

Ukraine hunts for “collaborators”

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The Ukrainian government is intensifying its hunt for pro-Russian “collaborators,” lodging charges against hundreds, if not thousands, of its own citizens, particularly in regions that recently came back under the control of Kiev. The accused face prison sentences, in addition to heavy fines, seizure of property, and the loss of other rights. According to data recently released by the General Prosecutor’s office, the government has opened more than 18,000 cases related to “crimes against national security,” which include treason, sabotage, “assistance to the aggressor state,” and “encroachment on the territorial integrity and inviolability of Ukraine.”

The Ukrainian government, hailed throughout the West as the embodiment of freedom and democracy, is waging a war not just against a foreign power, but against a section of its own population.

In late October, the director of a secondary school in Kharkiv was accused of collaborating with the enemy because he told instructors that they would reopen the institution, hold classes in Russian, use Russian textbooks, and employ Russian educational standards. A week earlier, another man from the region was charged with traitorous actions because, as the head of a municipal road repair shop in Balaklya, he made publicly-owned equipment available to Russian forces. Kharkiv was under occupation at the time.

In numerous instances, individuals are being targeted for nothing more than expressing some form of political support for Russia. Articles published in RBK-Ukraine between October 8 and 25 report that all of the following individuals are facing some form of collaboration-related charge: a resident of Yuzhnye who tried to convince acquaintances that the expansion of Russian sovereignty to Ukrainian territory was just; a woman who more than once discussed with a group of people her view that Ukraine’s independent existence was wrong; a resident of Kharkiv who

repeated Russian “propaganda” that Moscow’s invasion was justified. A news anchor with Luhansk 24, a pro-Russian press service, has been notified that he is being investigated for collaborationism.

More prosecutions of this type are forthcoming. “Law enforcement is continuing its work to expose Ukrainian citizens who are supporters of Kremlin policy,” noted Ukr.net on October 15.

Accusations of “aiding the enemy” are also being leveled against people for, it would seem, attempting to keep their communities alive in times of war. A 32-year-old man also from Kharkiv is being prosecuted because he allegedly voluntarily agreed to guard a pharmacy and a depot holding humanitarian supplies while the city was under occupation. The head of the tiny village of Valenkove is facing charges because “acting on instructions from representatives of the Russian Federation, the woman collected data and applications from local residents to address organizational and humanitarian issues.”

Indictments that carry 15-year or more prison sentences—joining anti-Ukrainian partisan forces, telling the Russian military the location of Ukrainian forces, reporting on “patriotic” Ukrainians, and providing economic and other resources to the Russian side—are also being doled out. One detainee, captured on the charge that he was “employed” by a “people’s militia of the occupiers,” died because he allegedly sought to flee and blew himself up stepping on a Russian mine.

Areas of Ukraine that have large Russian populations are being singled out in the hunt for collaborators. According to Pressorg.25, most of the recently-created “investigative offices were opened in the Luhansk, Zaporozhye, Donetsk, Kharkiv and Kherson regions.” In August, *The New York Times* published an article about the work of pro-Ukrainian militias working behind enemy lines. According to the newspaper, one of their missions, in addition to killing alleged

collaborators, is to monitor educators believed to be promoting a pro-Russian line. “Partisans,” however, “will not attack teachers,” they write. Rather, they “have sought to humiliate them through leaflets they often post on utility poles with dark warnings for collaborators, as part of their psychological operations.”

Ukraine’s recently-passed laws on collaborationism are extremely broad. They include things such as “public denial of the implementation of armed aggression against Ukraine, establishment and approval of temporary occupation of part of the territory of Ukraine,” “public appeals to support the decisions and/or actions of the aggressor state, armed formations, occupation administration of the aggressor state,” “implementation of propaganda of the aggressor state in educational institutions,” “voluntary occupation of a non-leading position (not related to the performance of organizational, administrative or economic functions) in illegal authorities established in the temporarily occupied territory,” and “participation in” or “organization and conduct of events of a political nature, implementation of information activities in cooperation with the aggressor state and/or its occupation administration, aimed at supporting the aggressor state and/or evading its responsibility for the armed aggression against Ukraine.”

Particularly for those located in areas that have come under occupation, it is easy to fall afoul of laws that ban essentially any engagement with Russian military or political authorities, much less the expression of a political thought that contradicts the official line of the government in Kiev.

Punishments include stripping people of the right to hold various offices or other posts for up to 15 years, confiscation of property, arrest for up to six months, imprisonment from three to 15 years or for life, and sentencing to two years of correctional labor.

Charges, trials, and punishments are proceeding at a rapid pace. The Telegram channels of Ukraine’s General Prosecutor and other state offices are filled with near-daily photos of the newly-accused. Under conditions of martial law, the destruction of infrastructure, and the exodus of more than seven million people—including, no doubt, many attorneys—it is impossible that anyone caught in this maelstrom is receiving a fair trial. Guilty verdicts and sentences

follow quickly on the heels of charges. Online images show that among the accused are the elderly and women, many of whom appear to be visibly poor.

The pictures of defendants released by the state are blurred but often still identifiable. The Ukrainian military is currently using US-provided facial-recognition-technology to both monitor its own population and torment the families of dead Russian soldiers by finding their social media accounts online, contacting their relatives, and sending them images of their dead bodies. In posting photos of those charged with collaboration on social media, state officials are creating conditions under which friends and family of the accused can be found and made subject to collective punishment.

At the same time, there are efforts underway to strip parliamentary representatives from opposition political parties, which were banned by President Zelensky in May, of their seats, on the grounds that they are sympathetic to Russia and, by virtue of that fact, collaborationists.



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