

UN report documents massive attacks on democratic rights in Ukraine

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19 December 2021

While Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky headed to Brussels to plead with NATO for more military support in his ongoing reckless provocations against Russia, the UN Human Rights Council reported on Wednesday that “fundamental freedoms in Ukraine have been squeezed” under his administration.

The report covered developments from November 1, 2019 to October 31, 2021, all dates which fall under the regime of Zelensky, who was first elected in May 2019 largely due to widespread disillusionment with the right-wing nationalist policies of former President Petro Poroshenko. The Poroshenko regime had come to power in the wake of the 2014 US-backed coup in Ukraine, in which a pro-Russian government was toppled through the mobilization of far-right forces.

Several previous reports by the UN Human Rights Council since 2014 have made similar statements, demonstrating both a continuation and further acceleration of government attacks on the press and democratic rights under Zelensky.

According to the UN Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights, Nada Al-Nashif, “restrictions on the free expression of critical or unpopular opinions, and on participation in peaceful assemblies on sensitive topics, as well as the safety of human rights defenders in Ukraine were of concern.”

In February of 2021, Zelensky shut down three popular television stations associated with pro-Russian opposition leader and oligarch Viktor Medvedchuk.

The Zelensky government later charged Medvedchuk with “high treason, violating the laws and customs of war, and assisting terrorist organizations” and placed him under house arrest.

The report described these attacks as violations of “international human rights law.”

The prosecution of Medvedchuk, a Russia-friendly

member of the Ukrainian oligarchy, was seen as a provocation by Moscow and contributed to the military crisis in the Black Sea in spring this year. In addition to supporting a negotiated settlement to the ongoing civil war in Donbass, Medvedchuk is personally close to Russian President Vladimir Putin.

More recently, the Zelensky government has used claims of a supposed “coup” to similarly attack media outlets owned by Ukraine’s richest oligarch, Rinat Akhmetov, by claiming that Akhmetov was unknowingly involved in the coup with the backing of Russian intelligence.

Prior to the coup claims, Akhmetov’s media outlets had recently increased their criticism of Zelensky, due to his signing of so called “anti-oligarch laws” that could potentially strip Akhmetov of his media outlets. In reality, such laws will likely be used for the selective targeting of Moscow-friendly members of the Ukrainian oligarchy, while Zelensky loyalists maintain their obscene wealth and business interests.

Zelensky himself possessed an estimated net worth of \$1.5 million when he came to office in 2019, an amount that has undoubtedly increased since he gained control of the Ukrainian state. The recently revealed Pandora Papers indicated that Zelensky founded a network of offshore companies in 2012 and purchased expensive properties in London.

Regarding attacks on individual journalists, the UN report stated, “Of particular concern is the lack of accountability for threats and violence targeting human rights defenders, media workers, and individuals who express opinions online or attempt to participate in policy-making. OHCHR documented 29 incidents targeting journalists, media professionals, bloggers, and individuals expressing opinions critical of the Government or mainstream narratives. In 2020-2021,

investigative journalists and media workers covering political topics such as corruption and the implementation of COVID-19 restrictions were targeted.”

What the report did not mention is the heavy involvement of neo-fascist forces in carrying out these attacks on journalists. Since the 2014 coup, a number of prominent Ukrainian journalists have been attacked and killed by fascist gangs, most notably Kateryna Handziuk and Pavel Sheremet. In yet another attempted political assassination by the far-right in December 2019, a three-year old boy was killed.

In almost every case, Ukrainian authorities drag their feet on any investigation which rarely results in arrest or significant prosecution.

The report also failed to mention the most recent attack by Zelensky on the democratic right of the working class to freedom of movement and association.

On December 2, Zelensky initiated five bills into the Ukrainian parliament that would be used to deny Donbass residents citizenship and voting rights. The Ukrainian government would also be able to rescind citizenship from anyone participating in “actions threatening Ukraine’s national security and national interests.”

Such anti-democratic measures could easily be used to deny citizenship and voting rights to not only separatists in the Donbass, but any Ukrainian who opposes the right-wing nationalist and war-mongering policies of the Zelensky government. Rigged elections open only to “true” Ukrainian citizens would also become a real possibility.

The measures would also strip citizenship from Ukrainians with Russian passports. Such a move would be particularly punitive against the Donbass region’s working class who often have relatives living in Russia and have begun using Russian passports to travel across the border. These measures would, of course, have no effect on Ukraine’s obscenely wealthy oligarchy who travel across the world wherever they please.

The UN report noted that “similar restrictions on freedom of expression” as those undertaken by the Kiev regime have taken place in the separatist-controlled regions of Donetsk and Lugansk and in Crimea, which was annexed by Russia in 2014. However, unlike Kiev, Donetsk, Lugansk and Crimea have not received \$2.5 billion in military assistance

from the United States and are not regularly praised as pinnacles of democracy by American and European imperialism.

While reports by the UN alleging human rights violations are regularly used by Western imperialism against strategically important nations to carry out already well-made war plans, in the case of Ukraine, it is Western imperialism that is publicly backing an extremely anti-democratic, right-wing nationalist state that backs neo-fascist forces and regularly carries out attacks on the press, ethnic minorities and political opposition. These connections were, of course, not addressed by the UN report.

Nevertheless, limited as it is, the UN report exposes attempts to frame a potential war between a “free Ukraine” against an “aggressive” Russia as a “war for democracy” as a complete fraud.

The coup of 2014, which provided the basis for an enormous escalation of the geopolitical conflict with Russia, was promoted by the Western media as a “democratic revolution.” The heavy involvement of neo-Nazi forces in the coup and new government was deliberately denied and covered up. To this day, bourgeois think tanks such as the Atlantic Council promote these lies in order to further the NATO war preparations against Russia. Thus, the Atlantic Council wrote last week, “Vladimir Putin fears Ukrainian democracy not NATO expansion.”

In reality, imperialism has been systematically building up a rabidly right-wing oligarchic regime and neo-fascist forces in Kiev in order to prepare both for a military conflict with Russia and the violent suppression of the working class.



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