

Right Sector threatens violence throughout Ukraine

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The Ukrainian neo-fascist militia, Right Sector, has announced it is preparing for “widescale actions” and the holding of an “emergency Congress” in Kiev, after a violent standoff with a rival gang and government authorities in western Ukraine last week. The primary fighting force behind the US-backed coup in February 2014 that led to the installation of the current regime in Kiev, Right Sector is now challenging the government of President Petro Poroshenko and demanding his resignation.

Among its criticisms of the administration is that it is failing to prosecute the war against pro-Russian separatists in the country’s southeast—which has already led to 6,500 deaths and a massive refugee and humanitarian crisis—with adequate ferocity. This week, the Ukrainian parliament approved a draft law that would give greater autonomy to the Donetsk and Lugansk People’s Republics. The legislation, which will be voted on in final form this fall, is at odds with Right Sector’s demand to reincorporate the regions with force.

In addition to preparing to marshal forces in Ukraine’s capital, press outlets report that Right Sector militants have set up three outposts along the country’s borders with Poland and Belarus. The group claims to be guarding the Volinsky oblast against corruption and contraband. Right Sector, however, is itself extensively involved in criminal smuggling operations, according to the government.

On July 11, the neo-fascist organization engaged in a gun battle in the town of Mukacheve, a small city about equidistant from Slovakia and Hungary, with forces allied to parliament Deputy Mikhail Lano, a representative of the right-wing, nationalist People’s Front. Eleven people were injured and three killed in the confrontation, which involved the use of grenade launchers. At one point, Right Sector took a six-year-old boy hostage when police surrounded them.

The Poroshenko regime says the clash was part of a turf war over smuggling operations, the most profitable of which include the illegal export of cigarettes. According to the online press *Gazeta.ru*, a single truckload of the good garners 470,000 euros.

Kiev brought in special units of the National Guard, as well as SWAT forces and other security services, to clampdown on the situation. Local residents were evacuated. Right Sector called in battalions to block roads leading to the Transcarpathian region where Mukacheve is located, in order to prevent government forces from arriving. Supporters of the group rallied in Dnepropetrovsk, Kiev, and Lviv, where explosions tore apart two police stations on Tuesday in an attack that the Ministry of Internal Affairs says was carried out by Right Sector with the aim of destabilizing the country.

While the violence has subsided for the moment and a spokesperson for Right Sector has said the organization will cease “armed resistance,” the tensions continue. Some Right Sector forces have been detained, while six others have fled to nearby mountains. Ukrainian security services are preparing an “anti-terrorist” operation in response. The far-right group has warned that it will respond with force to any efforts to suppress it. Previously Right Sector has stated that it has 18 to 19 reserve battalions on hand across the country, which it is prepared to unleash on Kiev.

Dmytro Yarosh, the leader of Right Sector, is demanding the resignation of the head of Ukraine’s Ministry of Internal Affairs, in addition to the president, as well as the dissolution of parliament. Right Sector’s emergency Congress and demonstrations being organized by the group are intended to take place on Maidan square, the site of last year’s anti-government putsch.

According to the Russian language newspaper *Pravda*, a Right Sector press secretary, Artyom Skoropadsky, has predicted Poroshenko’s demise. He “will not be able to

escape from the country as the previous president did,” Skoropadsky stated, making reference to former Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovich, who fled to Russia when his government was overturned. “He will be executed in a dark dungeon by a group of young Ukrainian military or members of the National Guard.”

Earlier this month, Right Sector staged a demonstration in Kiev. The event coincided with the leaking of internal government documents related to an investigation into battalions working with the group that, according to a report, are marauding gangs of violent criminals.

Even as tensions continue, Right Sector maintains the closest relations with the Ukrainian state, which owes its existence to the neo-fascist gang and relies on its paramilitary forces to suppress opposition to Kiev in the contested Donbass region and elsewhere around the country. In April, Yarosh was appointed an official advisor to the military, whose chief of staff expressed great “appreciation” for the group’s “contributions” and “outstanding services to the defense of Ukraine.”

On Friday, Yarosh said that his battalions would “join the ranks of the Armed Forces on our terms” in return for amnesty for those of its fighters still holed up in the Carpathian Mountains. He stated that the forces under his command, who had given into a “provocation” in Mukacheve, could “wash away their guilt with blood.”

Ukrainian parliament Deputy Semen Semenchenko declared on television that Right Sector faces “political persecution.”

The relationship between Kiev and Right Sector is rooted in a shared political ideology—right-wing nationalism and virulent anti-communism. The group couples calls for ethnic purity with hatred for Jews, homosexuals, leftists, and the working class, and supports the nuclear rearmament of Ukraine. The country’s parliament recently passed laws banning the Communist Party and all communist symbols, and rehabilitating Ukraine’s Nazi collaborators.



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