

Zelensky government expands media censorship

Jason Melanovski
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Amid the intensification of its NATO-backed war with Russia, the government of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has passed a bill that grants Ukraine's National Council of Broadcasting sweeping and arbitrary powers of censorship over nearly all of the country's media.

The 279-page bill, which has existed in various forms since Zelensky first ordered its creation in 2019, essentially permits the National Council of Broadcasting to censor television, print and online journalism, as well as social media and search engines such as Google. News sites that fail to officially "register as media" with the right-wing Ukrainian government may be shut down without a court ruling.

Moreover, the National Council of Broadcasting itself will be filled with appointees by Zelensky and the Ukrainian parliament, which is currently dominated by the president's Servant of the People party.

While the bill was passed under the guise of "media reform" to comply with EU "press freedom" standards, the law violates the most basic democratic freedoms.

Both the European Federation of Journalists and the Committee to Protect Journalists have opposed the measure, and in September Ukraine's own National Union of Journalists called the law "the biggest threat to press freedom in (Ukraine's) independent history."

Earlier in July, the European Federation of Journalists denounced the law, writing that "it proposes to give arbitrary and disproportionate regulatory powers to the national regulator, the National Council of Broadcasting, which would have authority not only over audiovisual media, but also over print and digital media."

"The coercive regulation envisaged by the bill and in the hands of a regulator totally controlled by the government is worthy of the worst authoritarian

regimes. It must be withdrawn. A state that would apply such provisions simply has no place in the European Union," Ricardo Gutiérrez, general secretary of the federation, said at the time.

While such organizations express consternation at Zelensky's blatant attempt to control Ukraine's media, in reality, censorship and the attack on democratic rights have long been integral to the Kiev regime's rule. They have only intensified as the Ukrainian state has moved towards war with Russia, backed by NATO.

After coming to office in 2019 due largely to widespread disillusionment with the xenophobic and militarist policies of former President Petro Poroshenko, Zelensky shifted sharply to the right by prosecuting Russia-friendly political opponents and escalating tensions with Moscow.

As his approval ratings fell in February of 2021, Zelensky took the unprecedented step of closing down three popular, opposition-affiliated TV channels—112, Newsone and ZIK—on the grounds of "national security."

Later that same month his government imposed sanctions on Viktor Medvedchuk, leader of the pro-Russian Opposition for Life party, the second largest political party in the Ukrainian parliament at the time. Medvedchuk was later indicted on charges of embezzlement and "high treason" and placed under house arrest. At the time, the move was a clear signal to Moscow that the Zelensky government had no interest in a negotiated settlement to the ongoing civil war in eastern Ukraine, which had killed over 14,000. The arrest was also viewed as a provocative escalation in the drive to war by Zelensky and his backers in the Biden administration, who publicly applauded his crackdown on domestic, pro-Russian political opposition.

In August 2021, on the eve of his infamous “Crimea Platform” summit, the Zelensky government banned the popular opposition website strana.ua by decree. The site was one of the few major media outlets in Ukraine that reported on the violent exploits of the country’s various militant far-right nationalist groups and corruption within the Ukrainian government.

Hypocritically, the Crimea Platform denounced Russia for supposedly limiting “fundamental freedoms” in Crimea, “such as the right to peaceful assembly, the rights to freedoms of expression and opinion, religion or belief, association, restrictions on the ability to seek, receive and impart information, as well as interference and intimidation that journalists, human rights defenders and defense lawyers face in their work.”

Following Russia’s invasion of the country in February 2022, the Zelensky government doubled down on political oppression and censorship by banning 11 “collaborationist” political parties, prohibiting the import of Russian books, canceling Russian language education, and consolidating all of the country’s television and radio reporting into one single government-approved program.

Such reactionary policies have been backed by Ukraine’s Minister of Culture Oleksandr Tkachenko, who in December wrote an op-ed in *The Guardian* urging a worldwide boycott of “The Nutcracker” by Russian composer Pyotr Tchaikovsky.

Last week Tkachenko announced the introduction of a law in the Ukrainian parliament that will accelerate its reactionary “de-Russification” policies by renaming streets currently dedicated to Russian cultural figures, such as Alexander Pushkin, and simplifying the removal of statues.

Speaking to the National News Agency of Ukraine, Tkachenko proudly reported that the law “will permit the government to continue the fight against hundreds of streets named after Pushkin, which already started last year.”

Such reactionary measures expose the true nature of the right-wing and undemocratic NATO-backed Zelensky government. Rather than seeking to end a bloody and disastrous war that has claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians and Russians, the Zelensky government is dedicated to undemocratic and xenophobic political and cultural censorship to divide

the Ukrainian and Russian working class and impose its war policies on the population.



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