The Creeping Resurgence of the Ukrainian Radical Right? The Case of the Freedom Party

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Abstract
In the context of the rise of radical right-wing parties in most European countries, the enduring absence of a far-right group in the Ukrainian parliament seems paradoxical. However, recent developments, namely the victory of the far-right ‘Freedom’ Party (All-Ukrainian Union ‘Freedom’, Vseukrayins’ke ob’ednannya ‘Svoboda’) in the 2009 Ternopil regional elections seems to attest to the gradual revival of the radical right in Ukraine. The article considers the far-right legacy in Ukraine and the reasons why it failed in the post-Soviet period, and then focuses on the history of the Freedom Party and discusses its prospects at the national level.

THE 2001 WORLD CONFERENCE AGAINST RACISM, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance organised by the United Nations in Durban, South Africa, resulted in a Declaration that, inter alia, expressed a concern that ‘contemporary forms and manifestations of racism and xenophobia [were] striving to regain political, moral and even legal recognition in many ways, including through the platforms of some political parties and organisations’ (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights 2001). This Declaration highlighted a disturbing trend in European politics that took shape as early as the mid-1980s, the resurgence of new radical right-wing parties. Following the evolutionary—or, perhaps, mutational—logic of adaptation to the continuing process of the democratisation of European societies, this new political phenomenon has superseded the old far right parties which had persisted desperately in the ‘hostile’ liberal-democratic environment of the post-war era, and which were, to a great extent, the direct heirs of the interwar fascist organisations.

Initially, the far-right parties had electoral success in the advanced industrial European countries, where such parties as the Front National (National Front, France), Lega Nord (Northern League, Italy), Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (Freedom Party of Austria, Austria), Fremskrittspartiet (Progress Party, Norway), Dansk Folkeparti (Danish People’s Party, Denmark) and some others challenged the democratic order by their promotion of ethnocratic liberalism.1 Following the series of

1Roger Griffin (2000, p. 173) defines ethnocratic liberalism as ‘a type of party politics [that] enthusiastically embraces the liberal system, but considers only one ethnic group full members of civil
revolutions in the Warsaw Pact member states at the end of the 1980s and the collapse of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, many of the former socialist nations also became part of the group of European countries characterised by the presence of influential radical right-wing parties.\(^2\)

However, in neither Western nor in Eastern Europe has the electoral success of the far-right parties been homogeneous, and indeed in Eastern Europe, while some countries have witnessed a growth, others have seemed immune—in terms of electoral success—to the radical right. In Russia, the misleadingly named radical right-wing Liberal’no-demokraticheskaya partiya Rossii (Liberal Democratic Party of Russia, LDPR) led by Vladimir Zhirinovsky was extremely successful in the 1990s, and although it apparently dropped its nominal opposition to the governing elites after the rise of semi-authoritarian President Vladimir Putin in 2000, the LDPR still enjoys about between 8% and 11% of the popular vote. Another far-right organisation, the Kongress russkikh obschchin (Congress of the Russian Communities), entered the Duma in 2003 as a part of the Motherland coalition, which managed to gain 9.02% of the votes. In Poland, the Ruch Odbudowy Polski (Movement for the Reconstruction of Poland) obtained 5.56% of the votes in the 1997 parliamentary elections, and in 2006, the far right Liga Polskich Rodzin (League of Polish Families), which polled 7.97% in the 2005 elections, joined the government of Jarosław Kaczyński as a minor coalition partner. While the electoral fortunes of the Polish radical right have been volatile, in Slovakia the Slovenská národna strana (Slovak National Party) failed to bring its representatives to the parliament of Slovakia only once during the period 1990–2006. In the 2006 parliamentary elections, the party won 11.6% of the votes and became a minor coalition partner of Prime Minister Robert Fico. In Romania the Partidul România Mare (Greater Romania Party) has never had deputies in the Romanian government, but the party’s participation in the 2000 and 2004 parliamentary elections was successful to a considerable degree, as it won 19.48 and 12.99% of the votes respectively.

In this context, the enduring absence of a radical right-wing group in the Ukrainian parliament since the reinstatement of independence in 1991 has seemed paradoxical (Umland 2008a, 2008b).\(^3\) Ukraine remains one of the most significant examples of the electoral failure of the far right at the national level, and this state

society\(^.\) On the radical right in Western European countries see Betz (1994); Kitschelt with McGann (1995); Carter (2005); Givens (2005); Norris (2005).

\(^2\)There is disappointingly little research on the far-right parties in post-socialist states. The notable exception is Mudde (2007), who analyses radical right-wing parties throughout Europe. See also Mudde (2000) and Minkenberg (2002).

\(^3\)Outside the scope of our article is the case of the pro-Russian and ethnic Russian radical parties, which function in Ukraine. The most prominent pro-Russian party in Ukraine is the Prohresyvna sotsialistychna partiya Ukrainy (Progressive Socialist Party of Ukraine, PSPU), which is characterised by Soviet and pan-Slavic nationalism, radical anti-Western and, particularly, anti-United States stances, and also promotes the idea of a political union of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. Due to its socialist economic positions, the party is considered left-wing, but politically it is clearly of the radical right-wing. The PSPU’s best electoral result is 4.04% of the popular vote in the 1998 parliamentary elections. It succeeded in having 14 deputies elected to the Verkhovna Rada under the proportional electoral system and won three seats in single member constituencies. The PSPU established a parliamentary group, but this was dissolved in 2001, as several party members left the group.
of affairs distinguishes the country from the majority of her immediate geographical and cultural neighbours. Although the democratisation process in Ukraine was slow under Presidents Leonid Kravchuk and Leonid Kuchma, the country did not become an authoritarian state. The Ukrainian transition to democracy was coupled with and depended on the simultaneous processes of nation building, state creation and marketisation. In the first years of Ukraine’s independence, as Roman Solchanyk and Paul Kubicek have observed, there were fears that the country would be seized by violent conflict as a result of the policies of ‘Ukrainisation’ of the predominantly Russian-speaking regions in the south-eastern part of Ukraine, but this scenario did not materialise (Solchanyk 1999, p. 282; Kubicek 1999, pp. 29–30).

As regards political parties, even in the period preceding the ‘Orange Revolution’ of 2004, they enjoyed complete freedom of organisation and mobilisation, while the electorate became structured in socio-demographic terms so that ‘clear political cleavages have emerged and coalesced along the dimensions of ethno-regional orientation and, more recently, individual socio-economic resources’ (Birch 2000, p. 140).

In Ukraine there has been no overtly nationalist group in the parliament (Verkhovna Rada) since independence, and no Ukrainian radical right-wing political party as such has ever been elected to the Verkhovna Rada. As Table 1 reveals, the Ukrainian radical right-wing parties and blocs failed to win parliamentary seats, and the number of

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<th>Date</th>
<th>Electoral law</th>
<th>Electoral threshold (%)</th>
<th>Number of parties/blocs</th>
<th>Right wing vote (%)</th>
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<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Semi-proportional</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.26</td>
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<td>2002</td>
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<td>2006</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>2007</td>
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The reasons for the absence of strong far-right parties in Belarus, a close—both historically and ethno-culturally—neighbour of Ukraine seem explicable. Under the rule of Aleksandr Lukashenka, who has been the president of the state since 1994, there is little, if any, political space for opposition in general and political radicalism in particular. Lukashenka pursues an ‘egalitarian nationalist’ agenda, and political rights and civil liberties remain limited (Leshchenko 2008). The main aim of the Belarusian extra-parliamentary opposition is to move the country in a democratic direction, rather than direction towards the radical right.

The problem of Ukraine’s slide to authoritarianism under Kuchma is analysed in Birch (1997); D’Anieri (2001) and Kuzio (2005).

See the discussion of Ukraine’s four transitions of nation building, state building, democratisation and marketisation in Kuzio (1998).
parties that contested the polls decreased over time. While the table shows an increase in electoral support for the radical right after 2002, this was too slight to indicate a resurgence, even though right-wing candidates did win a few parliamentary seats in single member constituencies in the course of the 1990s or as members of Viktor Yushchenko’s national democratic electoral alliance *Nasha Ukrayina* (Our Ukraine, NU) and Yuliya Tymoshenko’s *Blok Yuliyi Tymoshenko* (Bloc of Yuliya Tymoshenko, BYuT) under the semi-proportional and proportional electoral systems in 2002 and 2006.

However, some recent developments associated with the Freedom Party may be considered a basis for the resurgence of the Ukrainian radical right. The evidence that attests to their revival relates to the victory in the local elections in the Ternopil region of *Vseukrayins'ke ob''ednannya ‘Svoboda’* (All-Ukrainian Union ‘Freedom’, henceforth, the Freedom Party) on 15 March 2009, and the consequent massive mass media attention that made the leader of the party, Oleh Tyahnybok, a national sensation. The Freedom Party obtained 34.69% of the votes and 50 seats out of 120 in the Ternopil regional council, while its nearest competitor, the *Yedynyi tsentr* (United Centre), gained only 14.20%. The Freedom Party’s result at the Ternopil regional elections was the best electoral outcome—either at the regional or national level—for a far-right party in Ukraine’s history.

Our interpretation of the significance of these results is founded on the thesis, advanced, in particular, by Herbert Kitschelt. In his analysis of the French National Front as ‘a prototype of the New Radical Right’, he suggested that a strong showing in ‘secondary elections’ and the attention of the mass media played a crucial role in promoting the success of new parties at the national level (Kitschelt with McGann 1995, pp. 99–100). If we adopt this argument the Freedom Party has apparently achieved the first stage of this trajectory. However, before proceeding to a detailed discussion of the further prospects of the Freedom Party, I shall first consider two important aspects of the context of the situation of the Freedom Party, namely the radical right-wing legacy in Ukraine and the reasons why the Ukrainian far right failed in the post-Soviet period.

**The radical right-wing legacy in Ukraine**

The Ukrainian radical right appeared as a reaction to the inability of Ukrainian nationalists to acquire their own independent state. Ukrainian nationalism, as a distinct socio-political movement, began to develop in the nineteenth century but the original nationalist organisations and groups were extremely weak. At the beginning of the twentieth century Ukraine—or rather, the territories that were only later called

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7The radical right-wingers’ results of the 1994 parliamentary elections are insignificant and—to a high degree—irrelevant to our discussion, as these elections were based on the old Soviet majoritarian system, which did not allow political parties to play a full-fledged mobilising role in Ukrainian society. As Anna Makhorkina (2005, p. 254) asserts, ‘only with the introduction of the new semi-proportional electoral law for the parliamentary elections of 1998, did Ukrainian political parties start to mobilize the Ukrainian public’.


9The origins of Ukrainian nationalism are considered in Magocsi (2002).
‘Ukraine’—remained a predominantly agrarian country with largely dormant national ambitions. Following World War I, the Ukrainian people found themselves torn between the Soviet Union, Poland, Czechoslovakia and Romania. This ethnic and territorial chaos was aptly reflected in the political sphere: during the first post-war years more than 10 different governments claimed to rule over the territories of modern Ukraine.\textsuperscript{10}

Following the Polish–Ukrainian War of 1918 and 1919, Western Ukraine (Eastern Galicia, part of Volhynia and minor regions) was annexed by Poland, while Eastern Ukraine became the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (Ukrainian SSR). Both Western and Eastern parts of Ukraine had their nationalist movements. The Soviet authorities successfully suppressed the Ukrainian nationalists, either moderate or radical, but in Poland there existed different political nationalist parties that tried to normalise relations with the Polish state. In terms of ideology, they ranged from national democracy, represented by the \textit{Ukrayins'ke natsional'no-demokratichne ob'ednannya} (Ukrainian National Democratic Union), to socialism, represented by the \textit{Ukrayins'ka sotsial'no-radykal'na partiya} (Ukrainian Social-Radical Party). However, there were also legal Ukrainian parties that were less loyal to the Polish authorities. These parties, in particular the \textit{Ukrayins'ka partiya pratsi} (Ukrainian Party of Labour) and \textit{Ukrayins'ke selyans'ko-robitnyche sotsialistichne ob'ednannya} (Ukrainian Peasants-Workers Socialist Association), pursued a national communist agenda, in which they saw a possibility of satisfying both national and social needs.

In the course of the 1920s, the most radical nationalist organisation in Western Ukraine was the \textit{Ukrayins'ka viis'kova orhanizatsiya} (Ukrainian Military Organisation, UVO) led by Colonel Yevhen Konovalets. It was created in 1920 in Prague by veterans of the regular military units that fought the Polish army. The aim of the UVO was the continuation of the national liberation struggle by adopting such terrorist methods as arson and the destruction of telegraph and telephone communication lines, bombing, expropriation of state belongings, and political murders (Kyrychuk 2002, p. 556). Its other activities included espionage for the \textit{Abwehr}, the German intelligence organisation that financially supported the UVO in exchange for intelligence on Polish military structures (Kucheruk 2005, pp. 76–82).

Although originally the UVO was seen as both a military and a political organisation, its military actions were mostly terrorist, while its political activities failed altogether. However, in the mid-1920s, Western Ukraine as well as the Ukrainian nationalist milieu abroad saw the rise of various socio-political clubs and groups that avoided terrorist activities and were engaged in the elaboration of a Ukrainian right-wing ideology. The most important radical right-wing ideologue was Dmytro Dontsov. Like Benito Mussolini, Dontsov was a dissident revolutionary socialist, but following World War I, he became a mystical theorist of Ukrainian revolutionary ultra-nationalism. In his \textit{Foundations of Our Politics}, written in 1921, he praised the Ukrainian nation, which he considered part of the European civilisation, and simultaneously attacked Russia which allegedly endangered European nations. Dontsov foresaw an imminent war between Europe and Russia and argued

\textsuperscript{10}On the history of Ukraine see Magocsi (1996); Subtelny (2000); Lindheim and Luckyj (1996) and Reid (1997).
that Ukraine should become a European outpost in this struggle (Dontsov 2001, pp. 106–62).

In 1926, Dontsov published his magnum opus, Nationalism, in which he expounded the ideology of Ukrainian nationalism (Dontsov 1926). Although frequently referring to works by such thinkers as Friedrich Nietzsche, Georges Sorel and Charles Maurras, Dontsov nevertheless managed to create an indigenous fascist doctrine, in which European revolutionary ultra-nationalist thought was introduced into the Ukrainian context. Following the publication of Nationalism, Dontsov set to further turn nationalist socio-political organisations in Western Ukraine in a fascist direction and he personally translated Mussolini’s Dottrina del Fascismo into Ukrainian, in addition to a few chapters from Adolf Hitler’s Mein Kampf. Dontsov also published a number of brochures featuring biographies of the above-mentioned fascist leaders. 11

The need to combine political functions with subversive and military activities against Poland, Romania and Czechoslovakia (which occupied the Western Ukrainian territories) resulted in the integration of the UVO and minor radical right-wing groups into the illegal Orhanizatsiya ukrayins’kykh natsionalistiv (Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists, OUN) in 1929. 12 Yevhen Konovalets became the chief leader of the OUN, ‘a spiritual and political movement born from the inner nature of Ukrainian Nation at the moment of its intensive struggle for the foundations and goals of creative existence’. 13 In terms of doctrine, the OUN was indebted to the works of Dmytro Dontsov (who, however, never joined the organisation), as well as some ideologues within the OUN, in particular Mykola Stsibors’kyi, Volodymyr Martynets and Yuliyan Vassyyan. Taking into consideration the emerging consensus in ‘fascist studies’, which reflects the growing academic acceptance of the generic interpretation of fascism as a form of revolutionary ultranationalism, the ideology of the OUN can be considered fascist. 14

Although the OUN paid much attention to the ideological side of its struggle and endeavoured to infiltrate legal political parties, universities, and other structures, it carried on terrorist activities, which were previously associated with the UVO. Among the most notorious killings conducted by the OUN were the assassinations of Aleksei Mailov, the attaché at the Soviet consulate in Lviv in 1933, of Ivan Babii, the respected director of the Lviv Ukrainian Gymnasium in 1934, and of Bronisław Pieracki, the Polish Minister of the Interior in 1934.

In 1940, following the murder of Konovalets by a Soviet agent in 1938 and due to the operational and generational conflicts, the OUN split into two factions. One faction was led by Andrii Mel’nyk while the other, even more radical group, was headed by Stepan Bandera. On 30 June 1941, Bandera’s OUN declared the independence of Ukraine with Yaroslav Stets’ko as the prime minister. The

11 A number of contemporary political activists criticised Dontsov for his aim of promoting fascism in the socio-political life in Western Ukraine. In particular, the influential Ukrainian social democrat Volodymyr Levyns’kyi considered Dontsov’s radical right-wing propaganda a ‘national crime’. See Levyns’kyi (1936).

12 On the OUN see Armstrong (1963); Motyl (1980) and Lagzi (2004). The case of the OUN is also briefly discussed in Shekhovtsov (2007).

13 Rozbudova natsiyi, March–April 1929, p. 131.

14 For discussion of the consensus in ‘fascist studies’ see Griffin (1998) and Griffin et al. (2006).
declaration placed high hopes on the Nazis and assumed that ‘the newly formed Ukrainian state [would] work closely with the National-Socialist Greater Germany, which, under the leadership of its leader Adolf Hitler, [was] forming a new order in Europe and the world, as well as helping the Ukrainian People to free itself from Muscovite occupation’ (Romanyshyn 2006, p. 76). However, the Nazis did not support the idea of Ukraine’s independence and arrested both Bandera and Stets’ko. They were sent to the Sachsenhausen concentration camp and released only in 1944.

In 1942, Taras Bul’ba-Borovets’ launched the Ukrayins'ka povstans'ka armiya (Ukrainian Insurgent Army, UPA), a group of Ukrainian nationalist partisans—hijacked by Bandera’s OUN in 1943—that fought against the Nazi and Soviet forces, as well as being involved in murdering Poles, Jews, Russians and even Ukrainians who were not willing to cooperate with the UPA (Burds 1997; Rudling 2006, 2011; Marples 2007). In 1943, while Bandera and Stets’ko were held in the Sachsenhausen concentration camp, the OUN convened the Third Special Congress that elected Roman Shukhevych a Supreme Commander of the UPA. After their release in 1944, Bandera and Stets’ko attempted to restore their ideological influence within the UPA which resulted in a protracted conflict between the hard-core adherents of Bandera and the other factions, who eventually left Bandera’s OUN to form their own faction of the OUN in 1954–1956 (Kas’yanov 2005, pp. 462–67). The UPA continued its struggle against Soviet law enforcement up until the early 1950s but then was suppressed. Many fighters of the UPA and Bandera’s OUN were sent to Gulag prison camps, while other members of these organisations had to emigrate to Western Europe, Canada and the USA.

Although small Ukrainian nationalist groups, such as the Natsional'nyi front (National Front) or Ukrayins'ka helsins'ka hrupa (Ukrainian Helsinki Group), did appear in the Ukrainian SSR in the 1960s and afterwards, they were generally national democratic in their ideological orientation ‘with a concentration upon cultural and linguistic issues, human rights and national oppression’ (Kuzio 1997, p. 213).

Aged wine into new bottles: the Ukrainian radical right in the post-Soviet period

Already in the late 1980s, Western Ukraine was beginning to witness a weak rise of the radical right. As might be expected, these far-right groups demanded Ukraine’s liberation from the Soviet rule. Ironically, however, Ukraine became an independent state in 1991 not because of ultra-nationalist activities, but due to the peaceful demise of the Soviet Union. In the post-communist but ‘pre-Orange’ period, the radical right-wing milieu in Ukraine was dominated by three major political organisations, the Vseukrayins'ke politychne ob”ednannya ‘Derzhavna samostiinist’ Ukrayiny’ (All-Ukrainian Political Union ‘State Independence of Ukraine’, DSU), Konhres ukrayins'kykh natsionalistiv (Congress of Ukrainian Nationalists, KUN) and Ukrayins'ka natsional'na asambleya (Ukrainian National Assembly, UNA).15

The DSU was established in April 1990 by former anti-Soviet dissidents and veterans of the nationalist struggle. Former member of the Ukrainian Helsinki Group,

15Detailed analysis of the Ukrainian radical right in the 1990s can be found in Kuzio (1997). See also Wilson (1997); Solchanyk (1999) and Kubicek (1999).
Ivan Kandyba, headed the organisation. Ideologically, the DSU openly propagated the idea of establishing a national dictatorship and adhered to the fascist legacy of the OUN’s ideologists Dontsov, Stsibors’kyi and Bandera. Only ethnic Ukrainians could join the organisation, and only Ukrainians were considered an indigenous ethnic group in Ukraine (Ukrainians and Crimean Tatars in the case of Crimea).

Since the DSU had been founded prior to the demise of the Soviet Union, it suffered a strategic crisis after Ukraine declared independence on 24 August 1991, as the urge towards a literal ‘state independence of Ukraine’ lost its urgency. Consequently, the DSU adopted an approach that involved opposing politics as such: the organisation called the Act of Declaration of Independence of Ukraine ‘a useless scrap of paper’ and decided to boycott the presidential elections held in December 1991, as the leaders believed there was no independent Ukraine (Golobuts’kyi & Kulyk 1996, p. 109). On 23 March 1993, the DSU was officially registered as a political party, but, that year, it also suffered an organisational crisis, as Kandyba left the DSU to become leader of the recently established Orhanizatsiya ukrayins’kykh natsionalistiv v Ukrayini (Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists in Ukraine) and tried to dissolve the DSU. As a result of this conflict, in early 1994, the Ukrainian writer Roman Koval’ became chairman of the party, and under his leadership it was radicalised even further. In the 1994 and 1998 parliamentary elections, the DSU failed to win seats in single member constituencies. The party chose not to contest the 2002 parliamentary elections and in 2003 the Supreme Court of Ukraine annulled the registration of the party as it failed to meet the regulations of Ukrainian law.

The DSU was not the only radical right-wing party to involve former members of the OUN and UPA. In 1991, Yaroslava Stets’ko, the widow of Yaroslav Stets’ko, former member of Bandera’s OUN and leader of the Anti-Bolshevik Bloc of Nations, returned to Ukraine after 47 years spent abroad. The following year, she founded and became chairperson of the KUN, a party formed on the basis of the former émigré circles of Bandera’s OUN. Although the KUN nominally remained loyal to the revolutionary nationalist doctrine of Bandera and Yaroslav Stets’ko, its actual ideology was far less radical than that of the DSU. Roman Zvarych, who was born into a family of Ukrainian émigrés in the United States and was a member of the émigré OUN diaspora, became deputy head of the KUN and was responsible for its ideology. At that time, he could be considered a national democrat, whose worldview had been shaped less by his presumably fragmented relations with the OUN, than by the Western democratic discourse and his work at Columbia and New York Universities. Consequently, he tried to democratise the KUN and move it away from the ideological basis of the Orhanizatsiya ukrayins’kykh natsionalistiv (banderivtsi) (OUN-B), to which the party—through Yaroslava Stets’ko—was actually a legitimate heir (Kuzio 1997, p. 220). Therefore, the KUN accepted and was inclined to participate in parliamentary politics, and was also willing to cooperate with different political forces, not necessarily of a nationalist or radical right-wing nature.

In 1994, the KUN won five seats in single member constituencies, but Yaroslava Stets’ko could not contest the parliamentary elections, as her status as an

\[16\] Zvarych was removed from his position as deputy head of the KUN in 1994 and joined the national democratic party Narodnyi Rukh Ukrayiny (People’s Movement of Ukraine, Rukh).
Honorary Citizen of Ukraine did not qualify her to stand for office. However, when she later obtained a full passport she was elected to the Verkhovna Rada in 1997. The KUN’s participation in the 1998 elections was twofold: first, they ran candidates in single member districts and obtained three seats; and second, they formed an electoral alliance, the Natsional’nyi front (National Front), with two minor nationalist parties. However, although the alliance polled 23.75% and 20.86% of the public vote in Ivano-Frankivs’k and Ternopil regions respectively, it won only 2.71% of the votes at the national level. In 2002, the KUN joined the political bloc NU led by Viktor Yushchenko, and three members of the KUN were elected to the Verkhovna Rada.

Another prominent Ukrainian radical right-wing party, the UNA, emerged from a union of small nationalist organisations and groupuscules that was formed on 30 June 1990 on the principles of Dmytro Dontsov’s doctrine. The following year, the UNA elected Yurii Shukhevych, son of Roman Shukhevych, its chairman, and founded a paramilitary wing of the organisation, the Ukrayins’ka natsional’na samooborona (Ukrainian National Self-Defence, UNSO). In the period 1992–1994, members of the UNA-UNSO participated in the armed conflicts in Transdniestr, Georgia, and the Russian Federation (Chechen Republic), where they fought against the Moldovan and Abkhaz separatists and Russian federal forces respectively. In September 1994, Shukhevych left the party in protest at the increasing ‘pan-Slavisation’ of the UNA’s ideology and returned only in 2005.

While the UNA was successful in provoking mass disturbances and conflicts with Ukrainian law enforcement agencies, it appeared to be extremely weak in the electoral sphere. Although it was officially registered only at the end of 1994, nevertheless it participated in the 1994 parliamentary elections, which were held in March, and won one seat in a single member district. The following year, the party’s registration was annulled, but it managed to re-register on 29 September 1997. The 1998 parliamentary elections turned out to be disastrous for the UNA, as it failed to win any seats in the single member constituencies and gained only 0.39% of the votes. In 2002, the UNA gained even fewer votes (0.04%), but managed to win a seat in a Lviv single member district.

There are several factors that can explain the failure of the Ukrainian radical right in the ‘pre-Orange’ period. First, by the time Ukraine became independent in 1991, many of OUN’s original goals that been achieved and the radical right-wing project of national liberation struggle became largely irrelevant. As a result of territorial changes in the Soviet period, an independent post-Soviet Ukraine became the largest country located wholly within Europe. Moreover, the Ukrainian language, which can be considered one of the most distinctive identity markers of the Ukrainian nation, perceived in ethno-cultural terms, became the only official state language, (although Russian language is considered a mother tongue for about 29.6% of the Ukrainian population (All-Ukrainian Population Census 2001)).

Second, large, territorially confined parts of Ukrainian society are highly negatively disposed to the Ukrainian far right. There is an ethno-cultural cleavage between Ukrainian-speaking Ukrainians, Russian-speaking Ukrainians and Russians (Wilson 1997, p. 198; Kubicek 1999, p. 43; Umland 2008b, p. 34). This cleavage is reflected in geographical terms and—more importantly—in terms of administrative division.
Thus, for the most part, the first group lives in western and central regions, while the second and third groups live in eastern and southern regions. Traditionally and historically, the last two groups have strong cultural and family ties with Russia. The aggressive Ukrainian nationalism of the far rightists, who generally demonise Russia, is unacceptable for these groups. They also consider the radical right-wingers’ homage to the OUN and UPA fighters inadmissible, in particular due to the fact that their relatives eventually fought on different sides during World War II.

Third, the radical right-wing parties failed to modernise their doctrines in accordance with new developments and retained the atavistic ideology of the original OUN and Dontsov’s works written in the 1940s and 1950s. In particular the far-rightists had nothing to offer to Ukrainian citizens in the largely ‘Russified’ eastern and southern regions. The only major radical right-wing party that endeavoured to reform the ideological legacy of the interwar Ukrainian nationalism was the UNA. This party created a weird mixture of Ukrainian imperialism and pan-Slavic nationalism that could theoretically find a positive response throughout Ukraine (Kuzio 1997, pp. 231–33; Solchanyk 1999, p. 292), but the militarist image and violent behaviour of the UNA deterred larger parts of the Ukrainian population from supporting the party.

Fourth, the radical right-wing parties demonstrated a lack of unity. In the course of the 1990s, there were several political parties and organisations that laid claims to the legacy of the OUN, but they could not overcome the contradictions that dated back to the splits within the original OUN. Even the DSU and KUN, which were both founded on the basis of Bandera’s faction, spoke different ideological languages and disagreed on political strategies. The radical right-wing parties did manage to form electoral alliances before the 1998 parliamentary elections, but they competed with each other for the support of the same groups of the population and thus dispersed the radical right-wing vote.

Fifth, the Ukrainian political spectrum was based on an ideological polarisation that did not offer a distinct niche for the radical right. The first evidence of ideological polarisation came from the 1994 parliamentary elections, which revealed the Ukrainian political spectrum to be divided between the two extremes of the Europe-leaning national democrats and the Russia-leaning communists (Whitmore 2004, pp. 37–38). Moreover, the national democrats included hard-core nationalists, who took the far right votes away from the radical right. This was especially the case for the 2002 parliamentary elections when the KUN joined the mainstream right-wing alliance NU.

Sixth, in Ukraine, a worsening socio-economic situation was strongly correlated with ‘a decline in civic and political activity, including mobilisation around nationalist causes’ (Kubicek 1999, p. 42). Besides, Ukrainian blue-collar workers, whose economic status deteriorated with the breakdown of the industrial sector in the course of the 1990s, pinned their hopes on communist and socialist parties. Thus, Ukraine did not witness a ‘proletarisation’ of the electoral base of the radical right-

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17 The division of Ukraine into two, three or four large ethno-cultural regions is an obvious, but valid, generalisation. For a more detailed analysis of Ukrainian regions see Rodgers (2006).
From social nationalism to ‘freedom’

The Sotsial-natsional’na partiya Ukrayiny (Social-National Party of Ukraine, SNPU), which changed its name to the Freedom Party in 2004, was launched in Lviv on 13 October 1991. Several small nationalist organisations contributed to the formation of the SNPU, namely the Varta rukhu (Guard of the Movement) led by Yaroslav Andrushkiv and Yuriy Kryvoruchko, Students’ke bratstvo L’vova (Lviv Student Fellowship) led by Oleh Tyahnybok, and Molodizhna orhanizatsiya ‘Spadshchyna’ (Organisation of Ukrainian Youth ‘Legacy’) led by Andrii Parubii.

According to the political programme of the SNPU, the party ‘aimed at assuming power in Ukraine in order to build a new state and a new society’.

Six of the points in the party programme referred to Russia, which was believed to be the cause of all the troubles in Ukraine. In terms of ideology, the SNPU claimed that its social nationalism was founded on the work Two Revolutions, written by Yaroslav Stets’ko under the pseudonym ‘Z. Karbovych’, who argued that a Ukrainian revolution had to combine two revolutions, a national and a social one (Karbovych 1951, pp. 6–8). The official symbol of the SNPU was a Wolfsangel (Wolf’s hook). Although its original meaning was not associated with National Socialism, the Wolfsangel—due to its employment by several SS Divisions—had become a symbol of many post-war European neo-Nazi organisations. The SNPU modified the symbol by mirroring it (just as they seemed to mirror ‘National Socialism’), so that it looked like a letter ‘N’ with a vertical line ‘|’ in the middle of the letter. According to the SNPU’s leaders, the symbol meant ‘the Idea of the Nation’. The nation as such was—and still is—seen by the party’s ideologists as a ‘community of blood and spirit’.

The SNPU came to public prominence in 1993 when it declared that members of a group called the Lviv Student Fellowship had formed paramilitary ‘popular guard units’ intended to protect demonstrators and prevent provocations during the opening of the September parliamentary sitting in Kyiv (Streshnev 2006). The next day after the opening, members of the ‘popular guard units’, dressed in black uniforms, incited riots in front of the Ukrainian parliament. Afterwards, the ‘guard units’ joined the SNPU, which resulted in the expulsion of the Lviv Student Fellowship from the Union of Ukrainian Students.

In 1994, the SNPU participated in the parliamentary and regional elections and obtained no seats in parliament, although it did obtain four seats in the Lviv regional council. In spite of its participation in the elections the party was officially registered only on 16 October 1995. At the presentation ceremony, held in November 1995, the

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20 ‘Schutzstaffel’ (SS), the name of the major Nazi organisation in Hitler’s Germany.
21 Nash vzglyad v budushchee, July–August 2006, p. 4.
leaders of the SNPU revealed their racist and anti-Russian agenda in the following statement:

In view of the prospects of mass degradation of people and entire nations, we are the last hope of the white race, of the humankind as such. . . . We must resolutely separate ourselves from the North-Eastern neighbour, not only because it is aggressive or can grab us but, first of all, because it brings into our life, into the psychology of our people, qualities which are different from European values. (Streshnev 2006)

During the second half of the 1990s, the SNPU recruited Nazi skinheads and football hooligans. At the same time, the party decided to reorganise its ‘popular guard units’ to form the Tovarystvo spryyannya zbroinym sylam ta viiskovo-mors’kom flotu Ukrayiny ‘Patriot Ukrayiny’ (Society of Assistance to Armed Forces and Navy of Ukraine ‘Patriot of Ukraine’), headed by Andrii Parubii. However, although the ‘Patriot of Ukraine’ was formed in 1996, it was not until 1999 that it became a full-fledged organisation. Its first convention took place in Lviv in December 1999 and was celebrated by a night-time torch procession through the city streets.

In 1998, the party formed an electoral alliance Menshe sliv (Fewer Words) with the DSU. The 1998 parliamentary elections proved to be disastrous for the alliance, as it gained only 0.16% of the votes and ranked 29th out of the 30 parties involved in the elections. Even in the Lviv region, where the SNPU had four council members, the party polled only 0.65%. However, Oleh Tyahnybok won a parliamentary seat in one of the Lviv region single member districts. (The party’s former ideologist Yuriy Kryvoruchko also won a parliamentary seat in another single member district, but, by the time of the elections, he had left the SNPU and had contested as an independent candidate.) Tyahnybok joined the national democratic parliamentary group of the Rukh and became a member of the Budget Committee of the Verkhovna Rada. Tyahnybok’s incumbency earned him prestige among the party members and, after his settlement in Kyiv in 1998, he was nominated head of the SNPU’s Kyiv local organisation.

In 2000, the party established contacts with the Euronat, an association of the European radical right-wing parties. Jean-Marie Le Pen, the leader of the French National Front, participated in the sixth party convention, held on 21 May 2000.

The electoral success of Tyahnybok and the development of the external relations notwithstanding, the party suffered a dramatic organisational decline in the beginning of the 2000s. It chose to contest the 2002 parliamentary elections solely in single member districts, and, again, only Tyahnybok won a seat. More to the point, he ran not as a member of the SNPU, but as a non-party candidate nominated by the electoral alliance NU led by Viktor Yushchenko, who started drawing radical right-
wingers into his political project (Central Election Commission of Ukraine 2002). After his re-election, Tyahnybok joined the parliamentary group of the NU and became a member of the Budget Committee of the *Verkhovna Rada* again.

In 2003, the SNPU initiated the process of reorganisation and ‘respectabilisation’. On the one hand, the relevance of this process was conditioned by the sweeping democratisation of certain powerful political elites that paralleled Yushchenko’s electoral rise. On the other hand, the SNPU was sure that it would achieve political success by taking the model of the European radical right-wing parties, such as the French National Front or Freedom Party of Austria, as a blueprint. Analysing that period retrospectively, Tyahnybok argued:

> We felt that those methods of propaganda and agitation which we implemented had become increasingly outdated and not as effective as they had been in the beginning of the 1990s. We felt a certain passivity among our members, a certain loss of spiritual unity within the organisation, and we began to understand that in order to be successful in today’s state, to play an active role among the political elites, we had to change both internally and externally. (Gaivanovich 2004)

On 14 February 2004, the party held its ninth convention, which adopted the following important decisions. First, Oleh Tyahnybok would resign from his post as head of the Kyiv local organisation and become head of the party. Due to his charismatic personality and owing to the withdrawal of the other founding leaders from the SNPU, Tyahnybok managed to consolidate power in his hands and exert Bolshevik-like control over the party. Second, the party changed its name to the All-Ukrainian Union ‘Freedom’. We can only conjecture whether the party borrowed part of its new name from the Freedom Party of Austria, but this assumption is highly probable, since the party was trying to model itself on its West European ‘brothers in arms’. Third, the Freedom Party abandoned the modified *Wolfsangel* as its party symbol, and adopted the image of a right hand showing three fingers. In a 2004 interview, Tyahnybok himself admitted that popular perception of the party’s ideas had been impeded by a ‘somewhat inadequate symbol and party name’ (Gaivanovich 2004). Fourth, the convention disbanded the Patriot of Ukraine, as this paramilitary organisation as such and its overtly racist stances in particular posed a threat to the new ‘respectable’ image of the Freedom Party.26 Fifth, the Freedom Party moderated its radical right-wing positions. However, as the party’s leaders covertly decided, this moderation would affect only its public rhetoric, accessible to external observers, while the ideological foundations of the party would remain unchanged (Odnorozchenko 2007).27

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26 The Kharkiv local organisation of the Patriot of Ukraine refused to disband and renewed its membership in 2005. The following year, it managed to register as a regional social organisation, but, from then on, it had no organisational ties with the maternal party.

27 Here we find what Roger Eatwell (1992, p. 174), among others, termed as a distinction between the esoteric and exoteric ideological appeals of the radical right: ‘The former refers to the ideological nature of discussion among converts, or in closed circles. The latter refers more to what it is considered wise to say in public’. The Freedom Party used both esoteric and exoteric doctrines as early as in the 1990s, when it first had a separate political programme for internal use (‘Prohrama Sotsial-Natsional’noyi Partiyi Ukrayiny’, available at: http://www.vatra.org.ua/sotsial-natsionalizm/prohra-
Five months after the Freedom Party convention, which had allegedly decided to make the organisation more respectable, Tyahnybok publicly proved the party’s allegiance to its esoteric radical nationalist stances. While making a speech at the Yavoryna Mountain during a rally at the grave of a UPA commander, Tyahnybok appealed to both former UPA fighters and party activists:

The enemy came and took their [UPA’s] Ukraine. But they [UPA fighters] were not afraid; likewise we must not be afraid. They took their automatic guns on their necks and went into the woods. They got them ready and fought against the Moskali, Germans, Zhydy, and other scum, who wanted to take away our Ukrainian state! And therefore our task—for every one of you: the young, the old, the grey-headed and the youthful—we must defend our native land! . . .

These young men and you, the grey-headed, are the very combination, which the moskal’sko-zhydivs’ka mafia ruling Ukraine fears most.28

Since Tyahnybok participated in Viktor Yushchenko’s presidential campaign, his speech at the Yavoryna Mountain was widely publicised by Yushchenko’s political opponents. Consequently, Yushchenko demanded apologies from Tyahnybok and warned him of possible expulsion from the NU parliamentary group. The leader of the Freedom Party formally apologised but was expelled nevertheless and retracted his apology (Tyahnybok 2004).29 In summer 2004, the Public Prosecutor’s Office in the Ivano-Frankivs’k region opened a criminal case against Tyahnybok on charges of inciting ethnic hatred. Different courts continued the case for several months, but eventually Tyahnybok was acquitted on 31 March 2005 (The Stephen Roth Institute 2005). Tyahnybok’s expulsion from the NU group notwithstanding, the Freedom Party continued to support Yushchenko for president during the ‘Orange Revolution’.

While a member of the Verkhovna Rada in the period 2002–2006, Tyahnybok submitted 36 motions for debate, but the parliament adopted only four of them. In the majority of his motions he opposed the introduction of the Russian language as the second official state language, proposed recognition of the OUN...
and UPA during World War II, called for the lustration of former communist officials, security service officers and undercover agents, and demanded the prohibition of communist ideology. None of these motions was adopted.

In spring 2005, Tyahnybok became involved in further anti-Semitic activity when he signed a so called ‘Letter of 100’ that petitioned President Yushchenko, the Chairman of the Verkhovna Rada and the Head of the Supreme Court ‘to stop the criminal activity of the organised Jewry’, which was allegedly trying to undermine Ukrainian sovereignty (The Stephen Roth Institute 2005). The same year, the Freedom Party also focused its attention on the issue of immigration. Partially, this development was motivated by the 2005 riots in France, and the Freedom Party even issued a declaration on ‘the racial and ethnic disturbances in France’, in which it condemned ‘the suicidal immigration policies’ of the country and demanded, in particular, the strengthening control of Ukrainian eastern and southern borders, the tightening of immigration laws, and the cessation of ‘the criminal activities of ethnic mafia groupings’ (Tyahnybok 2005). The Freedom Party’s focus on the immigration issue was an obvious attempt to follow the ‘fashion’ of the West European radical right-wing parties. At the end of 2005, the Lviv local organisation of the Freedom Party organised a press conference of minor functionaries of the French National Front. They took the opportunity to blame ‘uncontrolled immigration from Africa to France’ for the rise of the organised crime, drug trafficking, and gangsterism. They also set forth the doctrine of the National Front and declared that the Freedom Party was the only party in Ukraine whose ideological foundations corresponded to the ideas of ‘a Europe of nations’. 31


Apart from the Freedom Party, only two radical right-wing parties contested the 2006 parliamentary elections, the KUN and UNA. However, the KUN’s candidates were included in the NU list, and only the UNA was a direct rival of Tyahnybok’s party. In the parliamentary elections, the Freedom Party gained only 0.36% of the votes and ranked 18th out of 45 parties. However, the regional and city council elections in western Ukraine were more successful for the party (see Table 2).

By the time of the elections of 30 September 2007, two important developments had taken place within the radical right-wing in Ukraine. First, the UNA decided to

ignore the elections, officially as part of its protest against political corruption, but also probably because it had not been unable to raise sufficient funds for electioneering. Second, at the end of 2006, the Prosecutor General’s Office opened a criminal case against Oleksii Ivchenko, the KUN’s leader and former head of the national joint-stock company *Naftogaz Ukrayiny* (Naftogas of Ukraine), on charges of embezzlement and abuse of his official position. Consequently, the NU dropped Ivchenko from its party ticket in spring 2007, and then, almost a month before the elections, the KUN decided to withdraw from the electoral alliance and not to contest the elections at all. As a result, the Freedom Party enjoyed the privileged position of being the only far-right party to participate in the 2007 parliamentary elections. However, although this helped the party to double its vote compared with the previous elections it still won only 0.76% of the popular vote and was ranked eighth out of 20 parties.

This limited electoral success notwithstanding, the Freedom Party enthusiastically embraced the overall outcome of the parliamentary elections. On 9 February 2008 they held a party conference, at which it was announced that the organisation would participate in all the presidential, parliamentary, regional and city council elections throughout Ukraine. This strategy seemed natural and consistent, as it was the only opportunity for an extra-parliamentary party to retain the attention of the mass media space and mobilise its support base outside the Western Ukrainian regions.

The first opportunity to test the new strategy in Central Ukraine came with the elections to the Kyiv city council and for the position of Mayor of Kyiv that took place on 25 May 2008. The Freedom Party ran its electoral campaign under the slogan ‘Ukrainian rule to the capital city!’ and distributed booklets containing the party’s project for a new Constitution of Ukraine, written under the direction of Oleksandr Shevchenko, a Professor at Kyiv University, which had been sanctioned by the eighteenth party convention on 5 August 2007. Interestingly, the message of the Freedom Party’s campaign in Kyiv, a largely ‘Russified’ city as regards the language spoken at home and between different ethno-cultural groups, was articulated less in ethnic nationalist terms and more on a strong anti-establishment, populist and

### Table 2

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<th>Lviv regional council</th>
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anti-corruption rhetoric. The party’s candidate for mayor, Tyahnybok, stood no chance of winning the elections and eventually polled only 1.37% of the vote. Nevertheless, the Freedom Party profited from the individual electoral campaign of its leader, increasing its vote in the city council election to 2.08%, compared with the 1.25% it polled in Kyiv in the 2007 parliamentary elections (BBC Ukrainian 2008).

A year later, however, the Freedom Party achieved much greater political success—although only at the regional level—obtaining 34.69% of the popular vote in the Ternopil regional council elections, held on 15 March 2009. Tyahnybok’s associates secured 50 seats out of 120, and Oleksii Kaida, head of the secretariat of the Freedom Party, was nominated chairman of the council. It was the first time the party had contested the elections in the Ternopil region, and—in comparison to the 2007 parliamentary elections, when it gained 3.44% of the votes in this region—the Freedom Party demonstrated a tenfold increase in popular support.

Le Pen and the National Front general delegate Bruno Gollnisch congratulated Tyahnybok on the victory in the regional elections during the latter’s visit to Strasbourg on 24–25 March 2009. In Strasbourg, Tyahnybok also had a chance to meet MEPs from such radical right-wing parties as the Freedom Party of Austria, Natsionalen sayuz ‘Ataka’ (National Union ‘Attack’, Bulgaria), Vlaams Belang (Flemish Interest, Belgium), Forza Nuova (New Force, Italy) and Fiamma Tricolore (Tricolour Flame, Italy).

In January 2010, however, Tyahnybok failed to repeat his party’s success in Ternopil region, obtaining only 4.89% of the votes in the first round of the 2010 presidential elections in the region. This failure resulted from two main factors. First, taking into account obvious differences between parliamentary and presidential elections, most radical-nationalist voters decided to support Yushchenko who had better chances of winning than Tyahnybok and whose praise of the OUN-UPA and attitudes towards anti-multiculturalist ‘Ukrainisation’ of the country did not differ essentially from those of Tyahnybok. Second, Tyahnybok’s electoral campaign on the whole was extremely weak, most likely because of insufficient financial resources. Even so, the Freedom Party, embodied by Tyahnybok, almost doubled its vote on the national level—as compared with the 2007 parliamentary elections—gaining 1.43% of the votes.

The Freedom Party’s prospects at the national level

It is no exaggeration to assert that, at the time of writing, the Freedom Party has established itself as a rather successful regional party. Its dramatic, although fluctuating, progress in the Ternopil region and previous showing in the Lviv city

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34 According to the 2005 public opinion poll, Russian language was spoken at home by 39.9% of Kyiv’s residents. A total of 12.3% of the residents spoke mostly Russian, while 23.6% spoke both Russian and Ukrainian at home. See Razumkov Centre (2005).


36 Vseukrains'ke Ob'ednannya 'Svoboda', April 2009, p. 2.

and regional council elections indicate that in Western Ukraine the party has become a strong political actor. The question, however, remains whether the Freedom Party will be able to transcend traditional regional boundaries and become established at the national level. Here I shall analyse this problem by employing a theoretical model that features three interdependent elements: first, ‘interest aggregation’ or societal demands and the Freedom Party’s ability to aggregate them; second, the ‘legitimacy’ of the party with respect to the political culture and party system; and third, the ‘organisational efficiency’ of the party.

According to an October 2008 opinion poll, in contemporary Ukraine, there are eight political, social and economic problems considered most urgent by more than 30% of Ukrainian citizens: increases in prices (70.1%); the government’s indifference to public opinion (56.6%); corruption at the top of government (47.8%); low wages (40.2%); the government’s failure to secure implementation of the law (38.0%); the absence of a social safety net for elderly people, low-income groups and large families (31.4%); unemployment (31.2%); and the absence of mechanisms of common civic influence over decision-making (30.5%) (Razumkov Centre 2008a, 2008b).

First, the Freedom Party has a limited ability to aggregate societal demands insofar as it has neglected socio-economic issues since its foundation in the early 1990s. In doing so, the party follows—even if unintentionally—the pattern of the majority of Western European radical right-wing parties for which the economic positions play a subordinate role (Betz 2003, pp. 76–77). According to Cas Mudde (2007, p. 120), ‘populist radical right parties use their economic program to put into practice their core ideological positions (nativism, authoritarianism, and populism)’. This is exactly the case of the Freedom Party. It used the ‘economic plank’ of its 2003 political programme to promote its anti-Russian and anti-communist agenda, as well as economic protectionism, while its 2007 pre-election programme ignored economic issues altogether. Moreover, the Freedom Party expresses its readiness to sacrifice ‘social justice’, which has allegedly been an important element of its doctrine since the times of the SNPU, for the pursuit of a ‘Greater Ukraine’. When asked how the party might fund one of its would-be projects, namely the resumption of Ukraine’s membership in the nuclear club, Andrii Ill’yenko, deputy head of the Kyiv’s party local organisation, replied that, for these purposes, Ukraine could reduce social welfare.

At the same time however, the Freedom Party has indeed been efficient in reflecting the protest attitudes of Ukrainian citizens and their concerns over political corruption. The party leaders consider their radical right-wing project a political alternative to ‘the crisis of parliamentarianism and seizure of power by the oligarchic clans, who deprived the people of any possibility to influence the processes in the country’ (Petrunya 2008). According to the Freedom Party, one of the instruments for fighting political corruption would be the implementation of lustration policies, which would purge the Ukrainian political system and administrative machine of...
‘komunisty-kadebisty-kuchmisty’ (communists, KGB agents, and adherents of Kuchma). Another instrument would be polygraph testing of government employees and candidates for elective office. Furthermore, they argue, the ethnic composition of government office-holders at all levels should conform to the ethnic composition of a given region. As it might be expected, the Freedom Party calls for a return to the Soviet policy of registering citizens’ ethnicity in internal passports and birth certificates.40

Without focusing on the proposed controversial instruments of fighting the political corruption and alienation from politics, it can be argued that the Freedom Party’s employment of populist anti-establishment strategies plays a crucial role in voter mobilisation.41 This may be corroborated by examining the background of social attitudes, against which the Freedom Party won the Ternopil regional council elections in March 2009 (see Figure 1).

As Figure 1 shows, the Ukrainian parliament and the ruling elites never enjoyed strong public support. In 2008, their support dropped to 1.4% and continued to decline in March 2009 to 0.6%, while dissatisfaction with the performance of the Verkhovna Rada dramatically rose to 69.3% in 2008 and to 70.3% in March 2009. The decline of trust in the parliament can be attributed to the inability of the ruling elites to provide an adequate response to the 2008–2009 global financial crisis. Moreover, in September 2008, two ‘Orange’ coalition parliamentary groups, Nasha Ukraina—Narodna samooborona (Our Ukraine—People’s Self-Defence, NU-NS) and the BYuT, started clashing with each other over the scope of presidential powers, and Prime Minister Tymoshenko was accused of colluding with the ‘anti-Orange’ Partiya rehioniv (Party of Regions, PoR). Andrii Parubii, a former leader of the SNPU, who switched to the NU after the ‘Orange Revolution’, added fuel to the fire by claiming: ‘We will soon witness the betrayal of national interests by the new coalition [of the BYuT and PoR].’42 In Western Ukraine, the alleged collusion of these two forces and the ambiguous gas agreements reached by Tymoshenko in Moscow resulted in a loss of public trust in the BYuT, which had won the 2007 early parliamentary elections in the majority of the Western Ukrainian regions. Tyahnybok himself acknowledged the role that Tymoshenko played in the Freedom Party’s landslide victory in the Ternopil region: ‘It was Tymoshenko’s friendship with the “Russian tsars” Medvedev and Putin that impacted most on Galician voters. It was the worst blow for them, which backfired on the Tymoshenko bloc and helped us’ (Open Society Foundation 2009).

Second, a radical right-wing party’s success always depends on the domestic political environment, which can be permissive or restrictive to the radical nationalist cause (Art 2006; Eatwell 2003; Mudde 2007, pp. 243–48), and important aspects of the political environment are political culture and the party system. Is Ukrainian political culture conducive or hostile to the radical right? To answer this question, I shall

41 Corruption remains a significant problem for Ukraine. According to the 2008 Corruption Perceptions Index report issued by Transparency International, Ukraine ranked 134th out of 180 countries, thus showing the worst result in at least 10 years (Transparency International 2008).
consider the thesis according to which the existence of a political culture permissive to the radical right is conditioned by the prior existence of a strong nationalist subculture. In this view, when radical right-wing parties emerge they are viewed as part of a nationalist tradition rather than completely novel political actors (Art 2006, p. 10).

In interwar Ukraine, as briefly outlined earlier, there was a strong fascist subculture represented by the OUN and the intellectual milieu around the organisation. It may be argued therefore that the Freedom Party is part of the existing nationalist tradition and, therefore, could be seen as a legitimate political actor. Furthermore, we should acknowledge that the claims to the OUN’s legacy made by the post-Soviet Ukrainian radical right-wing parties are reasonable not only in organisational and ideological terms, but also in terms of political culture. However, in assessing these claims one cannot ignore the fact that the OUN’s activities were virtually limited to the Western Ukrainian regions and therefore the political culture in Western Ukraine may be more permissive to the Freedom Party’s agenda than that in the other regions. This assumption receives some support from empirical studies (see Figure 2).

To a certain degree, Figure 2 confirms the argument of Andreas Umland (2008b, p. 34), who asserts that one of the factors, which reduces the Ukrainian radical right-wingers’ chances of success, is ‘the division of Ukraine into the Western part, on the one hand, and the Eastern and Southern parts, on the other, … where the nature of Ukrainian nation and its interests are perceived differently’. Taking this assumption into consideration, it should be added that positive popular attitudes towards national radicalism in the south-eastern part of Ukraine (7.1% on average) do not necessarily imply positive attitudes towards radical ethnic Ukrainian nationalism, espoused by the

**FIGURE 1. PUBLIC SUPPORT OF THE PERFORMANCE OF THE VERKHOVNA RADA (%)**

Freedom Party and the likes. On the contrary, in case of eastern and southern regions it is more correct to speak of radical pan-Slavic, Neo-Eurasianist or (pro-)Russian nationalism.

As far as the Ukrainian party system is concerned, in comparison to the ‘pre-Orange’ period, when the polarised party system was restrictive to the radical right, it may be argued that contemporary developments in Ukrainian politics indicate that the party system is currently rather conducive to the Freedom Party. Since the KUN and UNA withdrew from the 2007 early parliamentary elections and practically did not participate in the electoral process afterwards, Tyahnybok’s party is now the only organisation active in the radical right-wing niche within the party system of contemporary Ukraine. This niche has evidently become available in the years following the ‘Orange revolution’. The ‘Orange’–‘anti-Orange’ confrontation notwithstanding, during the period 2005–2009, the Ukrainian party system has been characterised by centripetal party competition. The gradual decline of the pro-presidential NU (as well as now former President Yushchenko himself) and the 2008–2009 negotiations on a grand coalition of the BYuT and PoR have raised the spectre of a two-party-system. According to Kitschelt, such developments may be considered as one of the conditions for the rise of far-right parties. In particular, he argues that ‘the radical right can establish itself most successfully where conventional mainstream parties have “converged” in their policies on positions that are distant from those held by potential radical right voters’ (Kitschelt 2007, p. 1184). However, after Yushchenko failed to be re-elected as president in 2010, it may be that he will draw radical right-wing votes away from the Freedom Party, as he has evidently become more radicalised to the right during and after the presidential campaign. On 22 January 2010,
Yushchenko posthumously awarded the ‘Hero of Ukraine’ to Stepan Bandera. This act of his as outgoing president drew sharp criticism from, among others, the European Parliament, Polish President Lech Kaczyński, the Simon Wiesenthal Center and the Anti-Defamation League, but was embraced by Ukrainian radical nationalists and a large number of national democrats. Yushchenko’s controversial move can be seen as an attempt at building a new base of supporters, partially ‘stolen’ from the Freedom Party (European Parliament 2010; Kaczyński 2010; Simon Wiesenthal Center 2010; Anti-Defamation League 2010).

However, the most important problem of the Freedom Party concerns its organisational efficiency. Although the party has been in existence since the early 1990s, it suffered a severe organisational crisis in the early 2000s and eventually lost most of its members. By the 2004 convention, which reorganised the SNPU into the Freedom Party, there were less than 1,000 members. In 2009, the party declared a membership of 15,000, and although it seems to be an exaggeration, there is no doubt that the party has steadily grown in number since 2004. However, if we do take the declared membership at face value—making necessary allowance for the fact that the number of active members is considerably less—it is still too small for the efficient operation of the party. First of all, it is indubitable that ‘the greater the number of party members is, the greater will be their ability to mobilise potential radical right voters’ (Art 2008, p. 423). This is especially the case for the Freedom Party: since it does not have enough funding to efficaciously promote its agenda through the mass media or hire professional political advisers, the whole burden of electioneering falls on the rank and file. In this situation, the party is limited in its possibilities to compete with major political parties like the BYuT or PoR, which are officially backed by Ukrainian business oligarchs.

Funding is an urgent problem of the Freedom Party. According to Tyahnybok, in 2006, the party established an ‘economic council’, which consists of representatives of small and medium-sized businesses. The majority of them are members of the party and provide much of the financial support for the organisation. This allows the party to be financially independent, but a serious question remains whether this independence can indeed meet all the needs of the Freedom Party.

Another organisational problem of the Freedom Party is practical leadership and party management at the local level. Oleh Tyahnybok is obviously a charismatic and pragmatic leader, but he cannot clone himself to fill in the leadership gaps in the regions. The Freedom Party claims to have local organisations in all the Ukrainian administrative regions, but virtually none of them has a leader able to combine high managerial competence and authority. On the one hand, this situation allows


44 Korrespondent, 14, 17 April 2009.

45 Quite naturally, various sources assert that the Freedom Party was covertly funded by the business magnates and/or politicians close to the now former President Yushchenko’s administration, who were willing to reduce the popular support for the BYuT in Western Ukraine. (At the time of writing, however, this information cannot be substantiated.) If it is true, funding from these sources is apparently very limited.
Tyahnybok to avoid factionalism, ‘a perennial problem for far-right parties’ (Marcus 2000, p. 35). Yet, on the other hand, the absence or poverty of efficacious practical leadership in the regions impairs the party’s chances of mobilising voters at the national level.

At present, the Freedom Party remains a regional party. In the European context, there is only one rather successful regional far-right party, the Northern League, which can be appropriately compared to the Freedom Party. Both parties maintain their regional strongholds, ‘Padania’ and Western Ukraine, and—due to their exclusionary nationalist rhetoric—receive an icy welcome in the *Mezzogiorno* and south-eastern Ukraine respectively. Unlike the Freedom Party, however, the Northern League is an organisationally strong body that can compensate for its electoral vulnerability resulting from its regional status with operational efficiency (Bull & Gilbert 2001). At the same time, the Freedom Party is evolving, and its electoral record reveals a slow but steady annual increase in popular support. The enduring political crisis in Ukraine as well as the global financial crisis play into Tyahnybok’s hands, as do the ideological convergence of the mainstream political actors and the Freedom Party’s privileged status of the only active radical right-wing party in the country. Considering the low threshold required for parliamentary representation in Ukraine, there is a strong and disturbing possibility that the Freedom Party will set up the first overtly nationalist parliamentary group in the *Verkhovna Rada*, thus constituting a new landmark of the resurgence of the radical right in Ukraine.

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References


The *Vlaams Blok* (Flemish Bloc) was another successful regional radical right-wing party, but the seat distribution rules in the Ukrainian parliament and the Belgian Chamber of Representatives are too different to allow meaningful comparison. In Belgium, there are 11 electoral districts. For each of them, the number of seats in the Chamber of Representatives is proportional to the population of a given district. Eventually, the Flemish Bloc was not ‘obliged’ to have any electoral support outside Flanders to enter the parliament.


