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WESTERN EXTREMISTS AND THE RUSSIAN INVASION OF UKRAINE IN 2022

ALL TALK,
BUT NOT A LOT
OF WALK

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**COUNTER
EXTREMISM
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The Russia-Ukraine war has been attracting foreign fighters/volunteers since 2014. Initially, the number of foreign individuals joining the conflict was limited. However, the invasion of Ukraine by Russia on February 24, 2022 provided a seemingly seismic shift in this field with up to 20,000 foreigners expressing an interest in joining the Ukrainian war effort.
2. Foreign fighters that joined the conflict initially after 2014 hailed from various ideological backgrounds—including from the far right, far left, or red-brown national communists—and fought on both the Ukrainian and Russian/pro-Russian sides of the conflict. The 2022 foreign volunteers, however, seem less radical and politicized in nature. Their mobilization is conducted mainly through official channels of the Ukrainian government and less through informal channels setup by non-state-linked “volunteer battalions” and militias, as was the case in 2014.
3. Precise numbers of foreign fighters having traveled to Ukraine and involved in combat since the end of February 2022 are currently difficult to establish. However, given the available information, it is reasonable to deduce that only a fraction of those who indicated an interest in traveling to Ukraine after February 2022 actually did so. Their number ranges from merely several hundreds to a few thousands. This is dwarfed by tens of thousands of Ukrainian volunteers who joined units in Ukraine’s Territorial Defense Force (TDF).
4. Among these foreigners, some individuals with extremist convictions have also traveled to the war zone. Violence-oriented foreign extremists have been in Ukraine since 2014, and at least two of these individuals have been killed in the latest round of hostilities. Both were on the pro-Russia side, including one who was a left-wing extremist.

5. To correctly assess the current flow of violence-oriented extremists to the war zone, one must study the recruitment input, i.e., local and right-wing scenes, their attitudes toward the recent Russian invasion, and whether their members have traveled to Ukraine to fight.
6. An analysis of the far-right and right-wing extremist scenes in seven countries—the United States, Canada, Spain, Italy, France, Germany, and Poland—reveals that the current conflict has not led to a significant flow of extremists to the war zone. There is a lot of discussion and debate among extremists, but very few have traveled to Ukraine. For example, about 30 from Germany and France seem to have traveled. In other cases, such as with Canada, hardly anyone from the local far-right and right-wing extremist milieus appears to have made the trip.
7. Furthermore, it is currently unclear how many of these violence-oriented extremists who have traveled are actually involved in combat.
8. Regarding the stance of the individual national extremist scenes, most have not changed their ideological position since February. For example, most pro-Russian extremist groups and networks have not switched allegiances.
9. At the same time, the study of the recruitment output—i.e., the Ukrainian units which have a history of allowing foreigners in their ranks—does not point to a flourishing milieu that is ready to accept and deploy Western extremist foreign volunteers in its ranks. Individual extremists from Western countries are in Ukraine in general and in Kyiv in particular, but their numbers pale in comparison to a) wider international volunteers and b) Ukrainian volunteers for the TDF.
10. Foreigners in Ukraine have not yet coalesced into recognizable highly ideological fighting units and, as individuals, have been largely unsuccessful in acting as recruiting multipliers for sympathizers in their home countries.

11. Units with a history of featuring foreigners since 2014 either recruited a small number of such individuals in 2022 (i.e., Azov), are nationally focused and do not advertise for foreigners to join (i.e., Belarusian and Russian units on the Ukrainian side), or lack coordinated strategies of recruiting foreigners to join their outfit (i.e., other far-right Ukrainian organizations fielding “their own” TDF units).
12. In Ukraine, incoming foreigners are distributed across different units, and there is typically little screening overall for ideological extremism. However, units such as the Georgian National/Foreign Legion that has been set up to receive foreigners does not seem to follow discernible targeted recruitment strategies focusing on attracting foreign extremists.
13. Therefore, the identification of foreigners within far-right ideologically motivated units within Ukraine is a first but not necessarily a sufficient indication of the ideological stance of the foreign recruits themselves, complicating monitoring efforts focused on violence-oriented foreign extremists in the war zone.
14. The low number of violence-oriented extremists currently involved in the war in Ukraine does not mean that this group of individuals will not present a challenge to domestic security upon their return. The combination of a violence-oriented ideology; potential combat training and experience; access to arms, ammunition, and explosive material in the conflict zone; as well as improved transnational networking opportunities for these extremists is worrying and requires mitigation measures.
15. Preventing the travel of violence-oriented extremists to the war zone should be a priority for governments. These individuals will not add significantly to Ukraine’s ability to defend itself. Furthermore, at least as right-wing extremist individuals are concerned, their presence in Ukraine can potentially feed into the Russia propaganda narrative that the Ukrainian government is dominated by Nazi ideology. Unfortu-

nately, as the seven country case studies in this report demonstrates, only a few countries—e.g., Italy and Poland—have legal safeguards in place against their nationals joining foreign conflicts. Consequently, preventing the travel of violence-oriented extremists to the war zone will remain a challenge for most governments.

16. Therefore, monitoring violence-oriented extremists travel to and from the war zone as well as collecting information on their actions and activities in the war zone should also be a priority. This is especially the case if the departure from their home countries cannot be prevented.
17. Finally, governments should begin exploring opportunities for managing returning violence-oriented extremists from the war zone. Given the currently small number of high-risk individuals, this should be well within already established capacities. This returnee management should include all elements from prosecution to disengagement as well as deradicalization and potential reintegration. As the country case studies in this report demonstrates, so far, few if any governments have begun addressing this issue.

INTRODUCTION

[Edy \(Edi\) “Bozambo” Ongaro](#), a native of Portogruaro in Northeast Italy, died fighting in Ukraine on April 1, 2022. The death of a foreigner in the war zone is not surprising since Ukraine has called on [foreign nationals](#) to join its fight against Russia and up to [20,000](#) of such volunteers expressed an interest in contributing to this fight, with allegedly [hundreds](#) of individuals arriving to Ukraine. However, the case of Ongaro is also indicative of the general situation. He was not among the recent wave of volunteers and had traveled to Ukraine [several years ago](#). Furthermore, he did not fight on the Ukrainian side but was part of the so-called “[separatist militias](#)” which support Russian efforts against Ukraine. He also had left Italy a [wanted man](#) for participation in bar brawl and attacking a policeman and was [associated](#) with “an anti-fascist and militant internationalist organization.”

Ongaro’s fate was shared by Stefan Dimitrijević, as [confirmed](#) on April 8, 2022. Dimitrijević was a Serbian foreign fighter who had fought in Continental Unity ([Unité Continentale](#)), a French-Serbian-Spanish-Brazilian far-right/far-left “[synthesis](#)” of an “international Brigade” among the Ukrainian “separatist” forces after 2014. He subsequently returned to Serbia and received a [1.5 year suspended](#) sentence for his actions in Eastern Ukraine. Following the invasion of Russia in February this year, Dimitrijević returned to the “separatist” areas to again join the war. He was not the only Serbian foreign fighter to return to the “separatist republics,” as others also [returned](#) to the frontlines even after they had been sentenced for their actions in Ukraine by the courts in Serbia. Their return to the war zone was [possible](#) since most of these Serbian foreign fighters only received suspended sentences in accordance with Serbia’s law prohibiting citizens from participating in foreign conflicts.

Ongaro and Dimitrijević’s stories showcase the complexity of the current foreign fighter phenomenon. According to currently available information,

many of the of foreigners that indeed participated in combat were in the war zone before the Russian invasion in February 2022. Furthermore, foreigners have also joined or re-joined the so-called “[separatists](#)” side and fight alongside the Russian army and Russian volunteers. Additionally, despite the fact that many publications imply that the war in Ukraine is a magnet primarily for “[neo-Nazi](#)” foreign volunteers from around the globe, there are also violence-oriented extremists from other ideologies involved in the fight.

The large scale of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 triggered an explosion of interest in far-right/right-wing extremist studies vis-à-vis Ukraine and this conflict. Unfortunately, a lot attention has been concentrated on Ukraine’s relatively feeble extremist scene and its alleged capabilities and capacities to recruit, train, and field “legions,” “brigades,” or “militias” full of Western extremist volunteers. This study aims to disaggregate the currently available data and analyze to which extent this truly is the case in order to establish a solid baseline for further research. This is necessary to avoid inadvertently feeding into a false propaganda narrative that attempts to portray the Ukrainian government as being dominated by right-wing extremist ideologies.

As CEP research previously [argued](#), “it is important to distinguish between three categories of individuals seeking to join the current conflict in Ukraine. The first and largest category consists of Ukrainian nationals and dual nationals who live abroad and are returning to their country. The second are international volunteers. The third and smallest are violence-oriented extremists. Given the inflow of foreign fighters and volunteers to Ukraine, it is not surprising that violence-oriented extremists are among them.

In order to take stock of the phenomenon and illustrate the extent to which a) the 2022 foreign volunteer mobilization for Ukraine is extremist in nature and b) how different extreme right-wing scenes and milieus

reacted to the Russian (re-)invasion of Ukraine since February 24, 2022, one should study both ends of the recruitment spectrum for this conflict. This means analyzing both sides of the issue. This includes the input, i.e., the discussions and reactions of the extremist milieus in each country and the eventual decisions of some extremist individuals to travel to Ukraine, as well as the output. The output includes an analysis of the Ukrainian units that had been welcoming foreign recruits, especially since 2014, particularly their current position towards foreign recruits and how many foreigners they claim to have among their ranks.

The first part of this report will focus on the output side of the foreign volunteer recruitment process. This will be followed by seven country case studies, analyzing the input: the United States, Canada, Spain, Italy, France, Germany, and Poland. This selection includes not only potential recruitment pools in North America but also the largest countries, by population size, of the European Union. Furthermore, in mid-March 2022, four of these seven countries (the United States, Canada, Germany, and Poland) were named by Ukraine as contributing with the [highest number](#) of volunteers to its ranks.

The country case studies will focus on their respective national far-right scene's position on the Russia-Ukraine war prior to February 24, 2022; the situation after that date; the discussions amongst extremists on potential travel to Ukraine as foreign volunteers; their actual presence on the ground (if any) and their involvement in combat; their numbers in relation to that of non-extremist volunteers from the same country; and, where information was available, the country's foreign volunteer/fighter returnee management policies.

VOLUNTEERS NOT FIGHTERS AND THE INTERNATIONAL LEGION

The first group of foreigners traveling to join the conflict in Ukraine after 2014 were [foreign fighters](#) in a narrow sense of the definition. They fought in non-state units on both sides of the conflict, either in Ukrainian volunteer battalions, which were later integrated into the Ukrainian military, or in the so-called “separatist” militias. The situation in 2022 on the Ukrainian side is significantly different. Foreigners arriving in the war zone are more correctly characterized as foreign volunteers. Most of them are attempting to enlist in official units, primarily the Territorial Defense Forces (TDF) of Ukraine. Their personal data is collected by the TDF via the Ukrainian embassies or the TDF’s recruitment center in Lviv, Western Ukraine. Thus, the process, as chaotic and makeshift as it sometimes might appear, is overseen by a state actor.

Media reports created an impression that these foreign volunteers who join the TDF’s [International Legion](#) appear to be a standalone unit. In fact, this unit is largely an administrative structure rather than a foreign fighting unit in Ukraine. The name Legion has a positive connotation in Central-Eastern European space (e.g., the [Polish Legions](#) and the [Czechoslovak Legions](#)) and also harks back to the mystique and military prowess of the French Foreign Legion. In reality, volunteers are distributed to various different Ukrainian units. Furthermore, some foreign volunteers find their way independently to a particular unit, based on existing contact networks.

Initially, the inflow of foreign volunteers was not well coordinated across the [Ukrainian bureaucracy](#) and seemed more akin to a public relations exercise aimed at the conflict’s internationalization. As interviews conducted for this study with some of these foreign volunteers demonstrate, these individuals after signing up at the TDF’s recruitment center had a broad set of “International Legion” experiences. Some have already returned home, while others are “attaching” themselves to seemingly

random units or are still waiting for deployment to the frontlines. Thus, the situation is fluid and much can still change, especially as some of the TDF units will be deployed eastwards and away from Kyiv to fight on the Eastern or the Southern fronts.

While discussing the issue of foreign volunteers, one must recall an adage shared with this author by one of the foreign fighters that went to the conflict in 2014. At that time, this individual had joined what was then called the Azov Battalion. In his view, foreign fighters were “backpacks,” i.e., a troublesome appendix which needed attention from an English-speaking Ukrainian soldier in order to function. Consequently, recruitment of such troops certainly had not been a priority for Ukrainian units back then and it would be hard to expect a drastic shift in the current conditions.

Currently, foreign volunteers are indeed welcomed by Ukraine. Nonetheless, the country, which has enough fighting men of its own, prioritizes transfers of weapons systems, ammunition, and other forms of military materiel over the enlistment and deployment of even the most enthusiastic and professional foreign volunteers. Consequently, in one online discussion forum for potential foreign volunteers, patience and perseverance are highlighted as the key virtues necessary for any foreign volunteer intent on fighting for Ukraine.

Furthermore, it is important to distinguish between intent, travel, and fighting. By early March 2022, reportedly [20,000 foreign volunteers](#) expressed an interest in fighting in Ukraine. However, this number is not equal to the number of foreign individuals that enlisted in the TDF. This author was told by one of his interviewees from amongst the community of such foreign volunteers that “high hundreds [from the self-declared 20,000] will most probably cross the border into Ukraine but how many of these will fight?” Even if this assessment was too modest and foreign volunteers will number in the low thousands, it would be an impressive increase compared to the foreign recruitment after 2014. At that time for-

eign fighter figures for Ukraine were in the [low hundreds](#). Furthermore, these low thousands of foreign volunteers are dwarfed by the [110,000 Ukrainian volunteers](#) who joined the newly formed TDF, outnumbering their Ukrainian counterparts at least 50 to one.

2014 MOBILIZATION

There are important differences between the current and former groups of foreigners joining the conflict in Ukraine. The previous recruitment of foreigners for the conflict reached its peaks throughout spring and summer of 2014. At that time, the conflict attracted relatively few fighters, which primarily joined non-state formations. This group encompassed at most a few hundred Europeans and Americans. Furthermore, these joined units on [both sides](#) of the war. Interestingly, individuals of similar ideological backgrounds effectively ended up fighting one another in Eastern Ukraine, a situation referred to as a “mental brainf***” by one of this author’s interviewees, a right-wing extremist fighter involved in the conflict at that time.

His comment also captures the continuing division of the European far-right and right-wing milieu concerning the conflict in Ukraine. In 2014, as it seems to be the case now, the radical right (i.e., the democratic yet anti-liberal milieu that is dominated by populist parties of the right) has longstanding ideological and financial [ties](#) to Moscow, and therefore, remains on the pro-Russian side of the equation. The situation was and continues to be more complex among more extremist elements of the milieu. After 2014, much debate centered around the alleged successes of the some Ukrainian groups, such as the [Azov Movement](#), to win over their Western counterparts to a pro-Ukraine cause. However, this debate de-emphasized that, Russia, through networks such as the Russian Imperial Movement, was able to “[convert](#)” some European right-wing extremists to its cause. Consequently, several pro-Russian contingents of right-wing

extremists from [France](#) and [Italy](#) joined “separatist militias.” Established far-right actors from the West, such as the German far-right party National Democratic Party (NPD), also experienced internal [disagreements](#) over the “military and geopolitical conflict between Ukraine and Russia.”

The most significant difference between the mobilization of foreigners for the war in Ukraine in 2014 and 2022 seems to be that the 2014 foreign fighter mobilization was more ideological in nature than that of 2022. The conflict was more contained and did not affect Western countries with the same severity as the current situation. Furthermore, while the current recruitment is conducted openly, recruitment in 2014 was carried out more discreetly. In 2014, Russian propaganda was able to establish the narrative that at its core, the conflict was internal and not an invasion by Russia. Given this propaganda narrative, foreigners joining the conflict were more ideologized or joined to obtain battlefield experience. Some did so [overtly](#), while others remained [in the shadows](#)—never showing their faces nor propagating their involvement in the war in order to avoid legal issues upon their return.

After returning to their home countries, some of foreign fighters, in particular those who fought for the non-recognized “separatists” were [arrested](#) (albeit later released), [imprisoned](#), or handed heavy [prison sentences](#) in absentia. Some of them were classified as mercenaries, which they had not been, or members of illicit, anti-state (anti-Ukrainian) formations. However, most of the 2014 foreign fighters, regardless of which side of the conflict they fought, had little to fear from the authorities in their home countries as foreign fighting, unlike foreign terrorist fighting, is not illegal in most of the Western countries, with most of the Central-Eastern European states as a notable exception.

2022: THREE GROUPS

The cases of Ongaro and Dimitrijević, as mentioned above, are also emblematic of a wider phenomenon: the extremely heterogenous nature of the 2022 foreign volunteer contingent. The volunteers arriving in Ukraine are of [different backgrounds](#) and often have little in common with each other beyond being the “concerned citizens of the world,” in the words of one of the 2014 foreign fighter veterans. They are almost [exclusively apolitical](#) and thus, do not constitute a repetition of the quasi-clandestine 2014 mobilization. They potentially number in thousands but while deploying to Ukraine, they join two other categories of fighters or volunteers: a) those who never left—like Ongaro, a foreign fighter for the non-state “separatist militias,” and b) returning former foreign fighters now re-joining as volunteers—such as [Mikael Skillt](#), one of the poster boys of the 2014 recruitment for the then called Azov Battalion. Skillt recently returned to Kyiv and is now helping train the new TDF recruits. Another example are Croat veterans of Azov (see below) who fought around Kyiv in March 2022. This complex picture is underpinned by ideological divisions among the veterans from 2014. Ongaro came from a far-left background. Skillt initially came from the Swedish right-wing extremist milieu. Dimitrijević was recruited by and fought in the ranks of a right-wing extremist French led unit for the separatists and some of the Croats recruits had been nationalist football hooligans. These foreign veterans now mix with the diverse and apolitical 2022 recruits.

This heterogeneity is further exacerbated by the fact that veterans of 2014 and their host units from the Ukrainian side play a key, albeit not an exclusive role, in the recruitment and deployment of foreign volunteers to the Ukraine war effort. In short, with their diverse and multi-faceted connections forged almost eight years ago, these individuals and their units effectively act as gatekeepers for foreign volunteers wanting to join the war. They can smooth the way and help the new recruits get past some of the bureaucracy and chaos they might encounter while in Ukraine and

offer a promise of a real fight alongside the conflict's veterans. Since some of the units in question have a track record of featuring far-right and right-wing extremist individuals from the West it is necessary to analyze their recruitment efforts while assessing the scale of the output, i.e., the known and confirmed presence of foreign far-right and right-wing extremist individuals as fighters on the ground in Ukraine.

OUTPUT

Azov

The [Azov Movement](#) is the [perennial bogeyman](#) as far as studying far-right extremism in Ukraine and its alleged and real transnational connections are concerned. The Movement is a socio-political paramilitary entity derived from the original Azov Battalion and structured around the National Corps (NC or *Natsionalnyi korpus*), a political party. The battalion, [derived](#) from a far-right political entity called Patriot of Ukraine, Patriót Ukrayíny, was only one unit among around [40 to 50](#) large volunteer formations which fought on the Ukrainian side from 2014. The battalion was subsequently absorbed into the National Guard of Ukraine.

The original commander of the Azov Battalion, Andriy Biletsky, was elected to the Ukrainian parliament in late 2014. His successful election campaign in a “first past the post” district was based on his and Azov’s battlefield successes. In addition to Biletsky, five other volunteer battalion commanders were [elected](#). In late 2016, Biletsky founded the NC which is led by Azov veterans. The party regularly refers to the now renamed Azov Regiment as “[its own](#),” despite the fact that the party does not exercise operational control over the Regiment. How the precise relationship between the party and the Regiment is structured is a complex issue. Some [observers](#) stress that the party and the Regiment are still connected whereas [others](#)

maintain that the Regiment had undergone a “depoliticization.” However, it is important to stress that the Azov Regiment no longer functions as a volunteer battalion and is not a “[far-right militia](#)” but a unit of the National Guard of Ukraine. Some of the Regiment’s members undoubtedly still espouse far-right views. However, these are counterbalanced by a significant number of post-2014 non-nationalist [recruits](#).

Unfortunately, the Azov Regiment continues to be confused with the Azov Movement in general and the NC in particular. Indeed, the political positions of the NC are radical far right. However, the fact that the party is itself derived from a volunteer paramilitary formation and maintains a [militant posture](#) does not mean that this structure is similar to that of Hezbollah (i.e., socio-political and military) or that the NC’s transnational connections are an indication that it [attempts to morph](#) into a far-right al-Qaeda, aiming to train likeminded foreign recruits for the Regiment and then sending them abroad on terrorist missions.

The latter notion, as was shown by previous [CEP reports](#), has been relatively overhyped as the Azov Movement’s capabilities and capacities to act as a transnational actor are constrained and limited. The Movement does not, despite many Western opinions on its activities, prioritize the “transnational.” It is first and foremost a Ukrainian [creation](#), which prioritizes its socio-political expansion within Ukraine. As was already [documented](#), a significant part of the Movement’s activities outside Ukraine are a function of its desire to outcompete different Russian entities in the Western far-right or extreme right space. Russia has built up its [connections](#) to the Western far-right for years, creating a complex web of direct and indirect connections including [financial support](#). The Ukrainian far right, and especially the Azov Movement, could not and would not be in a position to match the Russian approach. At the same time, its activities and apparent successes attracted public attention in the West. Regularly these activities were inaccurately interpreted as recruitment activities by the Azov Regiment and not understood as attempts to build up [political relationships](#)

between the Azov Movement and different Western far-right actors.

Since the Russian invasion in February 2022, the Azov Movement, and to a lesser extent the Azov Regiment, have reportedly developed four—but in reality, only three—different recruitment strands which, in theory, could attract individuals from abroad, including far-right and right-wing extremists. Below is a summary of these four strands with special emphasis on their existing, or lack of transnational elements:

1. **The Azov Regiment:**

The unit recruits from within those [foreigners](#) who in 2014 fought in the ranks of the Azov Battalion and the Azov Regiment. The Regiment, which is now part of the National Guard of Ukraine and is considered an official Ukrainian military unit, is legally not allowed to include foreign volunteers in its ranks. Nevertheless, it was reported initially that in March 2022, some of its old foreign members [returned](#) to the regiment. For example, reports claimed that a group of Croats, [led by a veteran](#) of the 2014 Azov Battalion/Regiment, was able to travel to [Mariupol](#) and were given the chance to fight alongside the Azov Regiment. However, it has now become clear that these arriving foreign volunteers did not get to Mariupol but fought around Kyiv, in the force discussed in point 3 below.

2. **Mariupol relief force:**

The fate of Mariupol continues to dominate the concerns of the Azov Movement. Posters and graphics showing an Azov Regiment soldier with a caption of “[Mariupol stands](#)” prominently feature in the movement’s external communications. Simultaneously, [the Movement’s leaders](#) continue to call for an attempt by the Ukrainian armed forces to relieve the besieged city. Moreover, as of early April 2022, these calls were supported by a recruitment process (coordinated via Azov

Regiment's telegram channel) for the "[unblocking of Mariupol](#)." Since the calls for volunteers seemingly allows for a recruitment of individuals without previous military experience, one can assume that the assembled force may not necessarily be dispatched quickly. Fresh recruits will need time for training. Alternatively, they might be directed towards non-military or non-combat roles in this effort. It is also worth noting that the call is in Ukrainian and does not discuss, unlike [other calls](#) for recruitment, involvement of foreigners in the "unblocking." This does not mean, however, that no foreigner would join this effort. As will be shown below, attempts to organize at least a rump Azov foreign group of volunteers are continuing.

3. The Azov Movement and TDF units:

The Azov Movement is paramilitary and militant in nature and therefore, it is not surprising that many of its members and sympathizers moved en masse as volunteers into the Ukrainian TDF. In fact, in some localities, there were so many NC and NC-related volunteers that they were able to dominate individual TDF units and [establish](#) their "companies" or even separate "battalions." The names are slightly misleading here as these units are in fact smaller in size than an equivalent battalion of a typical military. These are purely Ukrainian entities and fall firmly under the operational command of the Ukrainian armed forces. Their [recruitment ads](#) are in Ukrainian and do not discuss recruitment of foreigners. Due to the lack of available data, it is currently not possible to analyze the motivations of Ukrainian civilians joining these specific TDF units. However, it is clear that these also include non-NC, non-Azov Battalion/Regiment veterans, and Ukrainians without far-right positions. It is important to bear in mind that for years, the Azov Regiment has been cultivating the image of "the best regiment" of the Ukrainian armed forces, a "[special detachment](#)" that applies "[NATO standards](#)." Consequently, veterans of such a unit, now forming a backbone of different TDF "battalions" or "companies," would be in demand

and popular among their less military skillful compatriots seeking to sign up. Their aura of military prowess may act as a pull-factor also for non-ideologically motivated Ukrainian volunteers.

Azov Kyiv's TDF units will be engaged in the fight in the east of Ukraine (sometimes referred to as "[battle of Donbass](#)"). In fact, its members and commanders were so keen to be deployed there that their unit and soldiers were formally assigned to the Ukrainian Special Operations Forces (SSO or *Syly spetsial'nykh operatsiy Zbroynykh Syl Ukrayiny*). This formal and bureaucratic move is to help ensure their eastward deployment as not all of the Kyiv TDF units will fight for Donbass. It does not mean, however, that these volunteer formations and their soldiers acquired the status of SOF operators nearly overnight. Again, this route is not open to foreigners who will not be able to enlist in what formally is a SOF formation.

4. **The Azov Movement and foreign recruits:**

The Azov Movements currently attempts to facilitate travel to and within Ukraine of foreign volunteers. Their destination would either be the TDF or some kind of an Azov Movement sponsored or supported [detachment](#) of foreigners. The NC's international department—small but staffed with individuals speaking various foreign languages with a string of transnational connections and recognizable [presence](#) on some of the social media platforms—seems to have been tasked with a) advertising recruitment into the broader International Legion, b) administrative and logistics facilitation of the process for potential recruits, and c) directing of some of these foreign recruits to those units within the Ukrainian TDF to which the Azov Movement or the NC has a close connection.

This recruitment process has not been going smoothly—as was [indicated](#) by one of the recruiters. It seems that Ukrainian President Volodymyr

Zelensky's initiative concerning the International Legion has not been filtered down through the Ukrainian bureaucracy and some of the incoming foreign volunteers face a plethora of administrative challenges before actually deploying with any Ukrainian unit. Perhaps for this reason, Azov solicited the [support](#) from a Member of Parliament (MP) from the president's political party. He was supposed to smooth out some of the obstacles faced in this process. Despite these efforts, this separate foreign volunteer, Azov Movement-linked, recruitment track currently has only had limited success and has stalled at [around 20](#) foreign volunteers.

Furthermore, as confirmed to this author by the recruiters for this effort, those foreigners that the movement was able to recruit for this endeavor are by and large not far-right or right-wing extremists but non-ideologically motivated "concerned citizens of the world." The main attraction for these foreign volunteers seems to be the image of Azov as a proficient fighting force as well as liberators of Mariupol in 2014 and its staunch defenders in 2022. Only a few ideological sympathizers of Azov have made it to [Kyiv](#).

It is possible that in the end this recruitment strand will see the redistribution of this modest number of Azov Movement-facilitated volunteers among non-Azov TDF units. As outlined above, it is not likely that all TDF units will be willing to accept foreigners, including those recruited by the Azov Movement. Foreign recruits [require](#) the presence of English-speaking Ukrainian soldiers and/or must be grouped into separate teams and receive a disproportional assistance from their larger unit, at least in the initial phases of their deployment.

To ensure that their specific foreign recruits receive at least some initial training, the Movement brought back [Mikael Skiltt](#), one of the first foreign fighters in the Ukrainian ranks in 2014 and the [face](#) of the Azov Battalion's foreigners. Azov hopes that his experience as a private

military contractor and his network of transnational and local contacts will eventually allow for the establishment of a self-contained, smaller, more focused group of experienced foreign volunteers who could then be deployed on the frontlines, perhaps as a part of the Mariupol “unblocking.” While interviewed by this author, Skillt was fully aware of his 2014 extremist reputation and the fact that many journalists will see his presence in Kyiv as evidence of a politicized recruitment into TDF. He was, however, also adamant that he “put his past behind” and that ideology and/or politics plays no role in this current recruitment effort.

Even if there are doubts of both Skillt’s reassurance as well as those of the Azov Movement that this is an apolitical recruitment effort, it is clear that this recruitment effort remains limited in size. Given its past communication strategy and ideological competitiveness, the Azov Movement would have not hesitated to publicly announce that it was able to establish a transnational recruitment center for individuals wanting to join the war on the side of Ukraine. This, however, is not happening and it is therefore important to remain skeptical of any messaging attempting to overhype the size of this recruitment channel.

As far as foreign veterans are concerned, there is one entity which seems to be embedded in one of the TDF units that is dominated by the Azov Movement. This unit initially fought in the Kyiv region. It seems to comprise of foreign veterans of the original Battalion/Regiment, dubbed the “[Foreigner Group](#).” There are very few details available concerning this unit. However, available data seems to point to a very small group, with probably less than 10 men. Its members seem to be foreign Azov fighters that have returned to Ukraine. This unit is not recruiting foreigners, but its presence is documented through their call for [donations](#) to sustain their efforts in Ukraine. They, as well as the Georgian National/Foreign Legion discussed below, constitute the most organized 2014-veteran effort currently active in the war zone.

Georgian National/Foreign Legion

Ukraine hosts other units which are open to the recruitment of foreign volunteers. It is possible that among their potential recruits are also individuals from the far-right and right-wing extremist Western milieus. However, so far there are no indications that new foreign extremist recruits are present in the ranks of the [Georgian Foreign Legion](#), formerly Georgian National Legion. This is different from the situation after 2014, when this unit did include some fighters from the broader far-right Western milieu, for example from the [United States](#) or [Australia](#).

Among foreign recruitment processes in Ukraine, the Georgian Foreign Legion has always been the most successful in attracting foreigners, both in its early stages after 2014 and now. In fact, to a certain extent, the latest recruitment drive of the Legion began even [before](#) February 24, 2022. Throughout late February and March 2022, the Legion seems to have attracted a few hundred foreigners into its ranks. It focused on recruiting foreign military veterans, with prior combat experience, especially from Anglo-Saxon countries and Georgia, the same region from which it had recruited before 2022. Prior to 2022, the Legion, which for a while was part of the Ukrainian armed forces, was mostly kept in [reserve](#) in its base in Kyiv. With the Russian invasion in February, the situation changed, and it is now actively deployed. Therefore, the Legion remains one of the main channels through which foreigners can get to the frontlines in Ukraine. Its previous experience of facilitating such deployments, broad network of contacts forged by its current commander and wide-ranging [social media](#) presence and responsiveness allowed for a strong head start in the process of recruitment and deployment of foreign volunteers to the frontlines. The unit's commander, Mamuka Mamulashvili, confirmed to this author in mid-April 2022 that the Legion has deployed squads in different locations around Ukraine and distributes its volunteers to these. The Legion does not fight as a lone standing larger force in a particular region.

Its volunteers and prospective volunteers continue to converse on different online platforms monitored by this author. Their online discussions are hardly ideological in nature, and it seems that the administrators of these online chat groups are on the lookout for potential extremist recruits in order to weed them out. They openly advertise their successes in intercepting such individuals at different stages of the recruitment process, either at the input or output (in Ukraine). It is obvious that not every extremist wanting to deploy to Ukraine will be discouraged or intercepted in that way. The U.S. chapter in this report, however, provides one notable exception. At the same time, it is also obvious that the unit, albeit involved in a war, markets itself as an apolitical entity, as is evident in the discussions among its members and recruits online. These focus on logistics of getting to Ukraine, equipment necessary or useful while there, and on other channels of recruitment open to potential volunteers without military experience.]

Other Ukrainian units

As the seemingly forgotten Georgian National Legion mushroomed from dozens of members into hundreds, a similar process happened for the totality of the Ukrainian armed forces. The change was most visible via the TDF which absorbed new civilian recruits and featured units hosting, e.g., veterans of the conflict of a certain background or a certain locality. These units would consequently refer to themselves as “companies” or “battalions” but were often no more than squads of the actual larger TDF battalions operating on the frontlines. The majority of these “units” and their members had been motivated by their desire to defend their country. The same could be said about diaspora returnees who flocked back to Ukraine. Again, it seems that largely no ideology other than patriotism motivated such fighters to enlist in the TDF.

However, it is also important to recognize that amidst this national rush to enlist, different local far-right entities, such as [Right Sector](#) or Tradition

and Order which fielded the so-called [Battalion Revenge](#) or Brotherhood ([Bratstvo](#)), joined the fray and continue to advertise their frontline presence. The two even feature a small numbers of foreigners, such as [Belarusian](#), [Czech](#), [Danish](#), [Irish](#), [Polish \(with a promise of more recruits to come\)](#), or [Canadian](#) members. However, neither far-right entity seems to have a coordinated strategy for recruitment of non-Ukrainians, although Battalion Revenge is rumored to be favorable towards foreign volunteers who can get to Kyiv. It is also not clear how many of the Western foreigners that joined these units are far-right or right-wing extremist in orientation as, in the chaos of the war, some might have joined this or in fact any Ukrainian unit almost accidentally. Such was the case with a “[Spanish team](#)” of five fighters who arrived in Kyiv on March 1, 2022, which was very early in the conflict. Their aim was to team up with an Azov-linked TDF unit, but in the confusion of the war’s early days, these volunteers signed up with another TDF battalion.

Belarusians

Belarusian foreign volunteers have been [present](#) in Ukraine since 2014. They fought in the Maidan and then subsequently gravitated from civil disobedience towards armed resistance. In order to avoid increasing tensions with Belarus, the Ukrainian armed forces refused to enlist such volunteers, and they ended up fighting in the ranks of the Ukrainian volunteer battalions. As they were opposed to Belarus’s “Russification” by President Alexander Lukashenko, their ideological orientation can be characterized as nationalist and right wing but not “neo-Nazi.” Regularly these individuals served in [units](#) which featured their ideological brethren, including the Ukrainian Right Sector and the [Azov Battalion](#). In total, there had been at least a [few dozen Belarusians](#) fighting in these units and they constituted one of the largest foreign fighter contingents on the Ukrainian side in 2014. As Ukraine began professionalizing the various volunteer battalions and integrated them into the National Guard, these

units were barred from recruiting foreigners (as was the case with the Azov Battalion/Regiment), some of these Belarussian fighters left the country, others demobilized, and those who were able to obtain Ukrainian citizenship had the opportunity to continue their military careers.

Members of all these groups came together in 2022 to (re-)form the Belarussian contingent and channel the growing interest for volunteering in Ukraine from among the diaspora of Belarussians, which had come to Ukraine disillusioned after the rigged 2020 presidential election in Belarus. Unlike other national contingents, this new contingent is [well organized](#), has its own logistical channels, and maintains a purely national Belarussian character. Its leading element is the [Kastas Kalinouski Battalion](#). This new structure sees itself as a harbinger of things to come for Belarus where its members hope to continue their fight after the victory in Ukraine. Moreover, the battalion is [incorporated](#) into the Ukrainian ground forces. This is very different for all other units that include foreigners as these operate as elements of the TDF. Despite the far-right and right-wing background of some of its members and their service within Ukrainian nationalist units after 2014, the unit as a whole does not constitute a new far-right or an extremist force, and it has no intention of welcoming non-Belarussian fighters into its ranks.

Russians

It remains to be seen what transpires out of the “Freedom for Russia” Legion (Легион “Свобода России”), a unit comprised of defectors from the Russian army or anti-Putin Russians. It allegedly [fights for a Russia](#) which is “free from the tyranny of Putin and his cabal,” “for the future of Russia and its citizens [...] and democracy, and prosperity to Russia.” Its members are [convinced](#) that the “regime does not listen to us, we cannot rely on non-violent protest.” At the beginning of April 2022, its founders were allegedly disappointed with the speed of recruitment for their unit as

they hoped for more recruits to join their ranks. The Legion seems closed to non-Russians, and it will be extremely interesting to see what relationship it forges with the Russians who had been present in Ukraine from at least 2014 onwards and then fought against their native country in the pre-2022 phase of the war. Some of these [individuals](#) had been members of the Russian far-right milieu who escaped to Ukraine when they perceived that the Russian government turned against its nationalists in 2014.

COUNTRY CASE STUDIES

NORTH AMERICA

United States of America (Joshua Fisher-Birch)

Joshua Fisher-Birch is a researcher and content review specialist with the Counter Extremism Project, where he focuses on the extreme right, including online communications, propaganda, and social media. He has written about extremist content, ideology, and trends in the extreme right.

Far-right extremists and the Russia-Ukraine war

The [Atomwaffen Division](#) (AWD), before their March 2020 disbandment and an ongoing website dedicated to the work of neo-Nazi [James Mason](#) and AWD's accelerationist worldview supporting the group National Socialist Order, have viewed the Ukrainian extreme right as an opportunity to gain paramilitary training or experience, which can be brought back to the United States. AWD members had prior communication with the Azov Movement through the Iron March [forum](#), an Azov [podcast](#), and [potentially](#) the Ukrainian Asgardrei music festival. In a television [interview](#), Mason alleged that an undisclosed number of AWD members received training in Ukraine and returned to the United States. In October 2020, two alleged members of AWD, one with prior dual membership in The Base, were [deported](#) from Ukraine. In January 2022, a Telegram channel linked with the pro-Mason website [posted](#) a message encouraging Azov regiment recruitment.

Similarly, the neo-Nazi accelerationist group [The Base](#) viewed Ukraine as a potential training ground. The group's St. Petersburg-based founder and

former leader, [Rinaldo Nazzaro](#), had [promoted](#) sending the group's members to Ukraine to learn skills that could then be shared. There is no proven link between Nazzaro and the Russian government. One of the group's members, Ryan Burchfield, [joined](#) the Right Sector militia in Ukraine, although he distanced himself from The Base and condemned Nazzaro for living in Russia. It is not clear whether Burchfield's time in Ukraine overlapped with his membership in The Base, which he [claimed](#) ended in November 2019. Burchfield was [deported](#) from Ukraine in October 2020 along with another individual alleged to be a [member](#) of AWD.

The [Rise Above Movement](#) (RAM) and successive active club movement have supported Ukraine's far-right, with the group's co-founder, Robert Rundo, stating that his idea for a white supremacist counterculture was heavily inspired by Ukraine's Azov Movement, which he [described](#) as "the future." Rundo [participated](#) in an MMA tournament with Azov Movement members in 2018 in Kyiv. In the lead-up to the 2022 invasion, active club messaging on Telegram promoted an end to the war. One active club chapter in Indiana that had [posted](#) a pro-Russian message on February 21 later deleted the statement and posted a modified comment supporting white people and not one specific side.

The decentralized anti-government [boogaloo](#) movement has not had a discernible or united view on Ukraine or Russia. The movement has historically been focused on domestic issues.

Far-right extremists after February 2022

On February 25, the accelerationist website clarified its position, stating that they were [opposed](#) to both the Russian and Ukrainian governments but specifically supported the Ukrainian Azov Movement and white Ukrainians fighting against multi-ethnic Russia. The author of the

post also criticized American members of the far right who supported Russia, especially their non-accelerationist mass movement-oriented ideological opponents, mentioning “de-Nazification.” Another author commented that Ukraine would fall to the Russian invasion and anticipated that Ukrainians would embrace the far right as they fought an anti-Russian insurgency, which would heavily involve foreign fighters. The resulting chaos, the author hoped for, would create a force of American neo-Nazi insurgents that distracted Western governments would not have the resources to oppose. The website encouraged purchasing merchandise from Ukrainian online far-right stores and [donating](#) cryptocurrency to the Azov Movement.

Following the Russian invasion, Rinaldo Nazzaro strongly [discouraged](#) his online followers and members of The Base from joining the fight in Ukraine. He stated that the war was a fight between “liberal globalist” factions. He expressed his desire that the war would end quickly, but he stopped short of explicitly condemning Russia’s invasion. Nazzaro had allegedly resigned from all leadership and administrative roles in the group in early February 2022.

On February 26, one of the main active club Telegram channels posted a video of the Russian neo-Nazi Denis Nikitin, condemning Putin and stating that he was targeting the far right in Russia and Ukraine. Nikitin previously co-hosted a [podcast](#) with Robert Rundo, but he is an ally and not a leader in the mostly American movement. Succeeding Telegram posts encouraged people to purchase items from Nikitin’s clothing brand White Rex. The active club movement blog on March 28 posted an essay stating that the white supremacist community should not splinter over different views on the conflict and that activists should not be distracted and instead focus on local issues. The blog post called out the Indiana chapter for their support for Russia but stated the most important thing was the overall unity of the movement.

Two notable individuals in the Boogaloo movement made pro-Ukraine [statements](#) following the Russian invasion.

Talking of going to Ukraine

The neo-Nazi accelerationist website [stated](#) on March 2 that they were no longer advising their audience to travel to join Azov. The post specified that the website's readership is mostly aged 18 or younger, does not have the proper military training or experience, and would be unhelpful as volunteers. The site advised readers with training to look at Azov and other Ukrainian far-right Telegram channels for instructions on how to join. The website encouraged donating cryptocurrency to Azov and posted instructions on doing so. Small numbers of extremist Americans have indicated their [intention](#) to join Azov in chats.

The Base's propaganda channels did not comment on volunteering in Ukraine. On Telegram, Nazzaro wrote that white supremacists should not be involved because of the risk of being tracked by Western intelligence agencies, being killed by Russia, and being a worthless endeavor to participate in a "NATO proxy war." Nazzaro asserted that it was necessary to work towards the creation of a white nationalist territory in North America. He additionally noted that his statements were "awkward" because of his Russian residency.

An active club affiliated Telegram channel posted a video on February 26 in which Denis Nikitin broadly urged members of the far right to come volunteer as soldiers or aid workers in Ukraine and donate money.

One of the boogaloo adherents who eventually traveled to Ukraine, Henry Hoeft, [posted](#) on TikTok and Instagram and spoke to a local [newspaper](#) before departing for Europe. The newspaper [initially](#) described Hoeft as

a “local veteran” and was unaware of his boogaloo affiliations but quickly released a [revised](#) article. Hoeft [stated](#) that he was traveling with six other American veterans and cited being motivated by Russian attacks on civilians and that his travel to Ukraine was [unconnected](#) to his boogaloo involvement. He additionally claimed that dozens of other individuals contacted him via social media to send funds or request information on joining. Hoeft stated that an FBI agent contacted him before traveling, advising him not to go. Mike Dunn, a former boogaloo leader who claimed to have left the movement between September 2020 and March 2021, stated in an [interview](#) prior to departure that he intended to join the Ukrainian Foreign Legion and that his second choice would be to sign a contract with the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Dunn [claimed](#) that fighting Russia was in line with the tenets of the boogaloo movement and that he was standing up to Russian war crimes against people fighting to preserve their liberty. Dunn [stated](#) that he was traveling with one individual in the boogaloo movement, later [revealed](#) to be Hoeft, and that other boogaloo adherents were planning to follow. Furthermore, Dunn [claimed](#) that boogaloo adherents fighting in Ukraine had “given more to the (boogaloo) movement than anybody crying online has.”

Presence of extremists in Ukraine

There is no evidence that anyone currently affiliated with the neo-Nazi accelerationist milieu traveled to Ukraine after the February invasion. Individuals with broad links to the accelerationist milieu already present in Ukraine have participated as soldiers. The neo-Nazi accelerationist website stated that a “friend” of the site, identified as an American, has been in Ukraine and affiliated with Azov since 2014. This individual wrote an essay for the website claiming that there will be a civil war in Ukraine if Volodymyr Zelenskyy is still president when the war ends. A different post on the website vaguely stated that they had “already lost people” in

Ukraine due to Russian attacks. Another American, a military veteran from Texas who opened a gym in Ukraine one [year](#) before the invasion and is currently [affiliated](#) with the Georgian National Legion (GNL), was [identified](#) as previously organizing white supremacist rallies with several groups, including AWD. His current connections to the American white supremacist scene are unknown.

Henry Hoeft and Mike Dunn both traveled to Ukraine. Hoeft attempted to join the GNL, but in a video that quickly [spread](#) across social media, he claimed that following an attack on their military camp and refusing orders to go to Kyiv with few weapons, commanders told him and others to leave or face execution. Hoeft claimed that he snuck across the Ukraine-Poland border with the assistance of a humanitarian group to avoid being detained by Ukrainian soldiers and sent back to fight. He advised Americans not to travel to Ukraine, calling it a “trap.” An American volunteering in Ukraine [disputed](#) Hoeft’s account, stating that Hoeft had failed GNL vetting and left. Hoeft [returned](#) to the United States less than two weeks after he first departed. Dunn also [failed](#) GNL vetting, telling a journalist that he [hoped](#) to join an “extremist militia,” later claiming to have joined an unspecified “local militia.” Dunn posted on TikTok, disputing Hoeft’s story before his account was deactivated. Dunn has not commented further about any other boogaloo adherents’ travel to Ukraine.

Extremists among foreign volunteers

Based on the far-right American milieu, only a tiny fraction of the U.S. volunteer mobilization can be linked to violence-oriented extremists. Of the approximately [6,000](#) mostly Americans who inquired about service in Ukraine through the country’s Washington embassy, half were rejected for lack of military training, failed a criminal background check, or did not meet additional specifications. Approximately [3,000](#) Americans have signed

up to fight against Russia's invasion through official channels, according to the government of Ukraine, but the numbers on the ground are unclear. On March 10, only [100](#) U.S. citizens had officially been accepted by Ukraine's embassy to fight in the Ukraine Foreign Legion, and the State Department does not have statistics regarding the number of Americans who have entered Ukraine since February 24, which would include Americans who did not apply through the Ukrainian embassy. An unknown number have also [left](#) or transitioned to non-combat humanitarian roles. U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken has [urged](#) Americans not to participate as foreign fighters, and the State Department has [warned](#) Americans against traveling to Ukraine.

Overall, there is very little evidence indicating that more than a handful of U.S. extremist volunteers have traveled to Ukraine since the invasion. Because it is a developing situation, it is possible that additional U.S. extremists have joined the fight in Ukraine than indicated in this chapter and that they have decided to maintain low profiles and employ good operations security practices. Future analysis may prove that the number of quiet U.S. extremists who have traveled to Ukraine is, in fact, higher. However, at present, the available evidence does not support this. It is also likely that many U.S. extremists were cautious and unwilling to participate in a foreign conflict when faced with the brutality of the Russian invasion, instead choosing to emphasize the importance of a unified domestic movement, fantasize about fighting the U.S. government, or muse about a potential future civil war in Ukraine that their ideological allies can take advantage of. It is also possible that additional factors impacted the lack of travel, such as vetting of foreign volunteers, language barriers, or opposition to mainstream American support for Ukraine.

Canada (Guillaume Corneau-Tremblay)

Guillaume Corneau-Tremblay is an independent researcher currently working on a book about Western volunteers who traveled to Syria and Iraq from 2014 on to fight against the Islamic State (IS). He formerly worked for the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) and as the Chief Analyst for the Canadian Forces National Counter-Intelligence Unit (CFNCIU). He holds a BA in International Relations and a MA in Political Science from the Université Laval, Canada.

On March 15, 2022, two weeks after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the spokesperson for the International Legion of Territorial Defense [told](#) a Canadian news agency that Canadians represented the fourth-largest contingent of foreign volunteers in the country. Only a week later, unnamed extremist experts [shared](#) their concerns that Canadian far-right extremists might seek to join this new conflict. This chapter explores this topic, looking at the violent far right in Canada and Canadian volunteers in the context of the wars in Ukraine since 2014.

Far-right extremists and the Russia-Ukraine War

The 2014 conflict in the Donbass region was felt well within Canadian borders. Due to the importance of the Ukrainian diaspora in Canada, many Ukrainian-Canadians actively backed their nation's forces, and some even left to fight on their side. According to [The Soufan Center](#), 14 Canadians fought in Ukraine between 2014 and 2019, ten of which were with nationalist forces. Ukrainian far-right organizations also found support in Canada at the time, including from sympathizers amongst Canadian neo-Nazis.

Nonetheless, this support was relatively limited. Moreover, those who left for Ukraine were for the most part Canadians with Ukrainian lineage, including a handful who joined far-right units. As for the Canadians who fought on the separatist side, no credible information is currently available on who they are, why they went and what specific units they joined. In any case, it appears that their mobilization has remained marginal throughout.

In 2014, a national branch of the Right Sector emerged in Canada. During the Ukrainian national celebrations in Toronto, a stand was set up by the Branch to collect financial contributions. One of the representatives there even [stated](#) that he previously fought with the unit in Ukraine. Members of the Branch were also [seen](#) holding a large banner during Ukrainian celebrations in Toronto two years later. A Latvian Canadian neo-Nazi, having previously [played](#) in racist skinhead bands during the 1990s and early 2000s, [actively](#) promoted the Right Sector in Canada. He attempted to recruit fighters and participated in public events with the Canadian Branch, including for a trip to [New York City](#).

In 2014 also, a Canadian Ukrainian who self-identified as a national socialist but rejected the label “neo-Nazi” joined the Azov Battalion in Ukraine. He [claimed](#) to be a member of far-right groups in Canada, many of which have had problems with authorities due to their political beliefs. At the time, he [had no plan](#) of returning to Canada and in 2015, he was still [serving](#) with the unit. Likewise, in the summer of 2015, a Canadian military veteran of Ukrainian descent [spent](#) two months training the Azov Battalion to NATO standards. A year later, she appeared as the president of the local branch of the League of Ukrainian Women in Canada.

In the province of Quebec, many men from the national-socialist black metal (NSBM) and racist skinhead scenes adopted [symbols](#)

of the Misanthropic Division, a Ukraine-based neo-Nazi network [reportedly](#) tied to the Azov Movement. Starting in 2015, flags, t-shirts, and paraphernalia were sold, displayed, and worn by these Canadian neo-Nazis, including in public venues. One was also [seen](#) wearing an Azov t-shirt. While according to the Canadian Anti-Hate Network this neo-Nazi network in Quebec [is associated](#) with the Azov Movement, these extremists most likely only connected along common cultural markers and ideas and did not have real direct engagements with the movement in Ukraine.

Elements of the Canadian neo-Nazi accelerationist ecosphere also displayed an interest in the Ukrainian conflict, and for the Azov Movement more specifically. In September 2014, a Canadian user of Iron March [wrote](#) that he looked into the Azov Battalion, but claimed the group was not accepting Canadians. Later in July 2015, he was still interested in volunteering with the unit and inquired about the proper procedure to apply. Two years later, a Serbian Canadian moderator of the Iron March chatroom [attempted](#) to connect with individuals within the Azov Movement in order to receive training for the private military company he was looking to form. This man was a sailor in the Canadian military and was previously associated with Blood & Honour, a neo-Nazi organization who is now a [listed](#) terrorist entity in Canada.

Far-right extremists after February 2022

Very few reactions from the violent far right in Canada regarding the conflict in Ukraine have been noted since the 2022 Russian invasion. On March 14, Atalante, the political organization formed around the racist skinheads in Quebec, declared on its [podcast](#) that it supported Ukrainians in the defense of their land, and called it “the noblest of all causes.” The

Latvian Canadian cheerleader of the Right Sector also continued to display the organization's flag on his online profile and symbols of Azov and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army appeared in demonstrations of support for Ukraine in Montreal and Toronto.

It is probable some Canadian neo-Nazis will continue to be interested in parties involved in this conflict and will try to find opportunities to benefit from it. Indeed, the most prolific propagandist of the accelerationist movement, a Canadian graphic artist from Ottawa, has [previously](#) shown an interest in Ukraine, working on the design for a Ukrainian wine company that has no online footprint and whose imagery closely resembles that of his other Nazi artistic projects. His home was recently [raided](#) by the police, five weeks into the conflict, despite having been exposed by the media more than eight months earlier. This recent move could have been sparked by new intelligence with a Ukrainian nexus.

The limited support from Canadian violent far-right elements for organizations participating in the Ukrainian war, however, does not necessarily translate into them backing Western governments, the Ukrainian regime or the war itself. Many are actually against a conflict involving Caucasians in Europe. As [reported](#) by experts in March 2022, one Canadian neo-Nazi explained that Ukraine has become the “graveyard of the White race,” accusing both sides of being “anti-white.”

Presence of extremists in Ukraine

Despite some interest from the Canadian violent far right towards the current conflict, since the invasion, no extremist from Canada has been reported to be in Ukraine. Only one Canadian has been publicly confirmed to be fighting alongside the Bratstvo Battalion, a little-known unit that has been [labeled](#) as far right in the past, but a look at his social media accounts

does not reveal any indication of such political beliefs. He [claims](#) to have been a tree planter in Australia before the war broke out and spent the past few years posting mainly about Canadian hockey. Still, very little is known about him and the circumstances of his recruitment by this rather uncommon unit.

Extremists among foreign volunteers

A Ukrainian government source [told](#) a Canadian media outlet that up to 550 volunteers from Canada were based in Kyiv, Ukraine. There were so many that they reportedly formed a separate unit, according to the official. These claims remain unconfirmed at best, as there is no credible evidence of such a high number of Canadians on the ground in Ukraine. In reality, a little over a dozen volunteers from Canada were publicly confirmed to be on Ukrainian soil and around another dozen was reported to be at different levels of preparation to go. The vast majority of those, just like with the 2014 conflict in the Donbass region, [are](#) Ukrainian-Canadians with no explicit political beliefs.

The International Legion [requires](#) would-be volunteers to contact the Ukrainian Embassy in Canada and fill out a questionnaire. Selected recruits are then brought into Ukraine and placed at the Yavoriv training center, before being dispatched to regular Ukrainian units. It is there, at the training center, that a Canadian was reportedly [injured](#) by Russian missile strikes in early March.

But not all Canadians follow this process. Many just show up in Poland and arrange for a safe passage into Ukraine. They reach established contacts or roam around to find an opportunity to help. At least three Canadians joined the Georgian Foreign Legion this way.

The Canadian contingent of volunteers is also remarkably comprised of veterans, including two volunteers who fought against the Islamic State [in Iraq](#) and [Syria](#). They decided to travel to Ukraine after friends with [familial connections](#) there asked them to. One joined half a dozen other Canadian veterans with the Normand Brigade, a unit commanded by a Canadian [former military](#) whose wife and daughter are Ukrainian. The unit is now [reportedly](#) fighting on the frontline.

Returnee management

The apparent absence of violent Canadian far-right extremists so far in Ukraine does not preclude Canada from facing future security issues involving individuals who have traveled to Ukraine and radicalized there, through newly formed contacts and the harsh reality of war. Yet, except for Veteran Affairs who [stated](#) “it bears no responsibility for physical or psychological injuries acquired by anyone” in Ukraine, the Canadian government has remained silent on such risks.

Much of the focus has been directed instead toward the departure of Canadians to Ukraine. In its [2020 report](#), the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) acknowledged for the first time that an Ideologically Motivated Violent Extremist (IMVE) in another country has been prevented from traveling to fight on a foreign battlefield, most likely Ukraine. More recently, the Canadian military [banned](#) all full-time service members as well as part-time reservists from joining the war in Ukraine.

Still, the Canadian government’s position continues for the most part to be passive, limiting its involvement to [advising](#) against traveling to Ukraine. In early March, the Defence Minister [stated](#) that going

to Ukraine “is an individual decision that Canadians are making for themselves, and our job as a government is to provide information about the severity of the situation on the ground in Ukraine.” There may not be Canadian extremists going to Ukraine now, but such an approach will undeniably limit the control the government may have over the outcome of this mobilization.

EUROPEAN UNION

Spain (Quique Badia Masoni)

Quique Badia Masoni is a journalist and researcher at the Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB).

The far right before February 2022

The Spanish far-right scene is divided between those supporting Russia, orbiting around Aleksandr Dugin's Fourth Position, and those supporting Ukraine, coming from a hardcore neo-Nazi background. In the first group, there is Josep Alsina Calvés, considered by Dugin as one of his emissaries in the Spanish-speaking world. Alsina is the author of the book [El Hispanismo como Cuarta Teoría Política](#) (Hispanism as the Fourth Political Theory), an adaptation of the Russian philosopher's ideas into Spanish-speaking countries.

Although Alsina comes from the traditional neo-fascist far right, he has some influence in the Spanish populist radical right party Vox. He recently held a [conference](#) for Vox's youth branch in Barcelona about geopolitics. Another important source of support of Dugin's views in Spain comes from Jorge Alberto de la Fuente Miró, a.k.a. Jordi de la Fuente. He was part of the neo-fascist organization Movimiento Social Republicano (MSR or Social Republican Movement) and the author of the [prologue](#) in the Spanish translation of Dugin's "Project Eurasia." De la Fuente has had [relations](#) with the Eurasianist Party in the past, and now he has a leading role in Barcelona's Vox section. Other groups in the same orbit are [Hacemos Nación](#) or the constellation of Spanish neo-fascist traditionalist organizations like the Falangist movement.

On the other hand, some groups come from the autonomous nationalist scene, mostly linked with extremist supporters of Real Madrid or other neo-Nazi radical football fans. There are no leading intellectuals supporting those positions, but two Ukrainian nationals play a role connecting the Spanish and Ukrainian neo-Nazi scenes: Ivan Vovk, Svoboda's delegate in Spain, and Anna Garsia, [related](#) to the all-European Reconquista movement, according to the leader of the Intermarium initiative Olena Semenyaka. Those groups refer to links with the [Azov Movement](#) (not necessarily the Regiment) and the [Pravy Sektor](#) (Rights Sector).

Other neo-fascist groups like Democracia Nacional hold ambiguous positions. They have links with the [Russian Imperial Movement](#), but they kept a low profile regarding the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

The far-right after February 2022

Duginist supporters played a role spreading Kremlin's propaganda and blaming NATO for the ongoing invasion. Recently, they also have promoted a [campaign](#) to take Spain out of NATO. The autonomous nationalist field is promoting food collection campaigns and other humanitarian activities for the Ukrainian people. Other groups like Democracia Nacional hold ambiguous positions [claiming](#) that it is against "the war between brothers" and appealing for white unity.

Presence of Spanish extremists in Ukraine

Dozens of Spanish citizens and residents are joining the military efforts in Ukraine since the Russian invasion began in February, according to sources from the Spanish Ministry for Home Affairs. However, the sources

referred to do not provide an exact figure for those foreign fighters adducing the lack of a solid legal framework on which justify a follow up. Without any concrete infraction, the monitoring is unregulated.

Research conducted by the Spanish law enforcement is based on a recent public prosecutor's instruction that establishes the policing protocol for those movements in the conflict zone cited above. In other cases, like those joining the ranks of Islamic State, which is on the Spanish list of terrorist groups, the type of the criminal offense is much clearer. Still, none of the actors involved in the war in Ukraine are considered terrorist organizations by the Spanish authorities. Therefore, currently all the Spanish police are able to do is request an interview on a voluntary basis with those foreign fighters coming back from Ukraine. In the event that some evidence exists or is discovered during these conversations (e.g., actions involving human trafficking or other illicit behavior not related with terrorism), prosecution may be possible.

This concern can be explained because in 2015, eight Spanish nationals from the far-left scene were arrested for their involvement with the pro-Russian Vostok Battalion in Donetsk. Some reports also point at the presence of individuals with a [neo-Nazi background](#) in the Donbass area. Many of them were indicted with charges of compromising the neutrality of the State (article 591 of the Spanish Criminal Code), which can result in an eight-to-15-year prison sentence. The charge is also a criminal offense with a very high probative standard. In the end, none of them were convicted of any crime, ending the prosecution of those moving into the Eastern part of Ukraine to join the pro-Russian military efforts. This judiciary response explains the current lack of proactiveness of the law enforcement compared to seven years ago.

Nevertheless, the very same Spanish Ministry for Home Affairs sources referred above provide a general profile based on police monitoring of social media of those that join or attempted to join the Ukrainian army

these last few months. Most of them are individuals with access to fire-arms moving into the war zone because of their ideology, humanitarian reasons, or seeking some fame. The latter ones are the easiest to identify since they are very active in social media. There are also many cases of individuals with mental health issues and others that, after two weeks, leave the country without even engaging in combat.

In the first group, those moving into the conflict for ideological reasons, there is the case of [Miguel Faro Salmerón](#), a 23-year-old neo-Nazi activist with no previous military experience. He was arrested in Hungary in 2017 for wearing a t-shirt with the logo of the Hungarian antisemitic Arrow Cross Party and for performing the Nazi salute in a Jewish cemetery. On the opposite side of the political spectrum, there is the case of [Bernat-Lautaro Bidegain Ros](#), coming from a political left-wing background. He is also someone who fits the profile of someone traveling to Ukraine to seek fame. He has an Instagram account in which he explains and documents his adventures in war. There is also the case of Francisco Floro, a 30-year-old individual without any explicit political views who was in Iraq fighting along with the Kurdish Sinjar Resistance Units (YBS) against the Islamic State. All of them are involved in the Ukrainian military effort. At the time of writing, there is no information available regarding the movement of foreign fighters at the Russian army and allied military units.

Italy (Valerio Alfonso Bruno, PhD)

Dr. Valerio Alfonso Bruno is member of CEF (Center for European Future) and MAFTI (Mapping the Far-Right Truth Industry). Bruno is a specialist on the Italian far-right and has recently contributed to the Routledge handbooks of Far-Right Extremism in Europe and Non-Violent Extremism, and to multi-countries reports as Symbols & Slogans of the Radical Right Online: Italy, Germany, France (ACS) and the State of Hate: Far Right Extremism in Europe 2021 (Hope Not Hate/Amadeu Stiftung).

Far-right extremists and the Russia-Ukraine war

In Italy, two mainstream radical-right parties Fratelli d'Italia (Brothers of Italy) and La Lega (the League) function alongside a complex galaxy of fascist and extreme-right movements that are not represented in the Italian Parliament but are mostly active on the streets and online. The most prominent of these anti-democratic groups include CasaPound and Forza Nuova (New Force).

1. CasaPound was established in Rome in 2003. Within the milieu of Italian extreme-right groups, it is the most well-known. Since 2008, it has become a full-fledged political party with bases spanning from Southern to Northern Italy and with international links. CasaPound has a youth wing, Blocco Studentesco (Student Block), and a journal, *Il Primato Nazionale*.
2. Forza Nuova is an extreme-right neo-fascist and ultra-nationalist political party, founded in 1997 by Roberto Fiore and Massimo Morsello. It is present across all Italian regions and has often run independently from other coalitions. It has always distinguished itself by its violent actions and hateful rhetoric, particularly via homophobic and xenopho-

bic stances. The movement has a youth wing, named Lotta Studentesca ('Student Struggle') and is part of the pan-European platform party Alliance for Peace and Freedom.

Since 2014 up to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the two groups have been actively supporting [opposite sides](#) of the conflict. Forza Nuova by adopted an ambiguous stance, on one hand supporting Putin and on the other hand [keeping links](#) with the Ukrainian extreme right. CasaPound supports the Ukrainian side, in particular the Azov battalion, without hiding its admiration for Vladimir Putin too much.

Far-right extremists after February 2022

Forza Nuova and CasaPound have slightly changed their positions after the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Forza Nuova is [siding](#) more fiercely with Putin and the separatist forces than in the past, when its previous stance was more ambiguous. Conversely, CasaPound is supporting in a less vigorous way the Ukrainian forces—adopting a conciliatory stance in a kind of neutrality from all forms of imperialism, away from both Putin's Russia and NATO. In a communiqué dated March 3, 2022, titled "[Contro ogni imperialismo](#)" (Against all the imperialisms) it stated: "Freedom from the cultural and political yoke, free to defend its sacred borders to the east from Russian and Asian imperialism, to the south from migratory aggression, and to the west from a political and cultural colonialism made up of ideas alien to our millenary history." Moreover, on many pages of its official website and on its newspaper *Il Primato Nazionale*, commentators seem to side with Putin rather than with Zelenskyy's Ukraine. It is also important to notice that CasaPound and *Il Primato Nazionale* have often used tones of [admiration](#) for the Russian president and [his policies](#), as can be seen throughout the years up to the [recent events](#).

Talking of going to Ukraine

In Italy, talks about the possibility of leaving for Ukraine have been extremely limited, and there are several reasons for this:

1. As already stated previously in relation to CasaPound, according to comments on social media, there is a general condemnation in relation to the possibility of leaving Italy to fight in Ukraine against Russian forces. Under some of CasaPound's articles, there have been comments referring to the possibility to "enrage Putin" in the event that Italian extreme-right fighters are considering joining the Ukrainian army.
2. Apart from ideological reasons, there are important legal prohibitions that would not easily allow any Italian citizens to join the Foreign Legion of Ukraine—more so if the potential fighters are considered to be holding radical political views. More specifically, in Italy the penal code, [Article 288](#), states that "[...] anyone who, within the territory of the State and without government approval, enlists or arms citizens to serve or support a foreign country shall be punished by imprisonment of from four to fifteen years."
3. The current Italian executive (Draghi Cabinet led by Prime Minister Mario Draghi) never gave its consent to the enlistment of Italian citizens for the Ukrainian defense legion, and therefore embassies and consulates risk committing a significant crime.
4. The Foreign Ministry led by Luigi Di Maio has also repeatedly stated that any travel to Ukraine is absolutely inadvisable.

In conclusion, the vast majority of the Italian extreme-right fighters currently active in Ukraine were already present on Ukrainian soil from previous years.

Presence of extremists in Ukraine

The overwhelming majority of the extreme-right Italian foreign fighters in Ukraine have been there since previous years. Some of them have returned to Italy. For example, **Alberto Palladino**, known as “Zippo,” is a CasaPound activist. Palladino has been spotted [several times](#) in the Donbass in previous years. He was convicted in 2012 and sentenced to two years and 8 months in prison for leading an attack alongside 15 neo-fascists with a helmet on his head and a bar in his hands against three Italian PD (Democratic Party) activists, while they were putting up posters in Rome. Palladino is currently in Italy, as is [Francesco Saverio Fontana](#), a 52-year-old known as “Stan.” He was a former Avanguardia nazionale member and close to CasaPound, who fought in the Azov battalion. In 2015, he [told the press](#), “As a young man I was a member of Avanguardia Nazionale. I dreamed of one day taking part in a real patriotic revolution. This is my last chance to do so.”

[Valter Nebiolo and Giuseppe Donini](#), both fought in the Middle East and Africa for the Italian army and Donini was also seemingly involved with Italian police special teams. Donini (born in 1969) is from Ravenna (Emilia-Romagna region) and is known as “Celentano.” Nebiolo and Donini have fought with [Azov Battallion/Regiment](#). In a [video interview](#) from 2016 for Ukraine Today, they explained how they arrived in Ukraine in 2014 with other fellow Italians but they eventually had to leave as several wanted to fight for the independence of Donbass, just for “reason of opportunity.” In the same interview, Donini explains that he was “disgusted by Italian politicians” and this is why he went to work as contractor and that he “would like my Europe free from invaders.” Nebiolo (born in 1961) served as parachuter in the Italian army and worked for a private military company. His current location is currently not confirmed.

Others have been arrested by the Italian authorities, such as **Antonio Cataldo**. Below is an updated list of extremist Italian foreign fighters in

Ukraine, with the most recent information available that is currently available at the time of writing:

a. Separatist side

Andrea Palmeri, 42 years old from Lucca (Tuscany region), known as “il generalissimo.” A former football ultra of the Lucchese team and close to Forza Nuova. Palmeri is married to a Russian woman and has a child. In an [interview from 2015](#) he says “I love Russia, I love Putin, here children and women were bombed” and “if Russia is encircled, there will be the third world war.” In Italy, Palmeri has been sentenced to three years and 10 months in prison, for an aggression against a left-wing activist in 2013.

[Riccardo Emidio Cocco](#), closely associate to Palmeri, belongs to Forza Nuova, and notwithstanding being extremely active for pro-Russia propaganda online, there is currently less information available than the other Italian foreign fighters. In March 2022, Cocco produced a [short video](#) in Russian, speaking from Donbass.

Massimiliani Cavalleri, 45 years old from Palazzolo (close to Brescia, in Lombardy region), known as “Spartaco.” Cavalleri has spent three years in the Italian army, appearing to have served in Bosnia. In a 2016 [interview](#), Cavalleri says “Italian politicians are corrupted. When I shoot I see Italian politicians, and Bruxelles” and “One day Italy will implode.” In another [interview](#) from 2016, Cavalleri says “I miss Italy, but will stay in Donbass until the war is over and will go back to Italy in case of a revolution in my home-country.” About Ukraine he says, “Ukraine must accept Donbass is new Russia, they voted to separate” and “here people are all farmers and miners, they fight for their land, here politicians do think about the needs of their people.”

Gabriele Carugati, 32 years old and used to live in Varese area (Lom-

bardy region), known as “Arkangel.” He is a former security officer in a shopping center in Lombardy. Carugati is the son of Silvana Marin, former [League executive](#) in Cairate. When Carugati left Italy in 2014, he [said](#), “When people ask me if I’m afraid to go and fight, I say I’m not afraid of dying or being maimed doing good, I’m much more afraid of living 100 years and not having done anything good...” His mother recently said in an [interview](#) that she knows absolutely nothing—not where he is but assures that she has “fresh” news and that Gabriele Carugati is alive.

Antonio Cataldo, 33 years old from Avellino (Campania region), a former workman and mercenary, was [arrested](#) by the Italian police in 2018. Cataldo was in Libya where he was arrested (and subsequently released) for siding with the rebels fighting against Ghaddafi. Cataldo appears to be a former member of the [French Foreign Legion](#), who was then trained by the Russians in Kazakhstan. Cataldo fought for a long time in the 4th Motorised Battalion of the Luhansk People’s Republic (LPR) Army Corps. He then went to Syria to fight as a militiaman in Bashar al-Assad’s army, and finally returned to the rebel territories in Ukraine. Cataldo was reported saying, “I am not a terrorist. I have not beheaded anyone. I have done nothing wrong except come here to help the population.”

[Alessandro Bertolini](#), 26 years old from Rovereto (Trentino Alto-Adige region), is fighting in Donbass with the pro-Russia militias and is [seemingly close](#) to the League. Bertolini explained in a [2016 interview](#): “I was in Australia, working, I liked it. But I didn’t have a goal. I said: sooner or later I have to go back to Italy. I searched a lot, through the Russian pages on the internet I found a contact. I knew that other Italians were here.”

b. Radical-left fighters

In addition to Italian extreme-right fighters, Italy also has also several

radical-left fighters. Recently [Edy Ongaro](#), known as “Bozambo,” was killed in Donbass on March 31, 2022, where he was active since 2015. Ongaro was born in 1976 in Giussago, close to Pavia in the Lombardy region and had left Italy after some judiciary issues.

Riccardo Sotgia, originally from Sassari (Sardinia region), arrived in the occupied territories of Luhansk region in October 2016. Sotgia was also seen in Alchevsk in the positions of militants of the “Prizrak” group. According to the [Censor.net](#) newspaper, Sotgia is a sympathizer of communist ideology.

[Luca Pintaudi and Giampietro Simonetto](#), from the radical left, are also currently allegedly fighting in Donbass for the separatist forces. There are not many reliable sources of information available about the two.

Lastly, “**Comandante Nemo**,” a radical-left Italian activist who fought in Donbass for the separatist forces between 2015 and 2017, has seemingly left Ukraine. In a [2017 interview](#) Nemo stated, “The fascists who actually fought alongside the Ukrainians number no more than 10, then there are another 20 or so who fought for short periods.”

Extremists among foreign volunteers

The real overall number of the Italian foreign fighters currently in Ukraine is unknown. It is estimated that in the first years of the war (2014-2016), between [50 and 60](#) Italian foreign fighters have been in Ukraine, while the figure is likely fewer at the moment. At least 14 Italian foreign fighters are currently fighting in Ukraine, and the overwhelming majority (12) are related to the extreme-right and the radical left. They have been present in the region prior to the current Russian invasion of late February 2022, and most of them have a history either in the private warfare or in the Italian army.

Regarding non-extremist Italians who recently joined Ukraine, we can mention at least two: Giulia Schiff and Ivan Luca Vavassori.

[Giulia Schiff](#), 23 years old and originally from Mira (Veneto region) and a former Air Force pilot, has been in Kiev since the start of the war to fight as a volunteer in the Special Forces of the International Legion in Ukraine—the only woman in the group.

[Ivan Luca Vavassori](#), 29 years old, is a former goalkeeper of Russian origins, adopted by an Italian family at the age of five. Vavassori joined the international brigades as a volunteer and commands “a bunch of guys,” says he is part of the infantry and a “stormtrooper.”

Returnee management

There is no returnee management aside from judicial prosecution. As previously mentioned, the Italian government has not given its consent to the enlistment of Italian citizens for the Ukrainian foreign legion, and therefore, embassies and consulates risk committing a major crime. The Italian Foreign Ministry has also repeatedly stated that any travel to Ukraine is absolutely inadvisable.

France (Prof. Jean Yves Camus)

Prof. Jean Yves Camus is the director of the Observatoire des radicalités politiques at the Fondation Jean-Jaurès, an Associate Fellow at the Institut de relations internationales et stratégiques, and a member of the Academic Board, Délégation interministérielle à la lutte contre le racisme, l'antisémitisme et la haine anti-LGBT at the office of the Prime Minister of France.

French far-right extremists and the Russia-Ukraine War

Before the conflict erupted, the majority of radical right groups stood on the side of Russia, as proved by the involvement of a contingent of fighters from the Unité continentale unit in the Donbass in 2014. Several of them remain and are now with the [Separatist forces](#), some of them in arms, others fighting the “disinformation” war by publishing a glossy magazine, “[Méthode](#).” They present themselves as “anti-Fascists” who are the heirs to the fighters of the “Great Patriotic War.” The core membership of Unité continentale was made of former members of the Troisième Voie, Bloc identitaire, and other national-revolutionaries, including some with a professional military training, like the neo-pagan Erwan Castel, an intellectual admirer of “Nouvelle droite” who is [still in the Donbass](#), and François Mauld d'Aymé, a graduate of the Saint-Cyr school of Army officers who has lived in Donetsk since 2014 and fought there prior to joining the Kurdish forces against ISIS and subsequently returning again to the Donbass. The reason why they support Russia is because of their hatred of what they perceive as the decadent society in the West. They look at Putin as a strong leader whose supporters share their love for patriotism, traditional family values, hatred of radical Islam, and support for Christian civilization. Especially interesting is the presence in the Ukraine, including in Mariupol, of Erik Tegner, who is [embedded](#) with the Russian forces as a “journalist.” Tegner is the founder

of the pro-Zemmour online media *Livre noir* and a visiting fellow at the pro-Orban [Danube Institute](#).

On the other hand, prior to the war, a minority had chosen to stand with the Ukrainian far right, especially the Azov Movement and Pravyi Sektor. As early as 2014, a former member of *Troisième Voie*, Gaston Besson, was in charge of [recruiting](#) French people for both groups. One can understand this in the context of Jean-Marie Le Pen, then president of the Front National, having [signed an agreement](#) with the Svoboda Party on November 23, 2009. The agreement was a short-lived one, however, as both parties took [opposite stands](#) when Russia invaded Crimea. Another key man in the cooperation between French militants and Ukrainian nationalists is Pascal Lassalle, a former member of the new right groups GRECE and Synergies Européennes. A national-revolutionary in the vein of Guillaume Faye, Lassalle believes that Russians are ethnic Europeans, but he is opposed to Putin. He is a co-founder of the French web radio *Méridien Zéro*, host of *Radio Courtoisie*, and member of Gabriele Adinolfi's *Lansquenets* group according to [some sources](#). During a meeting with this author in 2016, it became clear that he was close to the defunct *Mouvement d'Action Sociale*, later to become *Bastion Social* in 2017. In 2015, Lassalle launched the French branch of the *Reconquista* pan-European network, which is aligned with Olena Semenyaka (<https://www.la-philosophie.fr/extreme-droite/olena-semenyaka.html>). It is through Lassalle that the then leader of the *Groupe Union Défense* (GUD), Steven Bissuel, came into contact with Azov and [participated](#) in the 2017 Pan-European Conference, which took place in Kyiv. GUD and *Bastion social* (the latter was banned in April 2019) established themselves as the most active supporters of the Ukrainian radical right in France and after 2019, they passed on the mantle to *Les Zouaves*, which is a violent neo-fascist street gang of the “Anti-Antifa” kind and the successor to GUD.

Before *Les Zouaves* were [banned](#) on January 5, 2022, their leader, Marc de Cacqueray-Valmenier, aged 23, who has an history of contacts with

Ukraine, has stayed in Kyiv in December 2019. He participated in an mixed martial arts (MMA) contest held at the Atek sportsclub, a [stronghold](#) of the National Corps, then gave an [interview](#) to Semenyaka. Cacqueray is linked with the national-socialist black metal (NSBM) scene, especially the Nazi band M8L8TH led by Wotanjugend leader Alexey Levkin, a Russian national who [sought refuge](#) in Kyiv. It is strange that Cacqueray, who was jailed on January 20 after a brawl during a political meeting held by Eric Zemmour, was released on March 23, although he has also been [sentenced](#) to one year in jail for other violent actions.

Finally, the most astonishing phenomenon is that of the white supremacist movement [Les Braves](#) whose leader, Daniel Conversano, lives in Romania and tries to convince French radicals that the best way to escape the multicultural society is to set foot in Eastern European countries, live and work there, then marry with a local in order to raise a family along “White values.” According to journalist Paul Conge, who has [written](#) on this topic, the group has sections in Poland, Romania, Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Ukraine, with some expatriates living in Lviv and others in Kyiv, where they first stay at a hostel in the Pecherskyj area. Each local branch consists of between 10 to 30 members who stay in touch beyond borders. The Ukrainian section, [named](#) “Les Coqs de l’est,” is led by Florent Lambert, which is probably an alias.

Far-right extremists after late February 2022

The ideological divide between pro-Russian and pro-Ukrainian groups and individuals have not changed at all. The usual Russian influencers such as [Pierre-Antoine Plaquevent](#) and [Xavier Moreau](#) continue their disinformation campaign. Les Zouaves, following the ban, continue in an informal way and disseminate their pro-Azov views via a Telegram channel called [Ouest Casual](#), sometimes [mirrored](#) by La Cagoule. The peculiarity of those

channels is to focus on the support for Azov of soccer hooligans from across Europe. At least one well-known neo-Nazi, who lived in Ukraine and was known on social networks under the alias “Saint-Claude 88” decided to escape the war and return to France through Hungary. Mathieu B., aged 37, was arrested and jailed in Marseille for [incitement](#) to racial hatred. Another interesting case is that of Loik Le Priol, a former GUD activist and former soldier in the Special Forces. On the night of 18-18 March 2022 in Paris, [Le Priol shot](#) former rugby champion Federico Martin Aramburu after a bar brawl. The Argentinian sportsman died on the spot. Le Priol was arrested on March 24 in Zahony, Hungary, after attempting to [cross](#) the Ukraine border. As he was in possession of three knives, a bulletproof vest, and a helmet, there is a possibility that he intended to enlist in a Ukrainian unit. He has since been extradited to France.

Talking of going to Ukraine

Following Zelenskyy’s call to join a foreign legion of fighters, a now deactivated Facebook page, “Volontaires français en Ukraine,” for would-be volunteers had more than 8,000 followers. The Legion even appointed a man in charge of specifically taking charge of French-speaking volunteers, Corporal [Damien Magrou](#), a 33-year-old citizen of Norway of French origin. French intelligence services estimated that about [70 French](#) radical rights activists contemplated leaving to fight. Members of the Légion étrangère of Ukrainian origin quickly asked their hierarchy for a special leave that would allow them to be temporarily discharged and join Ukrainian units. They were denied that right, but some nevertheless left their barracks, becoming defectors. Fourteen of them were arrested in Paris while boarding a bus to the Ukraine and about 20 are missing, according to the [French Legion’s spokesman](#).

Presence of extremists in Ukraine

The number of volunteers belonging to the French radical right is estimated to be between 20 to 30 individuals, by French security authorities. Besides, a number of national-revolutionary movements more or less associated to GUD and Bastion Social are collecting and conveying humanitarian aid, which might be a way to cover up contacts with radical right activists in the Ukraine. The group [Lyon Populaire](#) is sending aid to Kyiv through Warsaw, together with the so-called Humanitarian NGO Auxilium Europae, which claims to [channel the aid](#) through Hungary and Poland to Ukraine. The rival group Audace Lyon also collects aid. The most serious attempt seems to be that of Réfugiés Ukraine, another “NGO” launched by former member of Bastion Xavier Maire and two activists from the Angers-based group Alvarium, which was [banned](#) in November 2021 because of repeated violent actions. The group’s leader, Jean-Eudes Gannat, has in the past attempted to go to Lesbos, Greece, in order to confront immigrants and has collected humanitarian help for Artsakh during the 2020 war. Three other like-minded groups, Bordeaux nationaliste, Helix Dijon, and Luminis Paris, are now collecting on Telegram in order to leave in a convoy on May 1, 2022 and send medical aid through Mission Medyka, but they also intend to provide “logistical support” to [unknown people](#) in Ukraine. Les Braves are also working with Lyon populaire, sending aid to an unnamed recipient in Warsaw and the Ukraine. The women’s Identitarian group, Nemesis, led by their leader Alice Cordier, joined forces with Les Braves. A group of Nemesis activists from France, Switzerland, and Belgium, arrived at the border with Ukraine on March 26. The core ideology of this women-only anti-Feminist group is to denounce immigrants, especially those of Muslim descent, as a threat to the safety of White women.

Germany (Alexander Ritzmann)

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Far-right extremists and the Russia-Ukraine war

German violence-oriented extreme-right individuals and groups have longstanding ties to the [Ukrainian Azov Movement \(AM\)](#), the pro-Ukrainian Russian “[White Rex](#)” Network (WR), and the [Russian Imperial Movement \(RIM\)](#). In particular, German groups and political (micro) parties like “Der III. Weg” (The Third Way), “Die Rechte” (The Right) and the youth wing of the National Democratic Party (NPD/JN) have either hosted events where AM, WR, or RIM representatives were present or had members attend music festivals or participate in paramilitary trainings in Ukraine or Russia. Particularly AM and WR have [close ties](#) with key German violence-oriented extreme right entrepreneurs who organize and financially benefit from music concerts and festivals, mixed martial arts tournaments, and merchandise shops.

Until the start of the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, common efforts were focused on [building](#) a transnational network of white supremacy, based on the conspiracy myths of the “great replacement” and “white genocide.” The articulated perceived existential threat of liberalism, feminism, and the “Jewish New World Order” to their vision of whites-only homelands bridged the trenches between Russian, Ukrainian, German, and other violence-oriented extreme-right individuals and groups that had long existed before.

It is safe to say that a majority of German violence-oriented extreme-right individuals and groups had and have stronger ties with AM and WR than with RIM, which could be contributed to their much more active and attractive outreach strategies. Also, RIM has a strong religious agenda while the other groups favor paganism, and RIM was under more scrutiny by the Russian and [U.S. government](#). At the same time, paramilitary training camps by RIM in St. Petersburg, with German participants from The Third Way and JN, were [tolerated](#) by the Kremlin as recently as 2020.

Far-right extremists after February 2022

The first days following the Russian invasion were initially marked by confusion and controversial discussions about how to deal with this “White Brotherhood War.” On the various Telegram channels of German violence-oriented extreme-right key actors, a majority of the articulated positions then clearly shifted towards supporting Ukraine. In order to justify turning away from Vladimir Putin (previously celebrated as a “strong white man”), pictures and videos of the Chechen Muslim troops sent by Putin to fight in Ukraine and photos of Russian-Asian soldiers who were denigrated as “non-white” were shared. Additionally, Putin is sometimes referred to as “Jewtin” and Bolshevik. In particular, The Third Way and “Partei Neue Stärke” (Party New Strength) are showing their support for Ukraine with statements and memes.

The fact that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is of Jewish heritage was considered the “lesser evil.” Some extremists have shown respect for “this brave Jew who stays and fights.”

White Rex has recently tried to establish a “state building” recruitment narrative, published also in German, claiming that the fight for Ukraine is “of course not for Zelensky and gay parades,” but for Ukrainian nationalism

which supposedly allows for much more “nationalist freedoms” than other countries. Therefore, their leader said, everyone should come and help build this supposed new nationalist Ukraine. This new propaganda narrative seems to be disconnected from reality, since a coalition of extreme-right parties only received a [total of 2.15%](#) in the 2019 Ukrainian election.

A significant and growing minority of statements of German far right-extremists, in particular the [extreme-right entrepreneurs](#), are trying to remain neutral in order to avoid a split of “the scene.” However, none of them openly support the Russian invasion.

Within German “new/alt” far-right milieus and political parties like the “Alternative for Germany” (AfD) or the Identitarian Movement, there is more support and understanding for Putin, which is likely related to the longstanding (financial) support of German far-right parties by the Kremlin.

In summary, the public discussion of German violence-oriented extreme-right individuals indicates that a majority is in support of Ukraine and have reframed Putin’s Russia as anti-/non-white. Overall, the decision of which side to take seems to be based on pre-existing alliances, personal ties, and previous material or financial support.

Talking of going to Ukraine

During the first days and weeks of the invasion, dozens of German far-right extremists publicly articulated their willingness fight for Ukraine on the various relevant Telegram channels or on message boards like Reddit. Concrete logistical support was offered by Germans who have ties with the Azov Movement, White Rex, or other extreme-right groups in Ukraine. After a supposed visit by government authorities, a key German

extreme-right actor retracted his offer to help German volunteer fighters to join the battle by connecting them to the Azov Movement's National Corps. He now claims to only offer material support, as does The Third Way, which [claimed](#) to have delivered a truckload of non-lethal military gear to unspecified Ukrainian "nationalists."

White Rex has repeatably published an address in Lemberg/Lviv, Ukraine, where "nationalists" should come to join the fight.

The Russian private security contractor [Wagner PMC](#), which has a history of displaying Nazi-insignia as well as being antisemitic and against LGBTQ rights, is also accepting applications via Telegram.

The founders of Rusich task force, which is part of Wagner PMC, [were trained by](#) the Russian Imperial Legion, the militia arm of RIM. Since 2016, foreigners have [received weapons](#) training by the Russian Imperial Legion, amongst them Germans, Americans, Swedes, and others.

Pro-Russian separatist groups, such as "The Defenders of Donbass," share extreme right-wing slogans and antisemitic, anti-feminist, and anti-LGBTQ memes and stereotypes on their Telegram channels and call for volunteers to arrive at an address in the Russian city of Rostov, which is close to the eastern border of Ukraine. Germany has a large community of (pro-)Russian citizens, yet so far, no far-right extremists from Germany joining the Russian side have been identified.

On March 14, the head of the German domestic intelligence agency [summarized](#) these developments within the German extreme-right as "Maulheldentum," meaning "heroes by their big mouths only," because according to him, only three of them had left for Ukraine.

Left-wing extremist Ukrainian groups like the [Resistance Committee](#) and Black Flag Ukraine are also recruiting online and supposedly receive material and financial support from Antifa groups in Germany and other countries.

Presence of extremists in Ukraine

On March 20, the German government [announced](#) that 27 far-right extremists had left or had credibly announced that they are planning to leave for Ukraine. “A few” were supposedly involved in combat, and 13 are said to have returned to Germany already. These numbers should be considered the absolute minimum since the surveillance capacities of the intelligence agencies are limited, especially regarding individual and unannounced travel to Ukraine. Also, there are few, if any, [legal means](#) to prevent German residents to travel by land to Ukraine via Poland.

While there are [media reports](#) about German foreign fighters, none of the interviewed Germans have articulated extreme-right beliefs or appear to be known extremists. Until today, there are no publicly shared videos or pictures showing German extreme-right fighters in Ukraine. Also, no far-right extremists seem to have been taken prisoner by Russian forces who would likely exploited this for propaganda purposes. It is possible that extreme-right foreign fighters (are made to) follow a strict operational security protocol (e.g., no-cell phones) and are largely not allowed to the front lines to avoid feeding into Russia’s propaganda lie of this war being about the denazification of Ukraine.

Extremists among foreign volunteers

According to the Ukrainian embassy, several thousand residents of Germany have registered with the “International Legion” website, the official recruitment center for foreign volunteers of the Ukrainian government or have otherwise shown interest in going to Ukraine. No data is available regarding residents of Germany reaching out to the Russian embassy to join the (pro-)Russian forces. In general, no verifiable data is available on how many residents of Germany have left for Ukraine or Russia.

So far, the official number of German far-right extremists joining any of the sides and groups in this war is relatively low, with just under 30 cases by March 20. This number should be considered the absolute minimum, a significantly higher number is quite likely.

What do these numbers mean? Terrorism is much more about quality than about quantity. Foreign violence-oriented extremists traveling to Ukraine and returning back to their home countries represent clear and present security risks. Such individuals will possibly have obtained combat experience in the war zone and potentially will have a greater impact on the violence-oriented extremist milieus in their home countries upon their return. Their ability to plan and successfully carry out attacks in accordance with their ideology increases massively. Gun ownership or practicing at a firing range is one thing, but actual combat experience is something else entirely.

Attacks in recent years by extreme-right terrorists in Germany were deadly, with two victims killed in Halle and nine in Hanau. However, in terms of casualties, a group of combat-trained and experienced extremists could do much more harm.

Returnee management

To [prepare](#) for the likely return of an extreme-right “bands of brothers” to Germany, governments and qualified Civil Society Organizations should prioritize efforts of collecting information on violence-oriented extremists that are at risk of traveling to Ukraine or Russia. A tight cooperation between EU Member States and other countries (including Ukraine), particularly regarding data-sharing agreements, is essential.

A lesson to be learned from the (lack of) management of the first waves of foreign terrorist fighter returnees from Syria and Iraq is that one should not wait for their arrival to start the work of possible prosecution, deradicalization, disengagement, rehabilitation, and psychological support. The discussion on how to prepare for extremist returnees from Ukraine to Germany is just about to start, also due to the efforts of the Counter Extremism Project.

Poland (Przemysław Witkowski)

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Far-right extremists and the Russia-Ukraine war

The most important right-wing organizations in Poland can be divided into several basic trends. These are:

- Nationalists (organizations: Ruch Narodowy, Młodzież Wszechpolska; media outlets: “Media Narodowe,” “Narodowcy.net,” “Myśl.pl,” “Myśl Polska,” “Nowy Ład”)
- Neo-Nazi (organizations: Krew i Honor, media outlets: “Bhpoland.org”)
- Third position (organizations: Narodowe Odrodzenie Polski, Trzecia Droga; media outlets: “Nacjonalista.pl,” “Szczerbiec,” “W połowie drogi”)
- Neo-fascist neopaganism (organizations: Niklot, Zadruga, Białożar, Zarzewie Na Rzecz Tożsamości; media outlets: “Tryglaw,” “Neonowe Słowianowierstwo”)
- National radicals (organizations: Obóz Narodowo-Radykalny, media outlets: kierunki.info)
- National Bolsheviks (organization: Falanga, media outlets: “Xportal”)
- Autonomous nationalists and Szturmowcy (organizations: Praca Polska; media outlets: “Szturm,” “Autonom.pl,” “Wersja Robocza”)

The war in Ukraine and the attitude towards it is one of the [main contentious issues](#) which prevent the emergence of one strong nationalist formation in

Poland. Until recently, the majority of Polish nationalists who take part in elections—in particular those with free-market sympathies, supporting the far-right umbrella party—and the leaders of these parties, [Grzegorz Braun](#) and Janusz Korwin-Mikke, have been critical of any cooperation with Ukraine [since 2014](#) and have repeatedly promoted [Russian positions](#) in this conflict. They have emphasized the crimes of Ukrainian nationalists against Poles during World War II in the [Volhynia](#) region, as was the threat of changes in [ethnic composition](#) in Poland by Ukrainian migrants. They also expressed sympathy for the model of power introduced by Vladimir [Putin](#) in Russia or for [him](#) as the leader.

The Ukrainian question was approached completely differently by nationalists showing economic social or generally anti-capitalist tendencies, i.e. terrorists, new-right neo-pagans, neo-Nazis, and autonomous nationalists. An exception in this group are the national Bolsheviks from the Falanga organization, who for a decade have been staunchly declaring their [support for Russia](#) combined with their fascination with Dugin's neo-Eurasianism and hostility against [Ukraine](#). The group collaborated with pro-Russian forces to such an extent that three of its members launched a [terrorist attack](#) on the Hungarian cultural center in Ukraine, with the aim of destabilizing relations in the borderland Transcarpathian Ruthenia.

Generally, however, it can be said that the young generation of Polish neo-fascists generally [sympathize](#) with Ukrainian nationalists, including, in particular, the Azov Movement. This is the result of the actions of their “mentor,” the new-rightist Tomasz Szczepański. He is the leader of neo-fascist neopagans from the Niklot association, and since the 1980s has been promoting the concept of an alliance of states in the [Intermarium](#) (as opposed to Russia). In addition, in the past 20 years, numerous political connections have been established between Ukrainians and Adam Gmurczyk the leader of [Narodowe Odrodzenie Polski](#). They have clearly managed to pass on their contacts to the younger generation, which collaborates in Ukraine mainly with the National Corps and the Carpathian Sich. The main link

of these circles is the former activist of Młodzież Wszechpolska and the National Radical Camp Podhale, [Witold Dobrowolski](#). He has visited the fighting zone in the Donbass many times and is working as a liaison with Azov. Based on his visits to Ukraine, he wrote two [books on the subject](#). His counterpart on the Ukrainian side is the informal spokesman of Azov, [Vlad Kovalchuk](#), who has been studying in Poland for several years. The main reasons for the alliance were primarily [historical issues](#), such as the history of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the Piłsudski-Petlura alliance against the USSR, and the joint resistance of both nations against Russia's imperial tendencies.

Since 2014, the milieu of the neo-fascist magazine "Szturm" has been co-organizing [conferences, lectures](#), and public [meetings](#) in Poland with the Azov Movement, as well as informal meetings in [Kyiv](#) and [Western European cities](#), and Dobrowolski has repeatedly visited the war zone. Their contacts can be considered cordial and close. However, there were no documented reports before 2022 about the participation of Polish neo-fascists directly fighting in Ukraine.

Currently there is only scant data available on the exact numbers of Polish individuals fighting on the Russian side, except for Ludmila [Dobrzyniecka](#), who has been staying in Donbass since 2014, and Dawid Hudziec, who is officially a photographer. Dobrzyniecka is a former member of the Stalinist Komunistyczna Młodzież Polski and fights along with her Finnish partner in one of the Donbass international separatist brigades. [Hudziec](#) is a pro-Russian Polish nationalist, an ex-member of the Obóz Wielkiej Polski group.

Far-right extremists after February 2022

In the circles of the monthly magazine "Szturm," the outbreak of the war resulted in a declaration of support for the defending Ukraine. In their

opinion, Russia is a hostile empire, which grew up on the foundations of civilization alien to them and which, from the very beginning of its existence, has always tried to threaten their security and way of life. As a result, they [call on](#) the extremists who support Russia (including Marian Kotleba, Nick Griffin, Eric Striker, or the Forza Nuova party) to change their position or risk being viewed as “enemies of nation states, a united Europe and a persona non-grata.”

The neo-fascists of the “Szturm” [call for help](#) for refugees from Ukraine, contrasting them with other migrants, especially those from the Middle East, whom they consider as part of the hybrid war by Putin and Lukashenko. In a joint statement with Niklot and other autonomous nationalists, [they urge](#) their members and supporters to condemn the Kremlin's aggressive policy, and Russia, for trying to conquer Ukraine. They argue that Russia is the following in the footsteps of both the tsarist and the Soviet empire. “This is our war,” writes the editor-in-chief of “Szturm” Grzegorz Ćwik. “Międzymorze is as relevant as perhaps never before,” he adds. “The axes of Ukraine, Poland, Belarus and Lithuania are united and connected with each other,” he argues while [praising NATO](#). Ultimately, the whole argument comes close to the content proclaimed by PiS, including the criticism of Germany, the liberal opposition, and praise to the patron of PiS, the dictator of Poland, Józef Piłsudski prior to World War II. The identification with the Ukrainian nationalists is so strong that the “Szturm” publishes stories about fallen Ukrainian soldiers and [their obituaries](#).

Third Way terrorists are not as enthusiastic as “Szturm,” but they maintain a critical narrative towards Russia by publishing the texts of [Gabriele Adinolfi](#), who brings Russia down to the level of a Chinese province, which also betrays its European allies, and by [publishing](#) their own statement criticizing Russian imperialism and calling for retaliation.

Autonomous nationalists are less enthusiastic. On their website Autonom.pl, there is a lot of material criticizing the admission of refugees from Ukraine,

pointing mainly to the resulting problems and threats: [competition for work](#), crime, and prostitution. There are [no calls to fight](#) or anything like the neo-fascist joint call to condemn Russia.

Talking of going to Ukraine

The issue of leaving for Ukraine was raised primarily in two extremist circles in Poland—among neo-fascists associated with “Szturm” and among anarchists. Extremist volunteers who went to Ukraine are primarily from these two circles.

Presence of extremists in Ukraine

Open support for the trip to Ukraine is shown mainly by neo-fascists from the magazine “Szturm” and the Trzecia Droga association. The latter published an enthusiastic [interview](#) with a Polish nationalist volunteer, who is most likely [an activist](#) of the nationalist [All-Polish Youth](#) and the neo-fascist [Front of National Cleansing](#) and the [Social Alternative](#). The interview points to common goals of the fight as well as speaks of proving oneself on the front and the Polish-Ukrainian brotherhood in arms.

Another volunteer, who has indicated that they fight in Ukraine on the government side, is an individual residing in the United Kingdom. He allegedly is an important connection between English extremists from the National Action and their Polish counterparts from groups of autonomous nationalists, Szturmowcy, or the vicinity of the neo-fascist monthly “Szturm.” He, too, is currently involved in contacts with Ukrainian extremists and, according to his [claims](#), is currently in Ukraine, fighting with the Azov Movement. He was active in an or-

ganization sympathizing with the Ukrainian extreme right, although he himself had pro-Russian views and supported the Donetsk People's Republic. He participated in marches in the company of members of the National Rebirth of Poland, but he was also active in the Patria Fidelis association—the British branch of the National Movement with which the NOP was and is strongly in conflict. Over time, his ideological views became very eclectic and shaky. However, he maintained contacts with other individuals with similar ideological views: the elders of the neo-pagan Zadruga. Zadruga's ideology matched the views of this volunteer, as well as the views of people from the Blood & Honour network. Ultimately, he declared his support for Ukraine and, according to his own statements, is currently at the frontline.

Another alleged Polish volunteer is a member of the Szturmowcy milieu and potential Atomwaffen Division Poland and Greenline Front Polska. According to [Hope Not Hate](#), the Greenline Front in the West is one of the ways of recruiting volunteers to Ukrainian fascist volunteers. Currently, GFP operates in Poland under the name Ecoloktyw. The logo, however, remained the same for both organizations—and Greenline Front and Ecoloktyw use typical fascist symbolism: black sun, oak leaves, and the Algiz life rune. This volunteer posted photos on social media from Ukraine suggesting that he was in the fighting zone and that he was taking part in combat. Over time, however, he deleted them.

There is also information about [two Polish anarchists](#) from Poznań who joined groups of Ukrainian anarchists fighting in Ukraine against the Russian army (Committee of the Resistance). However, no data concerning the identity of these individuals is currently available.

Extremists among foreign volunteers

In Poland, participation in the armed forces of another country [is punishable](#) by between three months and five years imprisonment. The law allows obtaining prior consent from the Ministry of National Defence, but most Polish volunteers that traveled to Ukraine did not obtain it. The sudden and unexpected outbreak of the conflict, the close vicinity of Poland and the feeling that this war is crucial for the situation in the region and changes on the geopolitical map of the world meant that most of the Polish volunteers did not seek the consent of the ministry to join the Ukrainian foreign legion. As a result, even if there are photographs or recordings of Polish volunteers, they are extremely scrupulous about masking their faces or other details to prevent being recognized. Additionally, considering the high support among Poles for Ukraine in this conflict, some people publish films in which they claim that they are in Ukraine, fighting on the side of the Ukrainian foreign legion, even though they are not actually there.

However, the number of documented extremists is small among the estimated Polish volunteers in Ukraine. Most Polish volunteers are [former military](#) and policemen as well as [shooting instructors](#), survivalists, and preppers, whose political views are unknown. There are [19 official applications](#) for permission to join the foreign armed forces from Polish citizens. A group of [at least 30 people](#) in Poland who were willing to join the foreign legion have reportedly organized to begin training. In total, the number of Polish volunteers who went to Ukraine can be estimated at least three to four times higher. The documented Polish extremists currently in Ukraine are three to five individuals. Given the currently available data, these should constitute about 5% of Polish volunteers in the country.

CONCLUSION

Since early March 2022, foreign volunteers have been crossing the Western border of Ukraine to join its fight against the Russian (re-)invasion. Some will continue to do so in the foreseeable future, while others have already returned home from their relatively short-lived stay on the frontlines. They will be joining different units of the TDF or even, at times, attach themselves to different units of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Some will undoubtedly feature in units active since 2014, which have a track record of fielding foreign fighters/volunteers.

Despite concerns and warnings about the Russo-Ukrainian war becoming a magnet for Western extremist foreign volunteers, relatively few such individuals have traveled eastwards to join the fight. An analysis of local far-right scenes in seven countries revealed only a few actual fighters. Ukrainian units, which could host them, are not reporting their presence on the ground. It must be stated that in some cases such units themselves would gladly advertise such presence in their ranks, as they would see it as a propaganda and recruitment booster aimed at their friends or allies abroad. Other units, which could potentially host foreign volunteers, are either monoethnic in their composition and are thus unlikely to feature Westerners or are screening the arrivals for potential signs of political radicalism.

It is important to emphasize all foreigner volunteers on the Ukraine side, apart from the Belarusians and to some extent Georgians and Russians, do not fight in large national or multi-national formations. They are distributed among different Ukrainian units and therefore, so far, have not had the chance to establish themselves as a standalone “legion” or “legions.” As the idea of the International Legion continues to evolve away from a catch-all entity towards a more streamlined, smaller outfit

full of military veterans, then one might expect a smaller type of legion to actually appear on the frontline and meaningfully contribute to the Ukrainian war effort on a tactical level. However, it is not yet clear whether such a unit would develop an ideological agenda, apart from general Ukrainian patriotism.

The current situation in which foreign volunteers that are deemed fit for combat are channeled to various units in Ukraine is a challenge for the detection and monitoring of violence-oriented foreign extremists in Ukraine. It is clear that the presence of foreigners within units that espouse a far-right or right-wing ideology is a first but not necessarily a sufficient indication that these foreigners are violence-oriented extremists themselves.

However, it also remains important to recognize that even a limited number of violence-oriented foreign extremists being active in the war zone are likely to present a challenge for domestic security upon their return to their home country. Their involvement within an active war zone—which allows them to obtain battlefield training and/or experience, enables them access to arms, ammunitions, and explosive materials, as well as increases their ability to networks transnationally with other extremists—is concerning. This means even a relatively small number of violence-oriented extremists returning from Ukraine can change the domestic threat environment.

CEP, which has been monitoring the flow of foreign fighters to and from Ukraine since 2019, has [recently developed](#) a set of recommendations for policymakers working to mitigate these risks. These focus on instruments preventing the exit for violence-oriented extremists from their home countries, the monitoring of the travel of those whose exit cannot be prevented, the monitoring of the activities of violence-oriented extremists in the war zone, as well as a range of recommendations concerning the establishment of a returnee management system, focused on vio-

lence-oriented extremists that have returned from the war in Ukraine. At the core of all these recommendations lies the appropriate management of information between various stakeholders involved in these different stages of an extremist's journey to and from Ukraine.

This report was focused on taking stock of the current situation both within the foreign extremist milieus from which individuals may decide to join the war in Ukraine as well as the developing structures within Ukraine to manage arriving foreign volunteers. The aim was to disaggregate the currently available data to allow for an initial substantiated assessment of the current situation. CEP will continue to monitor the situation both in the various foreign extremist milieus, the travel of such extremists to and from Ukraine, as well as the developing situation of the management of foreign volunteers in Ukraine and will publish regular updates on this issue.

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