

The Euromaidan and the crisis of Russian nationalism

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This article examines the reverberations in Russia of the Euromaidan protests and the fall of the Yanukovich regime in Ukraine. It shows how the events in Kyiv provoked a major crisis in the Russian nationalist movement, which was riven by vituperative denunciations, the ostracism of prominent activists, the breakdown of friendships, the rupture of alliances, and schisms within organizations. Focusing on pro-Kremlin nationalists and several tendencies of opposition nationalists, it argues that this turmoil was shaped by three factors. First, the Euromaidan provoked clashes between pro-Kremlin nationalists, who became standard-bearers of official anti-Euromaidan propaganda, and anti-Putin nationalists, who extolled the Euromaidan as a model for a revolution in Russia itself. Second, the events in Ukraine provoked ideological contention around issues of particular sensitivity to Russian nationalists, such as the competing claims of imperialism and ethnic homogeneity, and of Soviet nationalism and Russian traditionalism. And third, many nationalists were unprepared for the pace of events, which shifted rapidly from an anti-oligarchic uprising in Kyiv to a push for the self-determination of ethnic Russians in Crimean and southeast Ukraine. As a result, they were left in the uncomfortable position of appearing to collaborate with the oppressors of their compatriots.

Keywords: Euromaidan; Russian nationalism; Putin regime; radical nationalism; colored revolutions

The Ukrainian uprising of 2013–2014 appeared to mark a historic breakthrough for Russian nationalists. At the highest levels of the Russian state, officials echoed their slogans and appeared ready to implement demands that had once appeared unthinkable. President Vladimir Putin signaled his support for both ethnic nationalism and territorial irredentism in public statements that were hailed by some nationalist ideologues as a revelation of his long-concealed, inner convictions (Dugin 2014b). His stance was echoed by government ministers, by the leaders of all parties in the Duma, and by Kremlin-aligned television stations. This patriotic turn was reinforced by the invective of a phalanx of nationalist intellectuals, who whipped up patriotic fervor and molded public perceptions of the crisis. In the course of two months, they constructed an image of the “liberal-fascist” enemy, celebrated “the Russian Spring” as an authentic national uprising, and fostered jingoistic euphoria about the restoration of Russian power. Never before had Russian nationalists played such a central role in public debate.

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Paradoxically, this ascendancy coincided with turmoil in the ranks of Russia's nationalist movement. According to Egor Kholmogorov, a prominent Kremlin-aligned nationalist publicist:

One of the unexpected and paradoxical results of the Kyiv Maidan was an acute crisis in the ranks of Russian nationalists in Russia. A movement, which was recently united by the Russian marches, by support for the Biriulevo protests, by vehement criticism of the Russian Federation's immigration policy, became polarized by an argument for or against revolution in Ukraine, for or against the "Right Sector" Group which emerged as a leader of the Euromaidan insurrection. (2014a)

A similar observation was made by Vsevolod Radchenko, a stridently anti-Kremlin activist of the unregistered *Natsional-Demokraticeskaja Partija* (National Democratic Party, NDP):

I could not imagine that events in Ukraine would cause such a serious schism in the ranks of the [ethnic] Russian movement in Russia ... From unconditional support for any Russophobic initiative of the new Ukrainian regime to demands to drown the Ukrainian revolution in blood. It is very painful to observe all of this. (2014)

As this schism unfolded, several nationalist organizations were riven by internal conflict. Others reached a common position only after protracted wrangling. Long-standing friendships broke down and new alliances were ruptured.¹ On at least one occasion, a regional nationalist leader was seriously injured by assailants who accused him of having pro-Ukrainian sympathies.²

This article seeks to explain why the apparently favorable turn of events in Ukraine provoked such commotion in nationalist ranks. It focuses on four tendencies of nationalist activism: (1) Kremlin-aligned nationalists; (2) national democrats opposed to the Putin regime; (3) leftist nationalists of Eduard Limonov's *Drugaja Rossiia*; and (4) ultrarightist nationalists, who included neo-Nazis and skinheads.³ It argues that conflict within and between these tendencies was shaped by three factors. First, the uprising in Kyiv rekindled a smoldering conflict between adversaries and allies of the Putin regime. For some nonsystemic, anti-Putin nationalists, the Euromaidan became a model of civic resistance against authoritarianism. For systemic, Kremlin-aligned nationalists, by contrast, it had no redeeming features. At best, it was intrinsically Russophobic; at worst, it was a neo-Nazi putsch instigated by the West as the first stage of a plan for a genocidal assault on Russia. In essence, the debate about the Euromaidan became a debate about the future of the Putin regime and the legitimacy of a revolutionary uprising. For participants in this debate, their opponents were either pawns of an antinational regime or traitors to the national cause. This circumstance was not conducive to mutual respect or a measured exchange of views.

Second, discussion of how Russia should respond to the Ukrainian upheaval triggered skirmishes along several of the movement's most sensitive ideological fault lines. National irredentists, who stood for ethnic homogeneity, polemicized against imperialists, who fantasized about a vast multiethnic Eurasian superpower (Kholmogorov 2013b). Left nationalists like Sergei Kurginian, who yearned for the restoration of a Soviet homeland, exchanged broadsides with anti-Communist nationalists, who despised the Soviet experiment as a national catastrophe inflicted by alien elements.

Third, the rapid succession of an antiauthoritarian uprising in Kyiv, the invasion of Crimea, and the "Russian Spring" in southeast Ukraine sowed confusion about whom to support and about the nature of the struggle. Sympathies and perceptions were in constant flux. One nationalist activist likened the predicament of observers of the Ukrainian upheaval to sporting fans at a contest where they were unsure about the identity of the teams, the rules of the game, and the criteria for victory (Krylov 2014a). Many nationalists were

unprepared for the overnight transformation of the patriotic heroes of an antiauthoritarian revolution into “Russophobic” villains who were denying Russian minorities their right to self-determination. Others were caught unaware by the pace of the Kremlin’s patriotic turn. For them it was axiomatic that Putin would never become a liberator of Russians in the former Soviet space. As a result, they found themselves left behind by a regime that had taken the wind of out of their sails.

1. Pro-Kremlin nationalists: the Euromaidan as a neofascist putsch

Pro-Kremlin nationalists comprised a heterogeneous group of public figures. They ranged from ethno-imperialists to national irredentists, from anti-Communist monarchists to leftists nostalgic for the Soviet Union. What these figures shared was a set of shibboleths about the “color revolutions” in the former Soviet space as a Western conspiracy and a mortal threat to Russia’s survival. Many of them had rehearsed this line as mouthpieces of the Kremlin’s “preventive counter-revolution” during 2005–2007 (Horvath 2012). Many of them took up the same themes during the political crisis of 2011–2012, when they produced a torrent of propaganda against the “Bolotnaia” movement as an instrument of Western powers and a threat to national survival. No sooner had this campaign receded than its central ideas were recycled in polemics against the Euromaidan.

The tone of these polemics was exemplified by Aleksandr Prokhanov, the novelist who edited the weekly broadsheet *Zavtra*, one of the crucibles of post-Soviet Russian nationalism. During Putin’s first two presidencies, Prokhanov had metamorphosed from a marginal fanatic into a respectable media commentator and the éminence grise of Russia’s ethno-imperialists. One mark of his stature was his central role in the creation of the Izborskii Club, a prestigious think tank that had enlisted the elite of pro-Kremlin nationalists for the task of developing an antiliberal agenda for Putin’s third term (Samarina 2012). In his capacity as an opinion-maker, Prokhanov went to Kyiv in January 2014 on a fact-finding mission that included a brief outing on the Maidan and consultations with government advisors and security officials (Prokhanov 2014a). The result was a series of statements that combined apocalypticism and bizarre conspiracy theories, both hallmarks of Prokhanov’s fiction. In *Zavtra*, he likened the Euromaidan to a burning, volcanic eruption at whose center was “a cold nucleus,” the headquarters of the revolution where (Ukrainian nationalist leader) Oleh Tyahnybok plotted his next move with his “American advisors, specialists on the conduct of special operations” (Prokhanov 2014a). In an article republished in the mass-circulation *Komsomol’skaia Pravda*, Prokhanov warned that the triumph of the revolution threatened “the immediate destruction of everything pro-Russian, everything Russian, everything that is linked to the civilization of the Russian world” (Prokhanov 2014b).

In late January 2014, Prokhanov was presented to a national television audience as a detached observer of the events in Ukraine. For over 20 minutes on *Voskresnyi Večer*, a prime-time current affairs program hosted by Vladimir Solov’ev on the *Rossiia* channel, Prokhanov spoke breathlessly about the terrifying spectacle he had encountered on the Maidan, a place of smoke, darkness, and cacophony, where fascist banners fluttered above tents reminiscent of those that had sheltered Genghis Khan’s invading hordes. Prokhanov juxtaposed this mayhem to the orderly, Russian-speaking civilization of southeast Ukraine, where massive, Soviet-era industrial combines were manufacturing the components of Russia’s rockets, missiles, and nuclear power stations. The imminent clash of these two irreconcilable worlds threatened Russia with a new Nazi-style genocidal onslaught,

a *Drang nach Osten* which is being realized by other means, without the Army Group Center, without [General Hasso von] Manteuffel, it is being realized by the Maidan – we are present at the third, perhaps the fourth world war which is seizing one province of Slavdom after another.⁴

Despite Prokhanov's penchant for obscure military references, each inflammatory declaration was greeted with rapturous applause by the studio audience, which evidently shared *Zavtra's* assessment of its editor's performance as distinguished by "rare sincerity and authentic pain for all that is happening on Ukrainian lands" (Lavrova 2014).

Prokhanov's apocalyptic rhetoric and virulent anti-Americanism were echoed by Aleksandr Dugin, another firebrand who had joined the ranks of respectable pro-Kremlin pundits under Putin. An adherent of the proto-fascist ideas of Germany's pre-Nazi "conservative revolutionaries," Dugin had adopted "Eurasianism" as a patriotic cloak for his entry into the mainstream of public life under the Putin regime, which he served both as the ideological guru of a militant pro-Kremlin youth organization and as an academic authority on "right-conservative" ideas.⁵ Dugin was slow to react to the crisis in Kyiv, but he produced an avalanche of commentary during its revolutionary climax. In mid-February, he argued in the newspaper *Argumenty i fakty* that the Euromaidan was really "an American Maidan that was directed against Russia's geostrategic interests." In Ukraine, the USA was "consciously constructing a neo-Nazi order" that would unleash civil war and "the genocide of the Russian population." He calmly rationalized the impending carnage: "In the bloody mess, hundreds of thousands of people will perish, but that is the logic of history" (Dugin 2014a). On 21 February 2014, he elucidated this logic in a long interview with the mass-circulation broadsheet *Komsomol'skaia Pravda*. The struggle in Kyiv, he explained, was part of the "Great War of the Continents," a geopolitical construct that revolved around the struggle between the oceanic power of the USA and the land power of Eurasia. Threatened by Putin's attempt to consolidate Eurasia in a new union, the USA had launched a cynical bid to maintain its global domination by provoking carnage in Ukraine. This desperate ploy of a "hegemonic terrorist" was doomed to failure because the West was fracturing and "America will soon collapse" (Grishin 2014).

Another pro-Kremlin nationalist who played a conspicuous role in the Ukrainian controversy was Egor Kholmogorov, a blogger and journalist with ties both to the regime and to national democratic circles. Although he frequently criticized government policy on immigration, his antirevolutionary pathos earned him privileged access to the Kremlin-aligned media. He was also one of a select group of pro-Kremlin political technologists who were invited to advise Putin on the postelection crisis at a closed meeting in February 2012 (Kholmogorov 2012). In his public statements during the Euromaidan, Kholmogorov called incessantly for the partition of Ukraine on ethnic lines. While ethno-imperialists like Prokhanov and Dugin were fixated upon geopolitical conflict and the hidden hand of the State Department, Kholmogorov concentrated his fire on the Ukrainian state, Ukrainian history, and Ukrainian nationalism. For him, it was axiomatic that Russians and Ukrainians were fundamentally different nations, which had been forced to share the artificial borders of the post-1991 Ukrainian state (Kholmogorov 2013a). The entire history of Ukraine, from its "first Eurointegration" under the hapless Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, was a litany of disasters (Kholmogorov 2013a). Post-Soviet Ukraine was "a phantom, an absurd plan to fabricate a completely new culture, a new people upon the old" (Kholmogorov 2014b). The Euromaidan was not a struggle for freedom, but a battle between two Russophobic forces, which he likened to J.R.R. Tolkien's "orcs and goblins" (Kholmogorov 2014c). The regime that emerged from this monstrous showdown was "a totalitarian-anarchic little empire" (Kholmogorov 2014d).

The invective of individual pro-Kremlin publicists was reinforced by a series of major collective statements. One of the most important was a memorandum from a “group of experts” of the Izborskii Club, which was published in Prokhanov’s *Zavtra* in mid-February 2014. Titled “Save Ukraine!” it claimed that “Washington stands directly behind all actions of the [Ukrainian] opposition and the very phenomenon of the ‘Maidan.’” By fomenting insurrection, the USA aimed to establish an anti-Russian state on Russia’s borders and to sabotage Putin’s project for the reintegration of the post-Soviet space in the Eurasian Union. The repercussions would be catastrophic for Russia’s strategic interests. Not only would the Black Sea fleet be driven out of Crimea, but also terrorist bases would appear in southeast Ukraine and “Euromaidan technology” would be used to destabilize Russia itself. To counter this imminent threat, the memorandum proposed a broad antifascist campaign. The government should make “an official, ideological designation of the creeping putsch as fascist and Nazi,” use federal television to expose “the fascist nature of the coup,” and issue a declaration to the world community about “the unacceptability of the creation of a fascist and anti-Semitic state near our borders” (Izborskii Klub 2014).

A parallel initiative emerged from another institutional bastion of pro-Kremlin nationalism, the *Rodina* party, which was informally headed by vice-premier Dmitrii Rogozin.⁶ On 19 February 2014, at the climax of the conflict in Kyiv, *Rodina* created *Rusintern* (*Russkii Internatsional*, “Russian International”), a transnational network dedicated to the protection of ethnic Russians in the former Soviet space. As an organization, *Rusintern* resembled the *Kongress Russkikh Obshchin* (Congress of Russian Communities), Rogozin’s original political project. But *Rusintern*’s name, which harked back to the Soviet-era *Komintern* (“Communist International”), suggested a more disruptive, subversive role. Like the *Komintern*, it promised to advance the interests of the Kremlin, but under the banners of nationalism rather than internationalism. This purpose was made clear in *Rusintern*’s founding manifesto, which was a *mélange* of patriotic platitudes, loyalist affirmations, and revolutionary clichés. Implicitly rebuking those nationalists who had discouraged their compatriots in Ukraine with unpleasant facts about Putin’s authoritarian kleptocracy, it celebrated the Russian Federation as a “modern, powerful, democratic and dynamically developing state,” which was a lodestar “for hundreds of millions of people sharing the ideals of social justice, sincere brotherhood, enlightened patriotism, respect for ancestral tradition and authentic progress.” At the same time, it lashed out at “the liberal-fascist mutiny” in Ukraine and promised a “merciless struggle against any manifestation of neo-fascism, extremism or Russophobia” (Rodina 2014).

2. National democrats

The Euromaidan was perceived very differently by Russian nationalists in the extra-systemic opposition. For many of them, it represented a nationalist revolution that was toppling a local version of Putin’s dictatorship. Some felt compelled to visit Kyiv and witness the uprising at first hand. Before the ouster of Yanukovich, the Ukrainian security services provided their Russian counterparts with a list of 30 Russian citizens whose presence had been detected on the square.⁷ Almost every tendency of Russian nationalism made an appearance. The visitors included ‘national-bolsheviks’ from Eduard Limonov’s *Drugaia Rossiia* (“Other Russia,” DR) moderate nationalists from the *Natsional-Demokraticheskaia Partiiia* (NDP), anti-immigration militants from the movement *Russkie* (“Russians”), and a motley assortment of neofascist activists and skinheads. When these Russian nationalists arrived on the Maidan, they could see that their Ukrainian counterparts – members of *Svoboda* and *Pravyi Sektor* – were playing an indispensable role as members of a revolutionary

coalition and as defenders of revolutionary territory. Some of the visitors were intoxicated by the freedom and the camaraderie that they witnessed in Kyiv. Others were fixated on the question of whether the Ukrainian scenario might be replicated in Russia. What lessons could be taken home for Russia's own "national-liberation struggle?" But admiration was tempered by unease about the anti-Russian agenda of some of the revolutionary leaders. The insurgents were potential enemies, and the visitors had to protect their reputations against the accusation of betraying their own compatriots, both in Russia and in Ukraine.

Some of the most vociferous Russian supporters of the Euromaidan were to be found among pro-democracy nationalists, a diverse group of activists who ranged from "national liberals" like Aleksei Navalny to more conservative "national democrats" like Konstantin Krylov.⁸ What these activists agreed upon was the necessity of Russia's democratization and the dismantling of authoritarianism. Many were prepared to believe that the protesters on Kyiv's Maidan were fighting for a similar cause. This perception was bound up with the hope and disillusionment experienced by pro-democracy nationalists in the "Bolotnaia" movement, the mass protests against election fraud in 2011–2012. In the Euromaidan, they found an antiauthoritarian uprising that was succeeding where they had failed. Their readiness to identify with the Kyiv demonstrators was enhanced by the anti-Putin slogans emblazoned on banners at the Maidan. For some activists, it was axiomatic that the victory in Kyiv was a defeat for Putin that would bring Russia closer to the day of its own antiauthoritarian revolution.

The standard-bearer of the "national liberals" was Aleksei Navalny, the anticorruption crusader who had become the leader of the Bolotnaia protest movement.⁹ On 23 February, two days after the overthrow of Yanukovich, Navalny inveighed against two schools of "anti-Maidanist" criticism. The first were those he designated "botanical anti-Maidanists," fanatical anti-Ukrainians who rejected the very notion of an independent Ukrainian state. As an exemplar of this tendency, he pointed to the science fiction writer Sergei Lukianenko, who had declared the previous day that "Ukraine henceforth is an accursed land, which will need three generations to atone for its depravity and cowardice" (Luk'ianenko 2014). Acknowledging that as a teenager he had also been unable to treat independent Ukraine seriously, Navalny advised his readers to take a look at a map and accept the fact that Ukraine was a major European state with a population of 48 million. The second group comprised "mainstream anti-Maidanists," who resented Russia's loss of a sphere of influence and the toppling of a pro-Russian regime. Navalny argued that there was no cause for disappointment: Yanukovich and the Party of Regions were not pro-Russian, but a corrupt elite, the analogues of the "crooks and thieves" in Russia's ruling party, *Edinaia Rossiia* ("United Russia"). Russia's real interests, he concluded, lay in a Ukraine that pursued a "European vector of development," as a democracy and a reliable trading partner, in parallel with Russia itself (Navalny 2014).

The NDP, the main political platform of Russian national democrats, was more ambivalent in its attitude toward the Euromaidan. In early December 2013, it dispatched two party leaders, Vladimir Tor and Vsevolod Radchenko, on a fact-finding mission to Kyiv. Although the delegation was restrained in its public statements, Tor's criticism of "Russo-phobes" on the Maidan provoked an acrimonious debate within the party. Andrei Skliarov, the head of NDP's Rostov branch, lambasted Tor for causing an unprecedented flood of negative publicity. Skliarov argued that Russian nationalists should either embrace the Ukrainian uprising as a model or abstain from criticizing it. He left no doubt about his own sympathies: "I completely support the Ukrainian people," who were "bolder, more active, more decisive than us." Ultimately, Russia would follow in their footsteps: "the victory of the Ukrainians means Putin's defeat [and] Putin's defeat means the hastening

of the victory of [ethnic] Russians” (Skliarov 2013a). Skliarov’s polemic triggered some controversy in the nationalist blogosphere (Kholmogorov 2013c). It also forced the NDP leader, Konstantin Krylov, to clarify the party’s position. Some comrades, he complained, were behaving as if NDP were a party of Ukrainian, not Russian, nationalists. In a tribute to the intensity of pro-Euromaidan attitudes, he found it necessary to make the abstract point that Ukrainian interests could fundamentally diverge from those of Russia. On a pragmatic level, he warned that those who openly sided with the Euromaidan risked both vilification as “national traitors” and repression by a regime that had already demonstrated its capacity for preemptive crackdowns in the wake of the original “Orange Revolution” (Krylov 2013). Krylov’s theses were enforced by the party machinery, which moved quickly to expel Skliarov and dissolve the Rostov branch (Skliarov 2013b).

Despite this purge, NDP remained cautiously sympathetic toward the Euromaidan. When insurgents demolished Kyiv’s most famous Lenin statue, the delegation was at the scene to grab souvenirs from the rubble. “It was cool [*kruto*],” exclaimed Tor on his blog. “One needs to do the same in Russia” (Tor 2013a). One day later, he posted a “Panegyric to the Maidan,” which purported to provide a dispassionate evaluation of the effectiveness of Euromaidan, as if it were a weapon like a Kalashnikov. In fact, Tor barely concealed his envy for the achievement of those who had wielded that weapon. He enumerated 10 “strengths” of their position. The first was the Maidan’s status as “an instrument and a product of a national mobilization,” which contrasted with the animosity toward nationalism that sowed dissension in Russian opposition ranks. Tor also praised the Maidan for its respect for tradition, its engagement of the regions, its integration of legal political parties and civil society, and its marginalization of gay rights activists. Each of these points, in Tor’s analysis, served to illuminate the weakness of the Russian opposition and the failure of the Bolotnaia movement (2013b). Twelve days later, NDP publicly condemned the \$15 billion package of loans and cheap gas that Putin had offered to Yanukovich. In terms that would not have been unwelcome on the Maidan, it argued that the deal would convince many Ukrainians of Russia’s “aggressive, imperialist intentions” and “pour water on the mill of Russophobia” (NDP 2013).

Even as the invasion of Crimea was underway, NDP distanced itself from the war hysteria raging on Kremlin-aligned television stations. On 3 March 2014, Krylov issued a statement that struck a careful balance between pro-Euromaidan sentiment and the party’s commitment to defending the interests of ethnic Russians. In striking contrast to official propaganda about the neo-Nazi putsch in Kyiv, Krylov disavowed hostility toward “Ukrainians, the Maidan, [and] striving for freedom.” He scorned warmongers as “those who are intoxicated by the militarist-nationalist hysteria and are imagining the bombardment of Kyiv.” The NDP was not among “those who salivate at the sight of a Russian tank.” On the contrary, it regarded military intervention as evidence of political failure. In Krylov’s eyes, the Kremlin’s policy toward Ukraine was a double failure. On the one hand, it had obstructed normal Russian nationalism by squandering funding on “freaks, marginals and grant-eaters (*grantedy*),” who promoted Soviet nostalgia and Putinism. On the other, it had ignored the Yanukovich regime’s crackdown on Russian nationalism. As a result, military intervention might be necessary to protect an enfeebled Russian community from the zeal of a revolutionary regime. But Krylov warned that the annexation of Crimea was contrary to the interests of its Russian majority:

Even if an Anschluss were possible, we consider such a development of events to be extremely undesirable and would be its opponents. Ethnic Russians (*russkie*), having escaped the danger of Ukrainianization, would fall prisoner to the Russian [*rossiianskii*, a neologism connoting

multiethnicity] regime, would become acquainted with its terrorist practices and would strongly repent for what had been done.

Annexation would entail arrests of Russian nationalists under anti-extremism legislation, the seizure of power and property by ethnic mafias, and the terrorization of ethnic Russians by Crimean Tatars (Krylov 2014a).

Closely aligned to NDP was *Russkoe Obshchestvennoe Dvizhenie* (“Russian Social Movement,” ROD), an NGO dedicated to the defense of nationalist victims of political persecution. During the Euromaidan, its executive director, Natal’ia Kholmogorova, was preoccupied with the trial of the nationalist lawyer Daniil Konstantinov, and she confined herself to a few, ambivalent comments about the events in Ukraine. Her basic position was support for the self-organization of Russian communities and distrust for the Putin regime. On 24 February 2014, after the ouster of Yanukovich, she exhorted the Russians of Ukraine not to rush to join Russia, because “it is even worse for us here.” They should “fight for freedom, not for a change of landlord” (Kholmogorova 2014a). That day, ROD reached agreement on a joint declaration on Ukraine after “torturous and terrible internal battles” (Kholmogorova 2014b). It opened with two points that were unanimously endorsed by its members: ROD would provide “information support” to ethnic Russians in Ukraine and legal assistance for those wishing to emigrate to Russia. The second part consisted of a series of theses that some ROD members considered too weak, and others too harsh. This median view acknowledged that an authentic national uprising had taken place in Kyiv:

We saw how under national slogans people went into open struggle, even to death, for their rights and freedoms, against a rotten and corrupt regime. We saw the steadfastness and courage that they demonstrated in the name of their nation.

This praise was tempered by the caveat that Ukrainian nationalism was “far from complimentary toward Russia and the Russian people.” One might hope for the “reasonableness and good will of the new Ukrainian authorities,” but it was necessary to prepare for the worst. Addressing ethnic Russians in southeast Ukraine, the statement exhorted them to resist the blandishments of the Kremlin. Instead they should create structures of self-organization, become political subjects, and defend their own interests (Kholmogorova 2014c).

No less explicit in his support of the Euromaidan was Igor’ Artemov, one of the nationalist activists elected to the Opposition Coordinating Council. In late January 2014, Artemov praised the Euromaidan as a potential counterrevolution, which could return Ukraine to its “normal development.” Like Navalny, he drew parallels between authoritarianism in Ukraine and Russia. The Yanukovich regime, he argued, was “a miniature, milder version of the Russian Federation.” With undisguised enthusiasm, he observed that Yanukovich’s fall would be “a blow to the Putin regime” (Artemov 2014a). In fact, the triumph of the Euromaidan was also a blow to Artemov’s hopes. On 26 February 2014, he appealed to the new leaders in Kyiv to curb anti-Russian excesses, such as the repeal of language-rights legislation and anti-Russian chants on the Maidan. These were, he warned, “a terrible stupidity that will immediately alienate tens of thousands of Russians in Ukraine.” In a tone of exasperation, he noted that “many Russian nationalists had supported the right of Ukrainians to freedom,” but that anti-Russian gestures and policies “had put Russian nationalists in a hopeless position,” forcing them to side with their compatriots against the new Ukraine (Artemov 2014b).

More skillful in navigating the hazards of the Euromaidan was Egor Prosvirnin, the editor of the fashionable nationalist website, *Sputnik i pogrom*. A relentless critic of Putin’s authoritarianism, Prosvirnin traveled to Kyiv in early February 2014 to observe the uprising at first hand. What he saw confirmed two theses that underpinned his writings

on Ukraine. The first was that the Euromaidan was a useful “technology,” an instrument of a nationalist revolution that Russians would do well to emulate (Prosvirnin 2014a). To emphasize the point, *Sputnik i Pogrom* published a series of “instructive posters,” which accompanied photographs of insurgents at flaming barricades in Kyiv with the caption: “Russians! Here might have been your revolution!”¹⁰

Prosvirnin’s second thesis was that the Euromaidan was a manifestation of Ukrainian nationalism, which should be regarded by Russian nationalists as a hostile and pernicious force. It was, he contended, intrinsically anti-Russian, because it defined Russia as its “other.” Moreover, it had nothing to offer Russians, inheritors of a great civilization, because it was the provincial nationalism of a Central European backwater. Here lay the seeds of Prosvirnin’s emergence as a vociferous propagandist of the “Russian Spring.” On 22 February 2014, he posted an “Appeal to All Russians of Ukraine,” which exhorted them to protect their identity by resisting Ukrainianization and embracing a Russian nationalism that relied not on “bloodletting and murders” but on political parties and civil society (Prosvirnin 2014b). Two days later, amid the first stirrings of separatist agitation in Sevastopol, *Sputnik i Pogrom* pleaded for military intervention in Crimea. It warned Putin that if he failed to act, “then you will be loathed by every succeeding generation” like Mazepa, the seventeenth-century Cossack leader who was anathematized by the Russian Orthodox Church for his alliance with Sweden against Peter the Great.¹¹

Other national democrats remained ambivalent about the march to war. Both ROD and NDP sent delegations to witness the growing ferment among Russian communities in southeast Ukraine. In Odesa, Natal’ia Kholmogorova felt alienated by the euphoria of local nationalists who were toasting Russia’s victory in Crimea. “It’s a shame,” she reflected, “that once again I am going against the general opinion and I do not share the universal enthusiasm.” She proposed her own toast, “to the victory of Russians, and not of other forces that are merely exploiting us for their interests” (Kholmogorova 2014b). No less dissonant was NDP’s Konstantin Krylov, who used a rare television appearance to express his “anxiety” about the freedoms that the Russians of Crimea would forfeit as a result of annexation. His host retorted that he sounded like “an enemy of Russia.”¹²

3. National Bolsheviks

The Euromaidan posed a major challenge for the leftist nationalists of Eduard Limonov’s *Drugaia Rossiia* party (“Other Russia,” DR), the successor to the banned *Natsional-Bolshevistskaia Partiiia* (National Bolshevik Party, NBP). The uprising split the party along its ideological fault line, which divided ethno-imperialists and advocates of democracy. The ethno-imperialists were led by Limonov and the party’s Executive Committee, who launched a campaign for the recovery of Russian-speaking regions of southeast Ukraine. The democrats, who dominated several regional branches in Siberia, were inspired by the Euromaidan as a social revolution against oligarchic authoritarianism and agitated to defend that revolution from the imperialism of the Kremlin and their former comrades.

Limonov’s irredentism harked back to an old strain of NBP activism, which had focused on fomenting insurrection among Russian communities in the former Soviet space. In his public statements during the Euromaidan, Limonov repeatedly invoked one of the most hallowed exploits in the party mythology: the act of 15 NBP activists, who spoiled the eighth anniversary of Ukraine’s independence by seizing the tower of the Sailor’s Club in Sevastopol, an iconic Crimean landmark, where they unfurled a banner emblazoned with the slogan, “Sevastopol is a Russian city.”¹³ This stunt, which earned prison terms for the activists and persona-non-grata status for Limonov, was part of a

larger strategy known in NBP documents as “Second Russia.”¹⁴ To compensate for the disappearance of revolutionary opportunities in Putin’s Russia, the party would redirect its agitation to the former Soviet space. In one version, NBP insurgents would create revolutionary enclaves, Russian republics that could serve as springboards for an eventual revolution in Moscow. In another, the NBP would act as proxies of the Kremlin.¹⁵ This strategy was shelved in April 2001, when Limonov and a group of supporters were arrested on charges of plotting to invade Kazakhstan, but revolutionary irredentism was never formally renounced by the NBP.

During Putin’s second term, the NBP’s nationalist militancy was overshadowed by a more democratic tendency, which found inspiration in Ukraine’s “Orange Revolution.” Despite some dissension, the party endorsed the uprising as “a revolution of the living against the dead” in a statement that paid tribute to “the fraternal Ukrainian people” and “the unexpected, but explosive union of Ukrainian democrats and liberals with nationalists” (Popkov 2014). Hopes that Putin might be toppled by a similar “explosive union” clearly influenced the NBP’s collaboration with liberal opposition activists in the *Drugaia Rossiia* coalition.¹⁶ Even after this coalition’s demise in 2008, the idea of collaboration with liberals persisted in the Strategy-31 movement, which Limonov launched one year later as a campaign for the civil rights enshrined in the constitution but flouted in practice.

Soon after the outbreak of the Euromaidan, the central leadership of *Drugaia Rossiia* reverted to its irredentist project. Limonov announced that the Euromaidan was not an authentic revolution, but merely the first stage in the disintegration of Ukraine. Almost overnight, his vehemence transformed him into one of Russia’s most visible public commentators. This was an astounding reversal of fortune for a professional revolutionary who until recently had assumed demonic stature for the Kremlin and its propagandists.¹⁷ As the Euromaidan evolved into a major international crisis, he became a regular contributor to the op-ed columns of the pro-Kremlin newspaper *Izvestiia*. Much of his commentary, with its denunciations of the insurgent leaders, their Russian sympathizers, and Western supporters, echoed the standard line of pro-Kremlin publicists. But Limonov was one of the first to argue insistently that the turmoil in Kyiv was an opportunity for the annexation of Crimea and southeast Ukraine. As early as 30 November 2014, he prophesied on his blog that Ukraine would “fall apart like an oversized baguette” and “we will seize its eastern part” (Limonov 2013b). Four days later, he announced in *Izvestiia* that “I am taking off my mask and introduce myself as I am, as an imperialist.” The main thing now, he advised the Kremlin, was to be ready to pounce when the rebels ruptured the unity of the Ukrainian state. When the crisis erupts, “[w]e must calmly annex left-bank Ukraine and Crimea and Odesa and Nikolaev” (Limonov 2013c). Limonov’s irredentism was formally endorsed by *Drugaia Rossiia*’s Executive Committee in a programmatic statement titled “We are for Russians and against ‘Germans.’” Issued on 21 February 2014, this call to arms reduced the Ukrainian crisis to the struggle of ethnic compatriots against a “German” Other, which comprised a rogues’ gallery of past and present enemies: Banderites, General Andrei Vlasov, SS troops, and the US State Department. “In this situation,” concluded the statement, “we unambiguously take the side of our own – Russians, and not others – ‘Germans’” (*Drugaia Rossiia* 2014b).

Limonov’s alignment with the Kremlin’s position on the Euromaidan provoked revulsion among some of his party’s veteran activists. One of the most outspoken was the young philosopher Aleksei Lapshin, a native of Odesa who had lived in Moscow for 15 years. After visiting Kyiv in mid-February, Lapshin argued on his blog that the upheaval was neither about European integration nor about Banderites. At its heart was the socially diverse mass of an “insurrectionary people,” who were struggling not only against “a

nomenklatura-oligarchic regime” but also against a “disgusting way of life” (Lapshin 2014a, 2014c). When Lapshin’s analysis was commended by another DR activist, both were rebuked by Aleksandr Averin, the party’s press secretary, who dismissed their anti-imperialism as nothing but “poorly masked Russophobia” (Lapshin 2014a). Two days later, Averin added insult to injury by publicly identifying himself with Yanukovych’s counterrevolution, boasting that “I am a *titushka*,” the term used to designate the hired thugs who had terrorized the protesters on the Maidan with beatings and kidnappings (Averin 2014).

The dissension was compounded by unrest in Siberia. On 24 February 2014, DR’s Novosibirsk branch denounced the removal of the leader of the Irkutsk branch for his pro-Euromaidan stance. Announcing that the party was suffering “a serious ideological crisis,” the dissenters accused the leadership of distorting the Ukrainian revolution by reducing it to a struggle between “Russians” and “Germans.” The real conflict in Ukraine, they argued, was between a diverse opposition, which was not monolithically anti-Russian, and an oligarchical regime that represented the very antithesis of everything that *Drugaia Rossiia* stood for.¹⁸ Instead of answering these criticisms, Limonov expelled the Novosibirsk branch. Unperturbed, the rebels refused to bow to his authority. On 3 March 2014, they joined the Murmansk and Khanty-Mansiisk branches in a statement that castigated Limonov for betraying the ideals of national-Bolshevism and the coming Russian Revolution. His support for a violent crackdown against the Kyiv protesters was “the height of disgrace for the leadership of a movement that had once called itself revolutionary.”¹⁹

The rupture within DR was exacerbated by the Kremlin’s intervention in Crimea. On 25 February 2014, the party began to recruit volunteers to join the separatist agitation. In a typically jocular fashion, it announced the creation of a “Society for Lovers of Crimean Tourism” (*Drugaia Rossiia* 2014a). The most famous DR “tourist” in Crimea was Aijo Beness, an Afro-Russian and professional revolutionary who had once headed the NBP’s branch in Latvia. The son of Ugandan migrants, Beness was now based in London, where he served as chairman of an ultraleftist groupuscule. Despite his socialist sympathies, Beness had incorporated some Russian nationalist themes into his worldview. He had converted to the Old Believer rite of Russian Orthodoxy and he fulminated against the “Russophobia” that he detected in Western socialists (Beness 2014a). “What happiness to serve the Motherland!” he exclaimed in a Facebook post from Simferopol, where he arrived on 13 March 2014 and became a local celebrity by enlisting in a local “self-defense” unit (Beness 2014b). For five days he stood guard near military bases and patrolled the streets. In an interview, he lambasted the Euromaidan as a rabble of hirelings and drug addicts who had unleashed chaos and acted brutally toward “the peaceful and gentle representatives of the law-enforcement structures, the police and Berkut” (Beness 2014c). No sooner had the annexation been formalized than Beness rushed to Donetsk, where he gave speeches to the pro-Russia crowd in Lenin Square (Beness 2014d). On 1 April 2014, he was arrested by Ukrainian police and deported to Britain.²⁰

The rebel faction in *Drugaia Rossiia* actively opposed the party’s meddling in Ukraine. On 3 March 2014, members of the Novosibirsk branch held a rally against Russia’s invasion of Crimea. Aleksei Baranov, the branch’s leader, declared that “we have come here for one reason: we are against war with a brotherly people.” Contrary to the party’s doctrine of struggle against a “German” enemy, he attributed Russia’s intervention to Putin’s antirevolutionary rage: “A pro-Kremlin regime was overthrown, and now he will avenge himself against this revolution” (Shagimulina 2014). Two months later, Baranov and his comrades announced the creation of *Natsional-Bolshevistskaia Platforma* (National Bolshevik Platform, *NB Platforma*), which was intended to be a vehicle for the reclamation of the

movement's revolutionary vocation. This project proceeded in tandem with preparations for a major "happening," a proposed "March for the Federalization of Siberia," which both satirized Kremlin rhetoric about the Russian insurgents in Ukraine and reaffirmed the Strategy-31 tradition of demonstrating in defense of constitutional principles.²¹ As news of the impending march proliferated on social media websites, the authorities staged a crackdown that magnified the publicity. Roskomnadzor blocked access to websites, including the BBC, which had provided information about the march.²² The founding congress of *NB Platforma*, which took place on 16 August 2014, the eve of the proposed march, was disrupted by the arrival of police who arrested Baranov and another organizer.²³ As a street action, the actual march was a dismal failure. As a form of Internet agitation, it was a major success.²⁴

4. Ultrarightists

The attitudes of Russian ultrarightist militants toward the Euromaidan were shaped both by their warrior ethos and their ideology. As fighters who underwent combat training, they admired the fearlessness and martial prowess of the insurgents confronting state terror on the streets of Kyiv. As biological racists and white supremacists, they were less susceptible than conventional nationalists to the claims of ethnicity or geopolitics. Ideological affinities were reinforced by personal ties. Some Russian ultrarightists had established contact with their Ukrainian counterparts through international ultrarightist networks. Others knew Ukraine as a sanctuary from the Russian security forces. Even as the Yanukovich regime tottered, ultrarightist fugitives were taking advantage of the country's porous borders. One of the most notorious Russian visitors to the Euromaidan was the skinhead leader Maksim Martsinkevich ("Tesak"), who was on the run from the FSB. He mingled in the crowds at the barricades in Kyiv before boarding a flight to Cuba (Evstifeev 2014).

The most important ultrarightist organization to come out in support of the Euromaidan was *Russkie*, an "ethnopolitical association" that united skinheads and anti-immigration agitators. In early February, it demonstrated its interest in the uprising by dispatching to Kyiv a three-man delegation of St. Petersburg nationalists and an affiliated media team. The delegation included Dmitrii Bobrov ("Shul'ts"), one of the luminaries of Russia's neo-Nazi movement, who had served six years in prison for his leadership of the skinhead gang *Shul'ts-88* (Garina 2005). His itinerary in Kyiv included meetings with fighters at the barricades and a consultation with Ruslan Zelik, a deputy from *Svoboda*.²⁵ Bobrov was clearly impressed by what he saw. He told *Izvestiia* that he had carefully observed the organization of protest actions and "decided to imitate the experience of his more 'successful' colleagues" in Kyiv. After his return to St. Petersburg, he presented a "seminar" on the subject to his comrades in the neo-Nazi formation, *Natsional-Sotsialisticheskaia Initsiativa* ("National Socialist Initiative").²⁶ The discussion took place behind closed doors, but Bobrov paid a public tribute to the Ukrainian insurgents on 31 March 2014, the occasion of the Orthodox Christian mourning ceremonies for demonstrators massacred by snipers. In a statement on his blog, he hailed "the greatness of the feat of the defenders of the Maidan ... who perished, but did not yield to the armed units of professional thugs from *Berkut* and other special forces that were defending the oligarchical system." According to Bobrov, the deeds of these martyrs "will always remain a model of civic courage and the self-sacrifice of people" for those struggling for "freedom and justice" against corrupt dictatorships (Bobrov 2014).

More ambivalent was another member of the delegation, Stanislav Vorob'ev, who headed *Russkoe Imperskoe Dvizhenie* (Russian Imperial Movement, RID), a monarchist groupuscule that offered paramilitary training to recruits.²⁷ Vorob'ev was exhilarated by

the “sheer air of freedom,” the “celebration of disobedience,” and the liberation from fear, which he found on the Maidan. Any Russian nationalist, he declared, “who has seen what the rebels have achieved, can only envy them.” But Vorob’ev cautioned that all the major political groups in the uprising were “anti-Russian [*antiruskii*]” and therefore a threat to Ukraine’s Russian minority. This circumstance put Russian nationalists in an awkward position. For Vorob’ev, the way out of this quandary was to reframe the discussion in terms of strategy. In his analysis, the major threat to the survival of the Russian nation was “the stability of anti-Russian regimes on all the territory inhabited by the Russian ethnos.” By undermining that stability, the upheaval on the Maidan created an opportunity for Russian nationalists to seize the political initiative and begin the resurrection of a national “great power” (Vorob’ev 2014).

One *Russkie* leader who was unable to travel to Kyiv was Dmitrii Demushkin, who was on trial for his defiance of a court ruling that had banned his neo-Nazi skinhead organization, *Slavianskii Soiuz* (Alekseeva 2014). Nevertheless, he found time between court appearances to record a public statement that hailed the Euromaidan as a “positive phenomenon” and an “absolutely sincere” popular uprising against a corrupt oligarchy. For Demushkin, the only difference between the Euromaidan and the Bolotnaia protests was that one had triumphed and the other had been quashed. More problematic, for a Russian nationalist, was Demushkin’s scorn for the Russian-speaking inhabitants of eastern Ukraine, whom he castigated for their passivity during the revolutionary crisis. Captives of “internationalist Sovietism,” they had rallied in defense of Lenin monuments rather than rising up to oust the corrupt elite that ruled over them (Demushkin 2014a).

No less outspoken was Demushkin’s colleague, Vladimir Basmanov (Potkin), a former leader of the outlawed Movement against Illegal Immigration. Basmanov’s blog provided detailed and sympathetic reports about the Euromaidan, which he praised for “giving more freedom to people” (Basmanov 2014b). While welcoming the prospect of self-determination for the Russians of Crimea, Basmanov scorned the “idiotic and stupid jingoism” of ordinary Russians over the impending annexation of Crimea, which he likened to the joy of prisoners who have been told that the territory of their concentration camp was being enlarged (Basmanov 2014c). In mid-March, he issued an elaborate critique of the “propagandist myths” peddled by pro-Kremlin nationalists (“adepts of war with St. George ribbons”). On the one hand, he warned that an invasion of the Ukrainian mainland would ignite a conflagration in which tens of thousands of people would perish. On the other, he debunked the claim that Russians were being “murdered and tormented” in Ukraine. Before the Russian invasion, “nothing in reality threatened them.” Even in western Ukraine, which had been ruled by Ukrainian nationalists for three years, there were no signs of a mass exodus of Russians. This tolerance would be destroyed by the outbreak of war, which would inflict far more suffering on Russian minorities than the 23 years of Ukraine’s independence. “All of this,” Basmanov concluded, “will be on the conscience of the loudmouths who want blood” (Basmanov 2014d).

Another strain of the ultrarightist milieu was represented by Aleksei Baranovskii, a nationalist agitator and publicist who was best known as the coordinator of *Russkii Verdikt* (“Russian Verdict”), a “rights-defense” organization which specialized in the defense of imprisoned neo-Nazis. In 2011, Baranovskii had achieved notoriety for his inept attempt to provide an alibi for Evgeniia Khasis, who was on trial alongside Nikita Tikhonov for her role in the double murder of the human rights activist Stanislav Markelov and journalist Anastasia Baburova (Sokovnin 2011). During the Euromaidan, Baranovskii was working in Kyiv as a stringer for the Russian newspaper *Kommersant*, but his articles were suffused with admiration for the ultranationalist fighters of *Pravyi Sektor* whom he

had encountered at the barricades. For Baranovskii, these fighters were nothing less than the revolution's "spark," and he lamented that their Russian counterparts, a possible allusion to Khasis and Tikhonov, were languishing in prison. He also paid tribute to the members of *Svoboda*, the Ukrainian nationalist party, whose self-sacrificial courage he contrasted with the self-promotion and mercenary habits of the publicists who dominated the nationalist segment of Russia's protest movement (Baranovskii 2014).

5. The Kremlin's carrots and sticks

The crisis of Russian nationalism was both aggravated and exploited by the Putin regime, which undertook a variety of measures to mobilize the support and deter the opposition of Russian nationalists. For the cooperative and the compliant, there were incentives that included access to the media and a relaxation of controls for holding public demonstrations. For the recalcitrant and the defiant, there was vilification, harassment, and repression.

The regime's first invitation to the nationalist elite to join its assault on Ukraine was made by Dmitrii Rogozin, the vice-premier and unofficial leader of the *Rodina* party. Under the aegis of *Rodina*'s subsidiary movement, *Rusintern*, Rogozin convened a meeting of nationalist leaders on 28 February 2014. The participants included Konstantin Krylov (NDP), Vladimir Tor (NDP), Valerii Solovei (*Novaia Sila*), Aleksandr Belov (*Russkie*), Dmitrii Demushkin (*Russkie*), Ivan Mironov (*Rossiiskii Obshchenarodnyi Soyuz*), Aleksandr Sevast'ianov (a leading ideologue and biological racist), and an assortment of Russian activists from the former Soviet space. The central item on the agenda was the fate of Ukraine's Russian community. It was a prudent move, given the presence of Euromaidan sympathizers like Demushkin, who reported afterwards that "we supported the people of Ukraine on the question of overthrowing Yanukovich."²⁸ The joint declaration that emerged from this meeting bore little resemblance to Kremlin propaganda. Instead of inflammatory rhetoric about State Department hirelings and the "fascist junta" in Kyiv, it merely noted that Ukraine's stabilization required respect for the Russian minority's interests and the institutionalization of Crimea's autonomy. The point of this anodyne document lay in two vague articles, which offered implicit support to the Kremlin's surreptitious invasion. The first committed signatories to defend Ukraine's Russian minority "from chaos and threats to [its] rights." The second offered support for "all the actions of the Russian Federation for the defense of the [ethnic] Russian population, the national minorities of Ukraine, and the guaranteeing of the special status of Crimea."²⁹

For those nationalists who joined the crusade against Ukraine, there were many rewards. The most important was access to Russia's circumscribed public sphere. During the saturation media coverage of the fall of Yanukovich and the invasion of Crimea, a cohort of approved nationalist ideologues became ubiquitous figures on Kremlin-aligned television and the columns of mass-circulation newspapers. Compliant nationalists also found it easier to hold demonstrations in public spaces. In May 2014, the authorities for the first time granted permission to Limonov's *Drugaiia Rossiia* to hold a "Strategy 31" rally in Maiakovskii Square (Diatlovskaia 2014). For Limonov, this concession was a landmark in his struggle for freedom of assembly; for his former liberal collaborators, it was recompense for toeing the Kremlin line.³⁰ There were also signs that the authorities were contemplating the admission of more nationalists to the field of "systemic" politics. After Konstantin Krylov signed *Rusintern*'s declaration on Ukraine, it was rumored that an informal offer had been made to register his NDP in return for support in Crimea.³¹ In August 2014, the party triumphantly announced that "at last it has happened!": the Justice Ministry had granted registration (NDP 2014a). The euphoria was premature. At

the last moment, a new refusal was issued (NDP 2014b). Nevertheless, this wavering was itself evidence of an amelioration of official hostility to a party that had emerged out of the dreaded Bolotnaia movement.

By contrast, nationalists who sympathized with the Euromaidan faced repression that was designed to obstruct their participation in public life. On 1 March 2014, less than a week after publishing his critique of “anti-Maidanists,” Aleksei Navalny was placed under house arrest and banned from using the Internet.³² A fortnight later, Roskomnadzor barred access to his popular blog, along with three opposition websites.³³ Within days, police at the Moscow airport detained Rostislav Antonov, who had just returned from leading NDP’s referendum-monitoring mission in Crimea; the effect was to disrupt a press conference at which he hoped to report his findings. On 20 March 2014, the same tactic was used against Aleksandr Belov, whose apartment was searched on the eve of a press conference that was part of *Russkie*’s campaign against moves, connected to the invasion of Crimea, to relax citizenship requirements (Krylov 2014b). Three months later, the FSB turned its attention to several of *Russkie*’s regional leaders, who were targeted in simultaneous raids. The legal pretext was infringements of anti-extremism legislation, but FSB officers claimed during the operation that *Russkie* was training fighters for Ukraine’s “Right Sector” and plotting “a coup d’état in Russia on the Ukrainian model” (Demushkin 2014b).

State efforts to coax and coerce the nationalist movement were reinforced by pro-Kremlin nationalists. The most authoritative was Egor Kholmogorov, who arrogated to himself the role of gatekeeper. As the conflict between Russia and Ukraine intensified, he waged a campaign to exclude Euromaidan sympathizers from the ranks of Russian nationalists. One of the first targets was Aleksei Baranovskii, whom Kholmogorov banned from his blog as a punishment for likening the aspirations of Russians in Crimea to those of Tajik migrants in Moscow. Expressing amazement that “a self-styled Russian nationalist” should identify native Russians with a despised alien diaspora, Kholmogorov attributed Baranovskii’s apostasy to the fact that “in the current case, the ultra[right] international and its solidarity is elevated above national solidarity.” For Kholmogorov, this preference threatened the very survival of Russian nationalism. Were Baranovskii’s views to find a widespread following, “the only logical consequence would be the self-dissolution of all the organizations and ideological structures of Russian nationalists” (Kholmogorov 2014e). A month later, Kholmogorov used an essay in *Izvestiia* to elaborate a theoretical justification for a purge of the nationalist community. He drew a line between authentic Russian nationalists and two groups that were unworthy of the label. The first were ultra-rightist groups that had collaborated with “Right Sector.” For Kholmogorov, these renegades “were not so much nationalists as skinheads who had grown a [Ukrainian] forelock.” The second were “nationalists of the Navalny enlistment,” whom Kholmogorov disparaged as “not so much nationalists as a relatively civilized xenophobia,” on the model of European-style populism (Kholmogorov 2014a).

For Kholmogorov, it was a small step from ostracizing these renegades to calling for their repression. During the interval between the fall of Yanukovich and the annexation of Crimea, he published a 40-point manifesto titled “Crimean Theses,” which proposed that Russian citizens who “participated in the information war against Russia on the side of the enemy must be restricted in their freedom of expression and action until the conclusion of the acute phase of the conflict” (Kholmogorov 2014f). These traitors included some whom Kholmogorov had once recognized as fellow nationalists. He openly endorsed the house arrest of opposition leader Aleksei Navalny as “completely justified” (Kholmogorov 2014g).

6. Conclusion

The crisis of Russian nationalism has important implications for our understanding of the carnage in southeast Ukraine. While a clique of pro-Kremlin nationalist publicists whipped up anti-Ukrainian emotion in the mass media, many opposition nationalists took a contrary position. Some of the latter openly supported the Euromaidan. Others criticized the rise of militarist hysteria, challenged the jingoistic certitudes of official propaganda, and warned about the dangers of a conflict that would inflict vast suffering and poison the fraternal relations between two Slavic peoples. It was the Putin regime and its proxies, not the mainstream of the Russian nationalist movement, which fanned the first of flames of war in Ukraine. Only when Kremlin-instigated uprisings in Crimea and southeast Ukraine were in full swing, only when conflict between the new regime in Kyiv and Russian minorities had become a reality, did the major opposition nationalist groups join the Kremlin's assault on the Ukrainian state. Even then, many of them supported the separatists in the belief that they were replicating what Ukrainians had done on the Maidan: rebelling against a corrupt oligarchy.

The acrimonious conflicts provoked by these events had a profound impact on Russia's nationalist movement. They shattered the broad front of parties, organizations, and activists that had coalesced in recent years around the Russian marches, the Biriulevo protesters, and political prisoners like Daniil Konstantinov. They also shook established hierarchies of authority in the nationalist milieu. For their support of the Euromaidan, some leading figures were vilified and ostracized. Even by the standards of this fractious milieu, this process of exclusion was extraordinarily acrimonious. The anathemas hurled against the new apostates would not be easily forgotten. The legacy of rancor would not be easily overcome.

One effect of this purge was to rupture the tentative alliance between national democrats and the left-liberal opposition that had formed during the Bolotnaia protests. It was precisely those nationalists most sympathetic to the idea of cooperation across ideological boundaries who were the most outspoken supporters of the Euromaidan. As these intermediaries fell into line or were discredited, the dialogue between the two groups withered. This rupture is exemplified by Vladimir Tor's denunciation of his former colleague on the Opposition Coordinating Council, Aleksei Navalny, whom he had once cultivated as an ally. After reading Navalny's critique of the "anti-Maidanists," Tor lambasted him as a liberal who presumed "to teach us to love democracy," while their compatriots were trampled in Ukraine (Tor 2014).

The purge also sealed a kind of partnership between Russian nationalists and the Kremlin. In the short term, the invasion of Crimea and the outbreak of hostilities in southeast Ukraine left many opposition nationalists with little choice but to abandon their agitation against a regime whose military power could save the fledgling Russian people's republics in southeast Ukraine. In the words of one nationalist commentator: "Putin today is the main Russian nationalist. That is to say, the regime has succeeded in creating a situation where speaking against him means speaking against the Russian people, and speaking for the people means supporting Putin" (Klimenko 2014). But there is reason to be cautious about the durability of the Kremlin's co-optation of Russian nationalism. The pro-Maidan sympathies of a significant segment of the Russian nationalist community reflected a deep hostility toward the Putin regime and a willingness to emulate Maidan strategies. Even for many in the anti-Maidan camp, support for the Kremlin was conditional upon the effective use of state power to support the "Russian Spring." As the separatist uprisings began to falter, that support began to falter. Were

they to collapse, Putin could easily be transformed from a savior into a traitor, a duplicitous leader who had abused the trust of his compatriots for his own purposes and betrayed them at the first opportunity.

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Notes

1. On friendships, see Kholmogorova (2014e); on alliances, see the denunciation of Aleksei Navalny by his former ally, Tor (2014).
2. It is possible that the assailants were pro-Kremlin activists. On the attack, see “Napadenie na lidera RUSKIKH ASTRAKHANI,” March 15, 2014, <http://ru-nsn.livejournal.com/4239270.html>.
3. These tendencies should not be regarded as immutable or mutually exclusive. For reasons of tactics or opportunity, some figures wavered between support and criticism of the regime. The boundary between “national democrats” and “ultrarightist nationalists” was also blurred. Many activists toned down their slogans as they emerged from the underground into the public arena.
4. “Voskresnyi vecher s Vladimirom Solov’evym,” January 26, 2014, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jN2myeb-6ks>.
5. On Dugin’s opportunistic use of Eurasianism, see Umland (2007), 154–171; on his entry into the mainstream, see Umland (2010).
6. On Rogozin’s shadow leadership, see Runkevich and Malai (2013).
7. “Ukraina peredala Rossii spisok grazhdan RF, mitingovavshikh na maidane,” *Izvestiia*, February 25, 2014. <http://izvestia.ru/news/566559#ixzz2uMlg3cSt>.
8. On the distinction between “national liberals” and “national democrats,” see Kolsto (2014).
9. On the tension between Navalny’s nationalism and liberalism, see Laruelle (2014).
10. “Russkie! Zdes’ mogla byt’ vasha revoliutsiia! (seriia pouchitel’nykh plakatov),” January 22, 2014, <http://sputnikipogrom.com/russia/ua/8486/wake-the-fuck-up/>.
11. “Ogromnye prorossiiskie mitingi na vostoke Ukrainy,” February 24, 2014, <http://sputnikipogrom.com/russia/ua/9452/russian-ukranians/>.
12. “Otkrytaia Studiia,” March 13, 2014, Channel 5, <http://www.5-tv.ru/programs/broadcast/508113/>.
13. On this action, see “Russkikh ne slomit’,” *Limonka*, 134, <http://limonka.nbp-info.com/134/okk134.htm>.
14. On Limonov’s persona-non-grata status, see Simakin (2003).
15. In 2000, Limonov used an interview with a general from the Federal Security Service (FSB) to propose that the authorities “use us in the CIS.” See Limonov (2002).
16. As noted by Lapshin (2014b).
17. Limonov’s rehabilitation had actually begun in the autumn of 2013, when he had published several articles that illuminated tensions within the opposition. See Limonov (2013a).
18. “Zaiavlenie Novosibirskogo otdeleniia Drugoi Rossii i otstranennogo rukovoditelia Irkutskogo otdeleniia Drugoi Rossii Igoria Kremneva,” February 24, 2014. http://vk.com/wall-5595894_8851.
19. “Zaiavlenie natsional-bol’shevikov,” March 3, 2014, http://vk.com/wall-5595894_9037.
20. “Drugoross Benes zaderzhan v Donetske po podozreniiu v podgotovke perevorota,” April 2, 2014, <http://grani.ru/Politics/World/Europe/Ukraine/m.227316.html>.
21. On the march as a kind of “trolling” of the authorities, see Borodianskii (2014).
22. On the BBC ban, see Liss (2014).

23. "S"ezd Natsional-bol'shevistskoi platformy v Novosibirsk sorvali politseiskie i Tsentr 'E'," August 16, 2014, <http://www.kasparov.ru/material.php?id=53EF4E25B492C>.
24. On the resonance of the proposed action, see Pulin (2014).
25. On the meeting with Zelik, see Basmanov (2014a).
26. "Ukraina predala Rossii spisok grazhdan RF, mitingovavshikh na maidane," *Izvestia*, February 25, 2014, <http://izvestia.ru/news/566559#ixzz2uMlg3cSt>.
27. "Deiatel'nost.'" <http://www.rusimperia.info/p/activity.html>.
28. "Rossiiskie natsionalisty gotovy otstaiivat' prava russkogo naseleniia na Ukraine," *Interfax*, March 1, 2014, <http://www.interfax-russia.ru/South/special.asp?id=477480&sec=1724>.
29. "Zaiavlenie russkikh natsional'nykh i patrioticheskikh organizatsii Rossii, Kryma, Pribaltiki i Moldavii o situatsii na Ukraine," February 28, 2014, <http://www.rodina.ru/novosti/slovo-i-delo/Zayavlenie-o-situatsii-na-Ukraine>.
30. For liberal criticism, see Il'ia Iashin's comments cited by Katorzhnov (2014).
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