

Newly elected Ukrainian President Zelensky backs anti-Russia campaign

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Just over a week after being elected President of Ukraine with over 70 percent of the votes, comedian Volodymyr Zelensky has backed new anti-Russian legislation and sparked a public conflict with Moscow over the granting of Russian passports to Ukrainian citizens.

In the immediate wake of Zelensky's election, Ukraine's Parliament passed a bill escalating the official state discrimination in the country against the Russian language. Russian artists and artworks have already been banned from entering the country and the popular Russian-language social media platform Vkontakte has been banned since 2017.

Among the blatantly discriminatory and anti-democratic measures included in the new bill are requirements that 90 percent of national television content be in Ukrainian, that service sector workers speak in Ukrainian, and that schools and universities teach solely in Ukrainian.

While special permission has been granted to English and the other official EU languages in both publishing and education, Russian, which is the predominant language in most of Ukraine's major cities, has essentially been targeted in the bill. Violators of the new language bill will be subject to fines of \$125 to \$440.

Hungary has protested the bill's passage as discriminatory against the country's Hungarian-speaking minorities in the southwest of the country. Poland and Romania sharply opposed earlier iterations of Ukraine's language law as well.

Zelensky has made few comments on the blatantly discriminatory bill. Implicitly signaling his support he promised to "review" the bill once in office and proclaimed his support for the status of Ukrainian as the country's sole official language.

Responding to this latest open provocation, Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a decree last week permitting Ukrainian citizens residing in Donetsk or Luhansk to obtain a Russian passport within three months of submitting an application. Later in the week, Putin proposed expanding the offer of easy access to Russian passports to all Ukrainian citizens regardless of residency status within the separatist regions. Ukraine does not recognize dual-

citizenship with any country.

In the separatist-controlled territories in the East, Ukrainians regularly travel to Russia to shop and visit friends and family members. In addition, tens of thousands of Ukrainians have moved to Russia in recent years to find jobs as migrant workers. Since the beginning of the war in Donbass, which followed the US- and German-backed fascist coup in February 2014, over 300,000 Ukrainians have applied for citizenship in Russia and it is estimated that over 2 million Ukrainians now live in Russia, fleeing both violence and social devastation.

NATO and the major imperialist powers seized upon the passport legislation to yet again step up their anti-Russia propaganda. The United States called Moscow's passport decree part of the continued "assault on Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity." The EU issued a similar statement.

While much of Zelensky's support in the presidential elections was due to the fact that he is a well-known Russian-speaking media figure who eschewed the openly right-wing ethnic and linguistic nationalism of incumbent President Poroshenko and made appeals to the widespread anti-war sentiments, he has seized upon the passport decree by Putin to quickly assure the imperialist powers that he will continue the anti-Russian propaganda and policies of his predecessor.

In a Facebook post on Saturday night, Zelensky mockingly offered Ukrainian passports to Russian citizens sarcastically stating: "We know perfectly well what a Russian passport provides...the right to be arrested for a peaceful protest" and "the right not to have free and competitive elections."

Zelensky hypocritically added that compared to Russians "we Ukrainians have freedom of speech, freedom of the media and the internet in our country." This is a blatant lie in a country where references to communism and the victory of the Red Army and Russian art works are officially banned. Fascist bands like the state-backed Azov Battalion regularly assault civilians and stage bloody pogroms against minorities such as the Sinti and Roma.

Just before the passport decree was issued, Zelensky had

also suggested that the EU and United States impose further sanctions on Russia if Ukrainian citizens were granted Russian passports.

American media outlets, including CNN, have praised Zelensky for “getting tough on Putin.”

Although there was some initial concern, especially in Washington, about Zelensky’s appeals to popular anti-war sentiments and promises to enter direct negotiations with Putin during the election, the NATO powers have thrown their support behind the new president.

Zelensky received congratulations from German chancellor Angela Merkel, US President Donald Trump and Turkey’s President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. He had also met with French President Emmanuel Macron to discuss his stance towards Russia prior to winning the second round of the election.

In an interview with Poland’s conservative *Rzeczpospolita* newspaper, European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker stated that he did not see “any significant difference between him and Poroshenko, if we are talking about Russia.”

The right-wing US-Ukraine Foundation think tank recently revealed that Zelensky’s “top advisor” had met with its representatives in a bid to assuage their concerns over his ability to confront Russia following the first round of elections in March.

Though the US-Ukraine Foundation—like most of the Washington establishment—had been clearly in favor of a continuation of the Poroshenko regime, the think tank’s representative “came away relatively confident that a Zelensky presidency will continue to facilitate Ukraine’s Western orientation although not as intently as Mr. Poroshenko’s would have.” The foundation also revealed that Zelensky’s “top advisor” had met with the EU.

In a sign of evident concern about the widespread hostility within the working class to Poroshenko and the 2014 coup that was expressed, if in a very distorted form, in the election of Zelensky, US think tanks and establishment press have published a flood of pieces urging Washington to escalate its intervention in Ukraine to further the war preparations against Russia.

Michael Carpenter, senior director of the Penn Biden Center for Diplomacy and Global Engagement, gave vent to this view last week in the Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos-owned *Washington Post*. Carpenter, a one-time foreign policy advisor to former Vice President and current Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden, insisted that the West had to “shake off its self-diagnosed ‘Ukraine fatigue’ and replace its wait-and-see attitude with a more strategic policy of proactively supporting military, anti-corruption and economic reforms in this strategically important country.”

Far from showing any kind of “fatigue,” the US, in particular, has massively escalated its direct intervention in Ukraine with the coup in 2014. Between 1992 and 2014, the US pumped an estimated \$5 billion into Ukrainian “civil society” including various NGOs and right-wing political tendencies which then played a major role in the coup that toppled pro-Russian president Viktor Yanukovich.

Since 2014, the US has stationed military advisors throughout the country, and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) alone spent another \$2 billion in the country. Carpenter’s piece in the *Post* can only be understood as a call for a significant escalation of the already well-advanced military build-up against Russia which expresses the foreign policy agenda of the Democrats in the 2020 election.

In a similar vein, Stephen Blank, from the American Foreign Policy Council, proposed that “Ukraine and NATO should enter into a new Lend-Lease deal giving bases there to NATO in return for the transfer of usable but surplus naval and other capabilities that Ukraine’s armed forces can use effectively.” Such a move would dramatically heighten the possibility of a full-scale war breaking out between nuclear-armed Russia and NATO over Ukraine.

Echoing these same wildly militaristic plans, the Republican House of Representative member Michael McCaul published an article in the *National Interest* calling for the creation of a “Black Sea strategy where the United States, NATO, and other US allies can regularly deploy naval assets there to better support Ukraine against Russia.”



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