conflict in the Eastern Ukraine led to overall increase of the level of patriotism and support of ideas, typical for far right political parties. Nevertheless, despite the fact that the party system has changed significantly (approximately one-third of all Ukrainian parties have been registered in or after February 2014), a few clearly identify themselves as the far right. Moreover, their electoral results are low and they remain marginal. It leads to a belief that the far right ideology will not gain much support in contemporary Ukraine.

**Key words:** *Ukraine, political parties, ideology, far right political parties.*

## INTRODUCTION

The history of contemporary far right political parties in Ukraine starts from the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Soviet one-party system had ceased to exist even before the country gained independence in 1991 and new political parties began to emerge in a rather alarming rate. Currently the number of parties is more than 300 [Single Registry of Civil Society Entities]. All major events in the country give an impetus for significant transformation of Ukrainian party system. Mostly, such changes occur, when the ruling party loses popularity and is forced to rebrand itself in order to maintain electoral support. The best illustration of this is the establishment of several parties after the Party of Regions (the party of the former President of Ukraine Viktor Yanukovich) lost any prospects of winning.

At the same time, newly formed political parties rarely choose far right ideology as the basis for their positions. The most favored self-labels include 'liberal' or 'centrist'. Even though their real ideologies, taken from their programs and rhetoric, can significantly differ from the proclaimed ones, again, far right ideology is not in favor. The far right parties, formed in the first years of independence, such as the Congress of Ukrainian Nationalists, remain rather marginal.

The Revolution of Dignity, annexation of Crimea peninsula and military conflict in the Eastern Ukraine led some experts to believe that the situation will change and the far right ideology will gain more popularity. With the overall increase of patriotism and the feeling of belonging, far right political parties did actually return to the political life. Several new parties have been established since and the process is still ongoing (for instance, one of the far right parties, mentioned in this study, the Right Sector recently experienced a split). Their electoral support is still rather low and there is little potential for further growth. Therefore, it is believed that the far right political parties will not gain long-lasting popularity, enough for active participation in the agenda setting and decision-making in Ukraine.

## **METHODS**

Since there is a significant difference between stated and actual ideology and values of any political party in Ukraine, all parties that emerged after the Revolution of Dignity (after February 2014) have been analyzed. The data has been gathered on the web site of the Ministry of Justice of Ukraine that publishes a list of registered parties. The content of their program documents (value and electoral programs) has been analyzed in order to determine whether they could be considered far right, according to the criteria, discussed in the Cas Mudde's seminal work "Populist Radical Right Parties in Western Europe" [Mudde 2007].

One of the main problems in this regard is that it is impossible to take into consideration constant rebranding of the political parties. Since the electoral laws (in practically all versions, adopted since gaining independence) have certain requirements on the 'age' of political parties, demanding from them to either exist for a defined period of time before elections or being registered before a particular date, some politicians, forming a new political party, prefer to buy and reorganize an existing one. For instance, far right political party "The Right Sector", discussed in this article, emerged during the Revolution of Dignity but it was decided to change the name of already existing "UNA-UNSO" party. As a result, on the official list of parties The Right Sector is recorded as a party, established in 1997. Due to a large overall number of political parties in Ukraine (over 300), it is impossible to study the history of every single one in order to identify such cases. Thus only the parties, listed as registered on or after February 2014 are analyzed in this study. Taking into consideration that since that time about 1/3 of overall number of Ukrainian parties has been registered, it is interesting to find out whether they choose far right ideology as their own [Single Registry of Civil Society Entities].

Further, electoral history of the parties, identified as far right, has been studied. The data has been collected from the database of the Central Election Commission. The results of all elections, which occurred after February 2014, has been taken into consideration. They include presidential and parliamentary elections in 2014 as well as local elections in 2015. Any special elections during this period were ignored as the information, available for analysis, is limited.

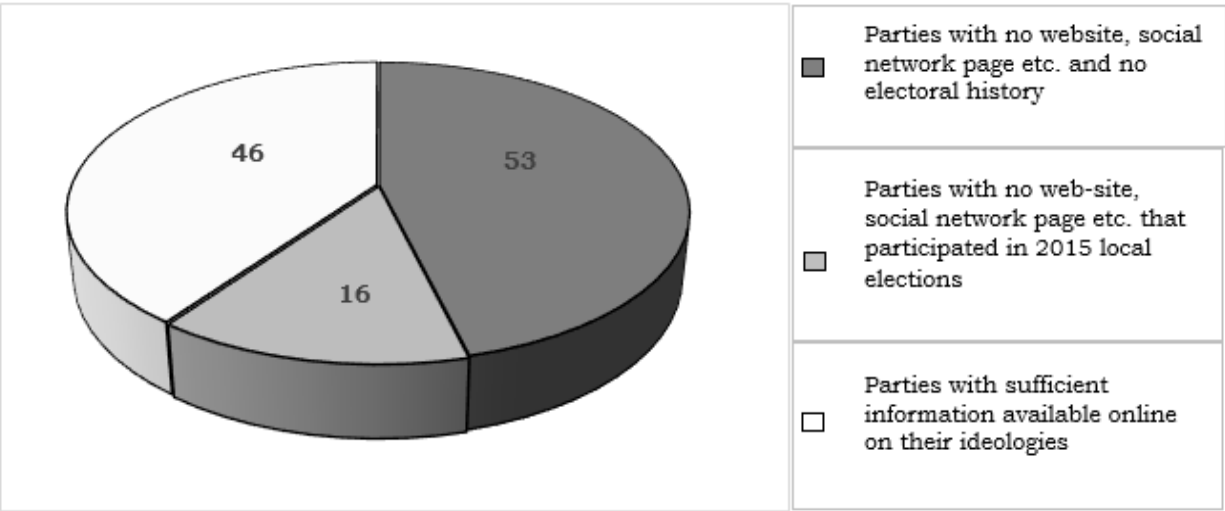
In order to make conclusion on the prospects of far right political parties, the public opinion has been studied. In this regard, the results of several most authoritative polls have been analyzed and compared with the outcomes of the elections for each

party. When available, several election results for the same party have been compared.

### MAIN FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

According to the Ministry of Justice of Ukraine, 115 political parties wereregistered in the period from February 2014 until December 2015. The prevailing majority of them do not have a web site, page in social networks, blog or any other form of mass communication. As a result, the only information available for analysis is from the electoral programs if they take part in any elections. Among the parties, chosen for this study, 53 did not take part in any elections and did not publish any information that could be accessed and studied.

**Figure 1.** Political parties in Ukraine, registered after February 2014



Source. The overall list of parties has been taken from the Single Registry of Civil Society Entities. The rest of data is from author's own research.

Consequently, 46 out of 115 political parties, established in Ukraine after February 2014, have been analyzed in depth. Three parties caught the attention as the instances of far right ideology have been found in their programs and other documents. They were taken into analysis in order to determine, whether they could be considered far right. The party on the edge of being far right is the “5.10” party. It has a clear anti-tax theme (the party demands full reorganization of Ukrainian tax system, leaving only two taxes – 5% sales tax and 10% social security tax). From this regard, the party is similar to some far right political parties that began their development by working on this topic. At the same time, no incidents of nativism and authoritarianism have been found in party documents thus this party was not taken into consideration [The 5.10 Party Program].

The other party that is somewhat on the margins is the party “Pravo narodu” (Right of the People). The party has a very small program, consisting of five bullet points paragraph, one to two sentences each. It limits the possibility to analyze the ideology in full, nevertheless, certain conclusions can still be made. The party refers to religion

as a basis for morality and all decisions. It accepts only Ukrainians by nationality and spirit, regardless of citizenship. More details can be found in the vision for Ukraine for 2020, also published on the website. It has several ideas, typical for far right political parties, such as a requirement to pass the Ukrainian language and history exam in order to receive any state help or subsidy. All investments by social security funds must be made only to Ukrainian enterprises [Theses on the Strategy of Development of Ukraine till 2020]. At the same time, the instances of nativism, mentioned above, are the only ones in several party documents, therefore, it would be impossible to classify the party as definite far right.

As a result, the only far right political parties, registered after the Revolution of Dignity, is the UNA-UNSO (Ukrainian-National Assembly – Ukrainian National Self-Defense). However, in reality the party is not ‘new’. The original UNA-UNSO party was registered in the beginning of 90s and renamed after the Revolution of Dignity to The Right Sector. But such decision was not supported by the most prominent UNA-UNSO leaders that left the party and reestablished the UNA-UNSO brand in 2015. Since the history of two parties is much interconnected, thus, it needs further research and explanation. UNA-UNSO was formed even before collapse of the USSR. The party, called Ukrainian National Assembly, was established in 1990. The party held several very radical and unusual for Soviet society activities such as a torch walk on the street of Lviv. During Soviet coup d'état attempt in 1991 the party formed a paramilitary wing Ukrainian National Self-Defense (from that time the party became known as UNA-UNSO). The wing was not very active in Ukraine but it took part in several military conflicts abroad, for instance in Moldova and Transnistria [Umland]. Main activities of UNA-UNSO included street manifestations and actions, often turning into fights with the opponents and police forces. The party was present in the media and rather known among Ukrainian voters but did not get much electoral support. In 1994, only one candidate was elected to the parliament in a single-mandate district. Moreover, the party was banned the following year and had to struggle to return its legal status. In order to do this and to increase the support, the party changed its image and the most radical politicians left it. But such strategy also did not prove successful and, in 1998 (the party was allowed to participate in the elections by that time) no candidate elected in the single-mandate districts and the party list received only 0,39% of the votes [Umland].

Despite low electoral support, UNA-UNSO remained rather active in various anti-government initiatives and street protests. For instance, its members took part in so called “Ukraine without Kuchma” (Leonid Kuchma was at that time the President of Ukraine and, in 2000-2001, many different organizations and opinion leaders joined forces in a mass street protest for regime change) and Orange Revolution (protest against electoral fraud and Central Election Commission announcement of Viktor Yanukovich’s victory in 2004). However, such activities still did not bring electoral popularity and much wanted voted. On the contrary, the results were getting even worse. In 2002, only 0,04% of voters supported the UNA-UNSO party. In order to improve the situation in 2006, the party tried to form coalitions with other ideologically close parties but unsuccessfully. The bloc was not formed and the party took part in parliamentary elections independently, gaining only 0,06% of votes and choosing not to run in early elections in 2007 [Umland]. In 2012, one more attempt to translate the recognition into votes again failed with the party getting only 0,08%.

A new stage in party history started in late 2013 with the outbreak of the Revolution of Dignity. The party was very active in the street protests, often organizing some events and leading them. Its representatives joined a group of various nationalist and far right organizations during the Euromaidan. Later the group received a name “Right Sector” and was led by Dmytro Yarosh. After Yanukovich’s escape and gradual phasing out of the revolutionary events, the party members within the Right Sector group took part in a series of radical protests in different regions of Ukraine against local authorities, corruption etc. Representatives of the group also formed volunteer battalions and participated in the military conflict in Eastern Ukraine. Deepening of cooperation between the members of the Right Sector group and the members of UNA-UNSO led to reorganization of this group into a political party. It was formed on the basis of existing UNA-UNSO structure but took the name “The Right Sector” [“Right Sector” Established a Political Party].

At the same time, some of the members of Ukrainian National Assembly did not agree with such decision and left the party. Former leader Yuriy Shukhevych took part in the parliamentary elections in 2014 within the Oleg Lyashko Radical Party list. At the beginning of 2015, UNA-UNSO party was reestablished and registered officially by the Ministry of Justice in August 2015 [Single Registry of Civil Society Entities].

As stated before, regardless the fact that The Right Sector has 1997 as the year of official registration, this party should be included in the list of new parties that emerged after the Revolution of Dignity and analyzed from the ideological point of view. The party program had been published on the party website at least from summer 2015, when it was noted as such during this study. The documents starts from party’s perspective on the national state and national identity. It is stated that, despite gaining independence in a long and bloody struggle, Ukrainians still face many internal and external threats that should be dealt with in order to preserve the nation. Three main issues are mentioned in this regard. First of all, Ukrainian elite lacks a clear vision of the nation-building, following short-lived electoral whims instead of following a certain long-term strategy. Secondly, Ukrainian ‘national idea’ still did not become a basis for government decision-making while establishment of Ukrainian nation-state should be the main political task. All other problems – political, economic, social, legal, educational, cultural etc. – can be solved only after this matter is. And, thirdly, the nation did not become the main actor of the decision-making process. The public lacks clear and efficient mechanisms of governmental control. Therefore the party believes that development of Ukrainian nation-state, based on the implementation of the national idea, must be its main task [A Program: The Right Sector].

Instances of far right ideology can be found in many statements within this and other party documents. For example, the main slogan of the Right Sector is ‘God! Ukraine! Freedom!’. Ukraine, its people and interests are above all. Following the ideas of many other far right parties in Europe, the Right Sector states that freedom is impossible if the nation is oppressed. The power should belong to the representatives of the nation that must personally believe in Ukrainian national idea. Members of all other national groups that live in Ukraine must acknowledge that Ukrainian nation is the true master of the territory and state and respect its language, history and laws [A Program: The Right Sector].

Far right ideology is also present in economic views and perspectives on culture national defense. The party believes that the nation state should focus on defending the economic interests of the nation. Big business in Ukraine is not only foreign but also anti-Ukrainian by its essence. The government supports import as opposed to development of national products. Ukrainian info sphere is also dominated by foreign products that often spread anti-Ukrainian ideas [A Program: The Right Sector].

It is very dangerous, according to the Right Sector, to mix up the notions of the national security, security of the nation and state security. The security of Ukraine can be guaranteed only by Ukrainian nation, united in own independent state on the basis of national idea. If the enemies of the nation and state are not identified and punished by the government, the government itself turns into an enemy [A Program: The Right Sector].

The second party, mentioned in this study, is newly established UNA-UNSO party. Since it meets the requirements, set in this research, it must also be studied in depth. The analysis of its program, presented on the party website, demonstrated a clear connection with the far right ideology and values. The party's slogan is "Ukraine for Ukrainians" and its duty is implementation of Ukrainian national idea as the idea of development of the nation-state. It is stated in the program that party defines itself as nationalist with as the communism, cosmopolitanism and liberalism as its main enemies. No progress can be made, according to the party, until Ukrainians start to fully identify themselves as a nation [Political Program of UNA-UNSO Party].

Presenting its economy views, the party states as a big problem the fact that political, economic, and financial resources in Ukraine do not belong to Ukrainians. As a result, national economy is not working for pursuing Ukrainian national interests. On the contrary, it is used against the nation. The party offers as an alternative development of the national-social state. Its main feature is that the economy will be aimed at prosperity of the nation and economic security of the state. The government should preserve control over strategic economic sectors and, if any strategically important enterprise has been already privatized, it should be returned to the state [Political Program of UNA-UNSO Party].

Typically for the far right political parties, the UNA-UNSO talks about tax reform as an instrument to support national manufacture and stimulate further development of Ukrainian business. All unwarranted tax breaks for international and foreign companies should be abolished. All strategic enterprises should be nationalized. Similarly to the Right Sector, the party also differentiates the national security and the state security, arguing that only Ukrainian nation can successfully guarantee the security of Ukraine. In economy, the idea of national-social state is promoted. The priority should be given to the problems of the members of the nation [Political Program of UNA-UNSO Party].

Therefore, the instances of far right ideology can be found in the programs of two out of 115 political parties, established in or after February 2014. Regardless of the fact that nativism ideas gained more popularity among Ukrainians (according to various polls), a very small number of political parties started to identify themselves as far right. Most parties choose to position themselves differently. It can be explained by many factors with low electoral support as one of the main. Despite the increase of the patriotism level, few Ukrainians actually vote for the far right political parties and the situation did not change after the Revolution of Dignity (see Table 1).

**Table 1.** Election results (national parliament) for the far right political parties in Ukraine

| Year  | UNA-UNSO                                    |                                     | Congress of Ukrainian Nationalists          |                                     | Svoboda**                                   |                                     | The Right Sector                            |                                     |
|---|---|-------------------------------------|---|-------------------------------------|---|-------------------------------------|---|-------------------------------------|
|   | Party list, % of votes (number of mandates) | Single-mandate districts*, mandates | Party list, % of votes (number of mandates) | Single-mandate districts*, mandates | Party list, % of votes (number of mandates) | Single-mandate districts*, mandates | Party list, % of votes (number of mandates) | Single-mandate districts*, mandates |
| 1998  | 0,39% (0)                                   | 0                                   | 2,71%*** (0)                                | 3                                   | 0.16%***** (0)                              | 1                                   | ---   | ---                                 |
| 2002  | 0.04% (0)                                   | 1                                   | 23,57%**** (1)                              | 1                                   | ---   | ---                                 | ---   | ---                                 |
| 2006  | 0.06% (0)                                   | n/a                                 | 13.95%**** (3)                              | n/a                                 | 0.36% (0)                                   | n/a                                 | ---   | n/a                                 |
| 2007  | ---   | n/a                                 | ---   | n/a                                 | 0.76% (0)                                   | n/a                                 | ---   | n/a                                 |
| 2012  | 0.08% (0)                                   | 0                                   | 1,11%**** (0)                               | 0                                   | 10.44% (25)                                 | 12                                  | ---   | ---                                 |
| 2014  | ---   | ---                                 | 0,05% (0)                                   | 1                                   | 4.71% (0)                                   | 6                                   | 1,80% (0)                                   | 1                                   |
| Notes<br>* Here both the candidates, nominated by the party, and the self-nominated candidates that listed their party membership are included<br>** Till 2004 – Social-National Party of Ukraine<br>*** Within electoral coalition “The National Front”<br>**** The result is for the electoral bloc of “Our Ukraine” that included the Congress of Ukrainian Nationalists representatives<br>***** Within electoral bloc “Less Words” |   |                                     |   |                                     |   |                                     |   |                                     |

Source. Elections. The Website of Central Election Commission, [online, in Ukrainian] Available at <http://www.cvk.gov.ua/> [Accessed December 15, 2015].

The situation did not change much after October 2015 local elections. The representatives of the far right political parties received rather low support, which distinguishes them from the far right parties of many European countries. Typically, the far right parties in EU tend to increase their support during so called ‘second order’ elections such as local and regional. However, it did not come true for Ukrainian local parties, including the ones that appeared after the Revolution of Dignity. Only two members of the Rights Sector has been elected as local deputies which is not even 0,01% of all local councilors in Ukraine. No representatives of UNA-UNSO has been elected [Elections. The Website of Central Election Commission].

## CONCLUSIONS

Despite the fact that radicalization of electoral preferences in Ukraine after the Revolution of Dignity and outbreak of the conflict in Eastern Ukraine has been predicted by many, the results of this study prove the opposite. Only an insignificant number of newly established political parties clearly positioned themselves as the far right and they remain rather marginal. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that the far right ideology is not becoming more popular in Ukraine at the moment.

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