

**Vyacheslav Likhachev**

**Right-wing extremism in Ukraine:  
the phenomenon of "Svoboda"**



## Author's introduction

Six months have passed since the national-radical right-extremist All-Ukrainian Union (AU) "Svoboda" has become one of the main Ukrainian political parties, breaking the parliamentary barrier and delegating its representative on the post of Vice Speaker. Deeply marginal several years ago, extremist ideas have received the parliamentary tribune and seem to occupy quite a strong position in society.

What has happened to our country? Why the party, which not so long ago was possessing neo-Nazi symbols (and so far exploiting them in part), glorifying violence and practicing political violence, has become a legitimate part of the political spectrum? Why it is in the face of "Svoboda" Ukrainian right radicalism and national extremism emerged from those marginal niches, where they naturally were during previous twenty years? In current essay I tried to give answers to these questions.

Besides, it is extremely important to me to refute common in recent years illusions that "Svoboda" is actually "soft and fluffy", or in the language of political speculation – evolves towards a moderate national democracy. Firstly, in the asset of the party there is a huge number of xenophobic utterances that occupy an important place in the ideology and rhetoric of the party leaders, as well as many incidents directly related to violence against members of minorities and political opponents. Secondly, in the past six months the party not only hasn't cut its power on these matters, but on the contrary – under the cover of parliamentary faction, spins the flywheel of radicalism.

Real danger of national extremism is directly proportional to the tendency to turn a blind eye to it. Attempts to present "Svoboda" as a normal and moderate party harm Ukrainian democracy no less than the activity of nationalist extremists themselves. The fact of alliance of moderate national-democratic and even liberal forces with "Svoboda" legitimizes xenophobic rhetoric and extremist practice in the public discourse. The danger of this phenomenon should not be underestimated.

In order to estimate the degree of severity of changes, taking place in the Ukrainian political spectrum right before our eyes, it makes sense to recall what place ultra-nationalist right-wing extremists has been taking up in the community during the entire preceding period.

## **1. National radicalism in Ukraine prior to “Svoboda”**

For more than two decades of political history of independent Ukraine extreme right-wing political parties and movements have been taking up the marginalized place in the political spectrum and in the system of voters' preferences. Despite the obvious risks relating to the prolonged period of difficult post-Soviet transformation of the society and state institutions, painful search for consensus on the model of national identity, as well as to numerous social and economic problems, right radicalism until very recently could not effectively accumulate protest moods by a number of reasons. In the 1990-s, right-wing radicals were known primarily by their participation in mass disorders (such as the clash with the police at Sophia Square in Kiev, July 18, 1995) or by the local armed conflicts in other countries of the former Soviet Union (primarily in the Transnistrian region of Moldova and in Georgia), but not by their real influence on the political processes in the country. However, in recent years, first of all, in my opinion, due to changes in the socio-political climate of the country as a whole, there has been significantly increased the popularity of the main current ultra-nationalist political party – All-Ukrainian Union (AU) “Svoboda”, led by Oleg Tyagnybok, which has practically monopolized the right-wing radical part of the political spectrum. More known in previous times radical right-wing organizations, such as the Ukrainian National Assembly – Ukrainian National Self-Defense (UNA-UNSO) or the Congress of Ukrainian Nationalists (CUN), have practically lost the remnants of influence and popularity among the voters to the present time, and the number of groups, active in the 1990-s, descended from the political scene.

Successful performance of “Svoboda” in the local elections in autumn 2010, and then later in the parliamentary elections in 2012, makes not only politologists but also the whole society pay attention to the ideology of the party.

For correct understanding of the situation specifics existing in Ukraine at the moment, it is necessary to indicate that earlier national-extremists have never achieved any significant electoral success. Right-wing radicals have not once been able to overcome the electoral barrier on elections to Parliament (the barrier is relatively low compared to other European countries; at a certain moment in Ukrainian political history it constituted only 3%).

Perhaps, the only specific exception was the experience of the Progressive Socialist Party of Ukraine (PSPU) led by Natalia Vitrenko. In 1998, PSPU, gaining 4.04% of the votes, entered the Verkhovna Rada. The ideology of this political force, despite the title and the formal representation of the party as left, is more likely to bear some right radical traits. In particular, PSPU professes a pro-Russian and partly pan-Slavic nationalism with elements of political orthodoxy, and in the public rhetoric its leaders in a rather aggressive way exploit nostalgia for the Soviet empire. However, the case of PSPU is atypical in the context of the electoral history of the Ukrainian national-radicals – the party was not perceived by the majority of its supporters as ultra-right, and aggressive anti-Western and Pan-Slavic rhetoric, combined with the elements of Soviet imperialism, is also typical to the Communist Party of Ukraine, and in a less obvious form to Socialist Party of Ukraine. Moreover, all these political forces, positioning itself as a leftist, also actively exploit anti-fascist rhetoric, that totally confuses observers, but quite fits into the strategy of populist exploitation of pseudo-left public rhetoric in the late Soviet style. More obvious right-wing Pro-Russian political forces currently play a role in politics on the regional level (in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, Odessa and some other areas), but at the national level they are marginalized and do not possess substantial support.

But if we recall the electoral history of the Ukrainian right-wing extremist radical nationalist parties in the strict sense of this notion, we would find out that it was a history of total defeats. The first Parliamentary elections in the independent Ukraine were held in 1994. At that time, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine was formed by deputies elected exclusively in single-mandate majoritarian districts. Several right-wing candidates were successful (in particular, the mandates were obtained by three activists of the most well-known at the time the right-wing extremist party – UNA, as well as five members of CUN), however, they were not enough for the formation of a parliamentary faction.

On the following parliamentary elections held in 1998, half of the deputies was elected according to a proportional system on party lists, the other half, as before, on single-mandate majoritarian constituencies. UNA gained 0.37% of the votes failing to promote any of its candidates through the single mandate constituencies to a parliamentary seat. The block "Men'she slov" (Less words) which included the neo-Nazi Social National Party of Ukraine (SNPU, later renamed to "Svoboda"), received 0.17% of votes. However, one candidate from SNPU was then elected in single-mandate constituency – it was Oleg Tyagnybok, who in 2004 became the leader of an updated and renamed party. It should be noted that the SNPU "rebranding" was also accompanied by a rejection of symbols (the emblem of SNPU was a "wolf hook" used in symbolism of the Waffen SS and is widely known in some Western European countries as the neo-Nazi graphic

---

symbol) and by a dissolution of the party paramilitary formation "Patriot Ukrainy" (Patriot of Ukraine).

The best result was shown in the 1998 by the bloc "National Front", which gained 2.7% of the votes. CUN constituted the basis of the bloc, which also included the Ukrainian Conservative Republican Party of Stepan Khmara.

At the 2002 elections the losing its already meager support UNA gained only 0.04% of the votes. In 2002, SNPU did not participate at the elections by party lists, but once again managed to drag O. Tyagnybok through a single mandate constituency to the Verkhovna Rada.

Most of the relatively moderate representatives of this political spectrum, such as CUN, during that election campaign joined the bloc "Nasha Ukraina" (Our Ukraine) of Victor Yushchenko, whose ideology rather bore national-democratic traits than extremist, although with a significant component of the ethno-nationalism. The dissolution in "Nasha Ukraina" granted some right-wing radicals individual routes to the Parliament in 2002, as well as participation in the activities of the Executive power in 2004–2006, however, it also led to a loss of their own political identity. Some of them retained leadership in their own political power (as CUN leader Alexei Ivchenko), some entered "Nasha Ukraina", completely abandoning attempts to play an independent role (as one of the SNPU leaders in the 1990-s, and the creator of the youth paramilitary wing of the party "Patriot Ukrainy" Andrei Parubiy), but they all almost put an end to their further independent political career. Due to participation in the political process, which took place in Ukraine after the victory of the Orange Revolution, they also took their share of the negativity having accumulated some of the disappointment in Viktor Yushchenko and the entire post-revolutionary Ukrainian power, perceived by a national democratic part of the society. It is significant that having been elected from a single-mandate constituency as SNPU member, Oleg Tyagnybok also joined the parliamentary faction "Nasha Ukraina", but was expelled from it in 2004 (already being a leader of "Svoboda") for aggressive chauvinistic and anti-Semitic statements. This event, unique in the Ukrainian parliamentary history, was the only serious attempt to hold a "watershed" between the moderate and the extremist wings of the Ukrainian right-conservative camp.

At the next elections in 2006 UNA gained 0,06% of the votes. The Ukrainian Conservative Party, created by the head of the Interregional Academy of Personnel Management George Shchekin, and known primarily for aggressive anti-Semitic rhetoric, gained only 0,09% of the votes.

I think it is important to note that such a marginality of the right-wing extremists is rather an exception than a rule for Eastern Europe. The political forces, like UNA or "Svoboda", in almost all countries of the region used to have quite a solid

support in the community. League of Polish Families in 2005, having won 7.97% of the votes entered into a coalition with the ruling party of Jaroslaw Kaczynski. The far-right Slovak National Party at a certain moment was a part of a ruling coalition. The party "Greater Romania" at the peak of its popularity received 19.48% of the votes. In the same row there are party "Attack" in Bulgaria, "Jobbik" (Party "For a Better Hungary"), "Rodina" (Homeland) and the Liberal Democratic Party in Russia, "Chrisi avgi" ("Golden Dawn") in Greece, having gained the support from 5 to 20% of the votes. In this context, the electoral helplessness of the Ukrainian right-wing extremists looks very revealing. Politologists Andreas Umland and Anton Shekhovtsov have taken an attempt to explain this anomaly, but I shall not go into their arguments.

By the end of the presidential term of Viktor Yushchenko almost all right-wing political forces that were trying to participate in the political process, apart from SNPU/AU "Svoboda", were in a serious crisis.

Thus, the most well-known right-wing extremist organization of the 1990-s, UNA-UNSO, though it's formal existence, after the repressions against activists decade ago due to the active participation in the riots during anti-government protests in 2001 and the subsequent splits, now does not represent a real force. The most recognizable and famous leaders of UNA walked away from organization activities. Dmitry Korchinskiy, who has largely laid the basis for the party's ideology, having organized all the activities of the party associated with violence, including the participation of organized groups of militants of the paramilitary Party organization the Ukrainian National Self-defense in local armed conflicts, now leads a dwarf outrageous group "Bratstvo" (Brotherhood), which exploits Orthodox rhetoric and is known mostly for their street performances of hooligan character. Another head of UNA, Andrey Shkil, being elected in 2002 to the Verkhovna Rada from the investigative isolation ward, where he was under investigation on charges of rioting during anti-government protests on March 9, 2001, has become one of the most active politicians in Yulia Tymoshenko's Bloc and significantly reduced the degree of radicalism in rhetoric. Finally, Eduard Kovalenko (the formal leader of the party in 2002–2005, when its real head Mykola Karpyuk was in custody) now heads a dwarf grouping The Social-Patriotic Assembly of the Slavs, active only on regional level in the Crimea and the Kherson oblast, the ideology of which is not based on the Ukrainian ethnic, but on a pan-Slavic nationalism and xenophobic rhetoric.

What is left out of UNA, is now headed by Igor Mazur and Yuriy Shukhevych – elder son of the head of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) Roman Shukhevych, who used brutal methods of fighting in a struggle for independence of Ukraine during and after the Second World War. UNA decided not to participate in the 2012 parliamentary elections by party lists, having proposed though to the op-

posing to the current government forces, united into Committee of resistance to dictatorship, to support the candidacy of Yuriy Shukhevych in majority constituency (in 2012, half of the deputies, as in 1998–2002, was elected in single member constituencies).



## 2. SNPU/AU “Svoboda”: General information

The organization was created in 1991 under the name of Social-National Party of Ukraine on the basis of pre-existing small groups. SNPU was officially registered in 1995. Yaroslav Andrushkiv has become a party leader, at the governing body there were also Andrei Parubiy, Yuriy Krivoruchko and Oleg Tyagnybok. The emblem of SNPU was the “wolf’s hook” used in the symbolism of the Waffen SS, widely known as the neo-Nazi graphic mark in the United States and some other Western European countries. Within the party, there was also a youth-paramilitary structure “Patriot Ukrainy”. In 1998, a bloc formed by SNPU got 0.17% of the votes. The only representative of the party – Oleg Tyagnybok – was elected to the Verkhovna Rada in 1998 and 2002 in a single-member constituency. In 2002, right-wing leader entered the parliamentary faction “Nasha Ukraina”, but was expelled from it in 2004 for aggressive chauvinistic and anti-Semitic statements. It is about a speech of Oleg Tyagnybok on mount Yavorina, which has received a wide publicity, where he paid tribute to the soldiers of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, who “fought with the Moskals, fought with the Germans, fought with the kikes and other scum that wanted to grab from us our Ukrainian State”. He proclaimed himself and his supporters the only force Moskal-Yid mafia is most afraid of. On the fact of that speech there had been initiated criminal proceedings against O.Tyagnybok under art. 161 of the Criminal code (“inciting ethnic hatred”), but after the Orange revolution, the case was closed without reaching the court.

Activists of “Patriot Ukrainy”, branch of SNPU, in particular, took an active part in mass disorders in Kiev in September 1993.

The first program of SNPU, adopted before the registration, declared Russia “the cause of all the ills of Ukraine” and stated that the struggle against “pro-Moscow influence” in the country is the primary task for the party. In promotional materials, the ideologists of SNPU were more candid, describing the confrontation with the “Moscow influence” as the race one. In publications of SNPU the Ukrainian nation was proudly called “the root of the white race”. Ukraine was understood as “an outpost of European civilization”, and Russia – as the “Asian hordes”. Ukraine, according to the statements of one of the leaders of SNPU (sub-

sequently departed to "Nasha Ukraina") Andrei Parubiy should "resist the aggression of harmful ideas of the Asian world, embodied by present-day Russia". Along with the Russophobia, the ideologists of SNPU profess anti-Westernism: in their point of view "internationalist Marxism and cosmopolitan liberalism are actually two sides of the same coin".

Ideology of SNPU of the 1990-s is almost identical to the theses of "Svoboda". Despite some softening of the official rhetoric in the 2000-s, the party is proud of continuity of its history and steadiness of the ideology.

According to the official pre-election program of AU "Svoboda" (parliamentary elections in 2006 and 2007), the party stands for the national proportional representation – i.e. professes the ideology, according to which the authorities must in proportion reflect the ethnic composition of the population, and, respectively, for the introduction of the column "nationality" in the Ukrainian passport (in the Soviet and post-Soviet word usage "nationality" means "ethnic origin"; this item was present in the passport in the Soviet period and was cancelled in the Ukrainian passports after the collapse of the USSR). Thus, in terms of "Svoboda's" official program, the opportunity to occupy this or that position should relate to the ethnic origin of the person.

Questions of history interpretation play a significant role for the party. Heroizing ambiguous legacy of fighters for Ukrainian independence in the mid-twentieth century, leaders and activists are working hard to prevent the deconstruction of the national heroic mythology. Thus, party activists have repeatedly disrupted the events dedicated to highlighting the role of UPA, for example, in the extermination of the Polish population in Volyn in 1943 (the so-called "Volyn massacre"). At the beginning of 2012, "Svoboda" made every effort to disrupt the series of public lectures of German historian Grzegorz Rosolinski-Liebe, who was interpreting ideology of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) in 1930s - 1940s as fascist. As a result of threats and pressure from "Svoboda" lectures were cancelled everywhere, where they were previously announced; the only appearance of the historian was held in the German Embassy in Kiev, accompanied by a picket of the activists of "Svoboda", claiming Rosolinski-Liebe as a "false heir of Goebbels".

Ethnocentric component of the ideology is central for "Svoboda". Other factors, such as social, are secondary to the party. The economic program of the party is developed poorly and looks rather amateurish. For populist goals, the party exploits the slogans of social protection and "fair" redistribution of super profits of "oligarchs" (of course, non-Ukrainian ethnic origin) among the Ukrainians.

In 2004, Oleg Tyahnybok placed himself at the head of a renewed and renamed party. SNPU then became known as the All-Ukrainian Union "Svoboda". "Rebranding" of the party was accompanied by a rejection of the symbols and the dissolution of the party paramilitary formation "Patriot Ukrainy". On the basis

of the paramilitary organization groups of SNPU, that had refused to recognize the decision (2004) of the management of the party on the dissolution of the paramilitary structures, there emerged a new neo-Nazi public organization with the same name – "Patriot Ukrainy". Looking ahead, I'd want to note that at the present moment its leaders are imprisoned on charges of involvement in serious crimes, while "Svoboda" provides full support for these neo-Nazis, and they officially join the ranks of the party.

Common assertion that the party and its leaders have experienced a significant evolution since SNPU times are confuted by "Svoboda" itself. The official propaganda of the party constantly emphasizes the continuity of the history of the organization and pledged allegiance to the very beginning of ideological principles. Thus, at the jubilee party congress in 2011, devoted to the twentieth anniversary of the organization, it was stressed that this was one of the few Ukrainian parties, which had 20 years of continuous history. "Rebranding" in 2004 was purely superficial and touched only symbols and, partly, rhetoric.

The ideological journal of SNPU "Orientiry" stated that "internationalist Marxism and cosmopolitan liberalism are in fact two sides of the same coin". Compare this with the text (2007) of the activist Alexander Ogorodnikov (in 2011 convicted of arson in the office of the "Party of Regions" in Odessa), posted on the official website of "Svoboda" under the eloquent title "Abandon liberalism until late": "Economy and industry are sold to multinational corporations – monsters of globalization, the oligarchs in regions plunder "Russ land", kikes with fatty faces sit and rob Ukrainian families with usury [...] In general, liberalism is purely kike ideology by means of which they determine their ethnic control over the countries of Europe and America! [...] We need our own Pinochet, who will exterminate the fifth column, will build "Ukraine for Ukrainians", will neutralize kikes from power..." I should admit the complete identity of the social-populist rhetoric of "Svoboda" and the Communists – but I will not go into this in detail, because the voters voted for the Social Nationalists not because of the credibility of their economic program.

### 3. Anti-Semitism and other forms of xenophobia

The “negative” component of mechanisms of ethno-political mobilization is more important for the party than the “positive” one, in latter it is hard to find someone else but “heroes” of OUN-UPA. Other Ukrainian politicians, such as sung in the national-romantic historiography Mikhail Grushevskiy, are perceived by “Svoboda” as “helpless liberals” and traitors. Meanwhile the party’s publications and websites are full of descriptions of enemy images that prevents the prosperity of the Ukrainian nation.

“The anti-Ukrainian regime” and related “oligarchs” seem to occupy the main place in that list (especially in the last two years). “Non-Ukrainian origin” of the leaders of the country is sometimes referred to, although most ethnic markers are placed less overtly, but comprehensibly enough for a permanent consumer of nationalistic propaganda materials. “The liberal West” and “Moscow” also constantly act as embodiment of malicious anti-Ukrainian forces.

Inside the country, the palm as an ethnic threat definitely belongs to the Muslims. Unifying with European peers and imitating them, “Svoboda” relies on the exploitation of migrantophobic and Islamophobic feelings of the population. During the presidential campaign in early 2010 antimigrant rhetoric was the result of attempts of Oleg Tyaghybok to find a social base in the South and East of the country, in regions where ethnic nationalism is not popular (unlike the Western provinces). Deputies from the party in the local councils prevented the issuing of permission for construction of mosques (for example, in Khmelnytskyi), and street party’s activists took part in Islamophobic actions (for example, in Lugansk).

Anti-Semitism, peculiar to a particular version of the Ukrainian ethnic nationalism, is used by the ideologists of the party in public rhetoric with caution, perhaps because it is Tyaghybok’s anti-Semitic rhetoric that caused his removal from the faction “Nasha Ukraina” in 2004 (see above).

It is often alleged that the hype in 2004 has forced the leader of “Svoboda” to restrain his anti-Semitic fervor. However, it did not prevent him in 2005 from signing a collective letter, containing the demand to ban Jewish organizations on the territory of Ukraine.

During the last years, the speakers of the party have been alleging that it was the Jews, who organized the famine in 1932-1933, calling their political oppo-

nents "kikes' mercenaries" and so on. Tyagnybok himself in response to concerns of the Israeli Foreign Ministry said that he respects the protection of Israel of the interests of its own people and calls on Israel to respect the choice of the Ukrainian nation. In the article "Bloody Christmas in the middle East" he bluntly condemned the counter-terrorism operation in Gaza.

The most straightforward mouthpiece of the anti-Semitic, as, however, and the neo-Nazi component of "Svoboda's" ideology at the moment, is a Lvovian Yuri Mikhalchishin. The publisher of collected articles of such "classics" as Goebbels and Röhm in his own translation (with the SNPU party symbol on the cover) is known, in particular, by his last year statement where he called the Holocaust "a bright period in the history of Europe". Mikhalchishin do not hesitate to throw up his right hand in "Sieg" "from heart to God", and his account in one of the social networks is called "Nachtigal88" ("88" in this combination – is common in neo-Nazi circles an encrypted term for "Heil Hitler"). Mikhalchishin's texts are very frank. Thus, the young man, who became a deputy, wrote: "What's wrong with legitimately elected representatives of the people claim a decree: property of the persons recognized as enemies of the revolution, subjects to forfeiture and transfer to low-income population groups? Who is worse off if such a decree is executed immediately? Revolutionary terror? As if today it is not the only possible way on the path of salvation of enslaved people from the invaders. The dictatorship of the revolutionary leadership? As if without it you can ask politely to behave like normal people, and make parasites return all the loot to the state and to all the working people..."

In 2011, "Svoboda" took an active part in the openly anti-Semitic campaign against the Hasidim (representatives of the branch of Orthodox Judaism), committing the annual pilgrimages to the city of Uman, Cherkassy region, where one of the most revered Hasidic tsaddiks (saints) – r. Nahman of Breslov – is buried. Visitors by their exotic appearance and poor orientation in the Ukrainian realities often became victims of anti-Semitic attacks and even more often – of a trivial crime.

Pilgrimage reaches its peak in the autumn, on Rosh Hashanah (new year), which, according to the Jewish religious calendar, occurred in 2011 on the evening of September 28-29. Each year on Rosh Hashanah Uman is visited by about 20 thousand of pilgrims, in 2011, in connection with the abolition of visa regime between Ukraine and Israel, the pilgrimage took the unprecedented character (according to the available data, in September Uman was visited by more than 25 thousand of pilgrims).

With summer there in Uman have begun active operations aiming to disrupt the autumn pilgrimage, a number of actions bearing anti-Semitic character took place. By September, antihisidic campaign has been supported not only by local,

but also by all-Ukrainian radical right-wing organizations. It is significant that from a certain moment "Svoboda" has become the main "engine" of the campaign.

On September 14, aggressive groups of local residents began to insult the Hasidim in the streets, shout anti-Semitic slogans, provoking pilgrims. There was a scuffle in which both parties claimed to have been attacked. The next day six of the Hasidim – participants of the clashes – were detained by police.

On September 25, activists of Ukrainian right-wing groups (first of all – AU "Svoboda" and "Svoboda's" youth organization "Sokol") tried to hold a march "Uman without Hasidim" within the "permanent campaign" of the same name. The official requirements of the campaign were: "to determine the status of the Hasidim; to make impossible the arrival of criminal elements; to introduce biometric control for visitors; prohibit the unauthorized construction for Hasidim; to recommend to visitors to stay at the certain places of worship; to forbid to disturb the peace of the Ukrainian population; to force the Hasidim to the observance of cleanliness".

On the eve of the meeting, the city was flooded with anti-Semitic leaflets. One poster called to come to action "If you are tired of aggression of strangers and scandals". Common graphical symbol of the campaign "Uman without Hasidim" was a crossed-out image of a stylized head of an "alien" with sidelocks and a bale. Perhaps, by the plan of logo's author, the silhouette might be associated with an alien from the same name movie, but many religious Jews recognized the pig in that silhouette (which is extremely offensive for Orthodox Jews). Arguing the need for that action, the chairman of the regional organization of "Svoboda" Tatiana Chernomaz contended that "the Hasidim come from countries where there is a bubonic plague and cholera, attack our guys with guns, behave rudely".

The meeting was appointed at a memorable stone to Gonta and Zalizniak (leaders of "Koliyivshchnyna" – peasant uprising in 18-th century, accompanied by the massacre of Polish and Jewish population of Uman), the site of which is planned to establish a monument to these ambiguous characters. After that, it was planned to hold the march. Three days before the action the Cherkassy Regional Administrative Court at the suit, submitted by the administration of the city of Uman, had prohibited to conduct any action from September 23 to October 10 due to fears that the radical right-wing activities might provoke a violation of public order and cause conflicts between radical right-wing activists and religious Jews.

However, on September 25, protesters arrived from Cherkassy and Kiev on buses (hired by central organization "Svoboda"), and tried to hold the event in the "reduced" form. The rally was represented as a meeting of voters with the deputies of local councils, and the march – as "a walk through the city". Part of the participants wore facemasks. The march was headed by the leaders of "Svoboda" – by the head of Kyiv city organization Andrey Ilyenko and Deputy Chairman

of the party Andrei Mohnyk. The participants of the march were blocked in the center of the city by police, the most active were arrested (sixty-seven people were detained, including eleven local residents).

Responding to a question of anti-Semitism after a march, the leader of "Svoboda" Oleg Tyagnybok said: "This is just ridiculous. Visitor comes to me, breaks me all the furniture in the house, shits in the kitchen, creating a mess. I ask this guest to put things in order... And you accuse me of anti-Semitism?" It is significant that later in the interview, he claimed that the authorities must conduct some monitoring of those people who come from countries, "where various viral infections are now dominating". According to him, this problem is "actually an issue of national security".

It is significant that after the clash on September 25 "Svoboda" in its public propaganda has made an emphasis on the fact that the confrontation took place between "the power and its repressive organs" from one side and "peaceful Ukrainian citizens" from the other. Anti-Semitic component, which gave, in fact, the reason for the attempts to hold a march, left on the second plan. In this vein there has been sustained a special press conference held by the functionaries of "Svoboda" on September 27 in Cherkassy, in a similar vein, Andrey Ilyenko commented on the incident during the breakdown of the political debate in Kiev Goethe-Institute of September 29, 2011.

From other traditional Ukrainian ethnic minorities, attacked by the party, there are Russians, Romanians, Poles, Hungarians – the representatives of those nations, whose state institutions at a certain historical period occupied the certain part of the territory of modern Ukraine, and actions of which are interpreted today by "Svoboda" as imperialist towards Ukraine.

Thus, for example, leaders of local organizations of the party in 2011-2012 have participated in acts of vandalism against the Hungarian monument on Verecke pass (Transcarpathian region), through which, according to the official Hungarian historiography, Finno-Ugric tribes in the year 895 penetrated into Europe.

Personally Oleg Tyagnybok exerted all efforts to disrupt the opening after the restoration of the Lychakiv cemetery in Lviv (by the efforts of the Polish side in the cemetery there was immortalized the memory of Poles killed in the Ukrainian-Polish armed conflict, 1919).

As it was stated above, in recent years the migrantophobic rhetoric has acquired more and more significance. It did not bring to Oleg Tyagnybok any electoral dividends in the 2010 election, but secured to him the legal space for a slightly disguised xenophobia, as well as the support of street youth professing subcultural racism in the Southern and Eastern regions of the country, which could become important while arranging resonant public events.

The support of youth subcultural groups, such as the Nazi-skinheads or football hooligans, is extremely important for the party. In the 1990-s the party went beyond the Western regions and entrenched in the capital, primarily through recruiting youth activists from the neo-Nazi skinheads. A key role in this process belonged to Oles' Vahniy, the former SNPU leader in Kiev, who had repeatedly held criminal responsibility for acts of violence.

An extremely aggressive rhetoric of the leaders of “Svoboda” against members of the LGBT community also bears sequential nature. In 2010, party activists violently disrupted the campaign for gender equality, which was held in Lvov in the days of equality between men and women. In 2012, “Svoboda” has become one of the major forces that wrecked Kiev LGBT Pride as a public action. Deputy Chairman of the Party Andrei Mohnyk in response to accusations of homophobia said: “The charges are taking place, but we do not think that’s bad [...] We are against the propaganda of sodomy [...] what’s wrong with that?”

The representatives of the Communist and pro-Russian forces (from the point of view of the party’s ideologists, these two elements of the ideology are interrelated) are also the target for “Svoboda”. The party is struggling with this “enemy” at different levels – from the legislative initiatives on prohibition of the Communist ideology to the street attacks on participants of public events (for example, 9 may 2011 in Lvov, 4 and 7 November 2011 in Kiev).



## 4. The path to the Verkhovna Rada

Paradoxically, not being able to get from its active (albeit unapparent) participation in the Orange Revolution any practical dividends, “Svoboda” just won. By 2005 – 2006, “Svoboda” has found itself in a very fortunate situation. It was not represented in the bodies of power of the victorious orange coalition. Due to this fact, it was faced with no necessity of solving those hard questions, the new power was faced with unexpected severity. As a result, “Svoboda” was not discredited in the eyes of voters by involving itself into ensuing alliances, disputes, divisions and conflicts within the orange coalition, which provoked deep frustration among the national-democratic part of the society.

In 2006, “Svoboda” for the first time took part in the elections under that name, with a new leader and the modified symbols, having received 0.36% of the votes. At the off-year parliamentary elections in 2007 “Svoboda”, the only right-wing group represented in the ballot, won 0.76% of the votes.

Then Tyagnybok took part in the early elections of Kyiv mayor, having received 1.37% of the capital’s votes.

The unexpected for the majority of observers “Svoboda’s” breakthrough took place at the early elections to the Ternopol regional Council in the spring of 2009. The party has received 34.69% of the votes and won 50 out of 120 seats in the Council. Of course, the success of “Svoboda” in Ternopol was due to exclusively local and situational factors. The legitimacy of the election already at the moment of running was doubtful. Many participants of the political process confidently asserted that the result would be cancelled. Major players on the national-democratic and social-populist field, like the Bloc of Yulia Tymoshenko, refused to take part in them. That has led to a phenomenal level of support for strange political projects. This applies not only to “Svoboda”, for example, 14% of votes, received by the “United Center”, were also left unexplained.

However, “Ternopol breakthrough” led to an important psychological turning point. “Svoboda” then was no longer perceived as a fundamentally unpromising party. Voters and potential sponsors began to perceive it seriously.

A voter needed new faces, and “Svoboda” had successfully worked out the model of protest voting. A good point in the party’s propaganda was the thesis that “we have not been in power”. The ideologists of the party said something

like this: "All, who were in power, have already disappointed you, and we need to perform the rotation of political elites, because without this change, there will be no political situation. Give us a chance – you have seen the others". The phenomenon of search for new faces has provided support in the 2010 presidential election to such inane political projects, as Arseniy Yatsenyuk and partly Sergey Tigipko.

The success of "Svoboda", since 2009, is primarily credited by a general political context, rather than party's strategy. As in Ternopol in 2009, and in other Western regions in 2010 "Svoboda" was supported just because all the other parties of the "Pro-Ukrainian" direction, both radical and moderate, had actually been self-annihilated. After several years of orange power, it has become almost a shame to vote for "Nasha Ukraina". BYuT has lost its political face to such an extent in those endless coalition intrigues that it was unclear what exactly you vote for, if you vote for BYuT. The rest of the parties have either been dissolved in the broad coalition or have simply disappeared in a crisis of national "post-orange" democratic movement, or have failed to develop a successful strategy, which "Svoboda" has been able to do.

After the local Ternopol triumph, Tyagnybok took an active part in the presidential elections. The leader of "Svoboda" obtained the worse result he and his supporters might have expected. He gained 1.43% of the votes. And this is despite the total disappointment of society in the national-democrats and personally Viktor Yushchenko.

The next stage of the electoral history of "Svoboda" is the local elections in autumn 2010. There "Svoboda" has shown very impressive results, especially in the Western regions. Thus, in Lvov regional Council candidates from the party won 41 out of 116 seats, in Ivano-Frankovsk – 17 out of 114. Deputies from "Svoboda" were also elected to the regional councils of Volyn, Rovno, Chernovtsy, Kiev and Khmelnytsky regions.

Thus, the electoral success of "Svoboda" is explained, first, by the departure of right-wing radical competitors from the political arena, secondly, by the system crisis of moderate national-democratic movement after the disappointment in the leaders of the Orange revolution, and third, by the coming to power of Viktor Yanukovich.

The local elections 2010 took place in a completely new political context. It is this context that finally caused the success of the party in parliamentary elections in 2012.

## 5. Freedom in Parliament

The official results of the parliamentary elections, held on 28 October 2012, were announced on November 10-11. According to the CEC data, “Svoboda” has received 10.44% of the votes on the party system. That means that the first 25 candidates from the list of that political force has become MPs. 12 more “Svoboda” nominees were elected in majority districts.

“Svoboda” has demonstrated an unprecedented result for a traditionally regional “pro-Bandera” political party. In Kiev, the party has received more than 17% of the votes. The party has confidently overcome the 5% barrier in many areas of Central and even Eastern Ukraine (for example, in Sumy oblast). Two deputies from the party were elected in single-member districts in the left-bank Ukraine – in Kiev and Poltava region. At the local elections in 2010, “Svoboda” unsurely crossed Zbruch, having achieved success in Khmelnytskyi and Kiev regions.

What is the secret of this success of Ukrainian ultra-nationalists? I have already slightly addressed to this issue above, now – a little more in detail. Of course, as in any other case, for the benefit of radicals there was a complex set of factors. From its part, “Svoboda” did everything it could – it refused from the neo-Nazi symbols and shocking names, it nominated a number of prominent speakers from its ranks, it actively worked at the street level and it formed a mobile all-Ukrainian activist network. However, external factors, relating to the changes of the political context in the country as a whole, seriously affected the situation.

First, in the last years of the presidential tenure of Viktor Yushchenko there was felt disappointment of the voter in the moderate national-democratic parties. The voter, tired of boring parties and brands, which had failed to justify his trust, was looking for a “new political person”, who could personalize the expectations for change and improvement. In parliamentary elections in 2012 image of the “new person” in politics was most successfully exploited by Vitaliy Klitschko, but part of the political dividends from the query on the new forces was also received by Oleg Tyagnybok.

Second, after the election victory of Viktor Yanukovich there occurred an injection of artificial confrontation in society on culture, language and identity. The authority party’s policy was perceived by many Ukrainian voters as anti-national, especially in regard to the “betrayal of Ukrainian national interests in favor

of Russia", as well as anti-Ukrainian position in the cultural policy of the country. In that situation, the radical rhetoric of Ukrainian nationalists was perceived as relevant by people, who had been moderate and far from supporting "Svoboda" just a few years ago. It seems to me that those, who claim that ardent Russophobes Yuriy Mikhalchishin and Irina Farion are quite a legitimate and balanced response to Dmitry Tabachnik and Vadim Kolesnichenko, do not adequately assess the situation. However, considering that the latter two represent power, feelings of citizens, who entrust the neo-Nazis with the protection of their identity from this, as it seems to be a very real threat, in general, can be understood. Besides, a significant part of the electorate has voted for "Svoboda" not because of its nationalist nature, but simply because the party has the image of the radical opposition. In single-mandate districts people voted for its representatives not of special love to the ideology of social nationalism, but simply because they were agreed candidates of the "United opposition" put forward by "Svoboda's" quota, according to the agreement with "Batkivshchina" (Fatherland). And in such status candidates of "Svoboda" were significantly ahead of, for example, their competitors from "UDAR" (even in Kiev!), as Vitaliy Klitschko did not agree with the "United opposition" on the harmonization of all candidates by district.

A short period after the elections have passed, but the new Parliament has not yet started to work, was a test for "Svoboda". Commentators and observers, sympathetic to this political force, cautiously assumed that immediately after the announcement of the preliminary results of the voting, as a parliamentary party, "Svoboda" would necessarily evolve in the direction of the moderate national-democratic force. In particular, the well-known political analyst Alexei Garan stated that street troublemakers, being under the dome of the Rada, would inevitably accept civilized rules of the game. As an argument, there was cited the fact that during the election campaign "Svoboda" carefully avoided anti-Semitic rhetoric. Even the annual autumn pilgrimage of Orthodox Jews from all over the world to Uman, which had caused such a surge of negativity in the previous year 2011, in the pre-election period was ignored. In this regard, immediately after the election there has been put forward an assumption of a possible forthcoming split of "Svoboda" to moderate and radical factions.

Today, we can confidently assert that the ideology, rhetoric and activities of "Svoboda" if have only undergone changes, but only in the direction of radicalization. The elections have passed, and one may not fear any scandal. Deputy mandates in the pocket provide immunity from law enforcement officials. This gave free rein to the key leaders of this recently street party, prone to hooliganism and vandalism. Finally, Tyahnybok and his team simply have no real motivation for the evolution towards a moderate national democracy: in the conditions of total polarization of society voter only supports manifestations of radicalism

from nationalists. Actually, they were voted for to see radical actions and hear radical statements – and functionaries of "Svoboda" have decided not to deny themselves and their voters this pleasure. Back in the "test" transition period between the announcement of the election results and the first meeting of the newly elected Parliament, "Svoboda" ran from the takeoff into an ugly scandal in connection with the anti-Semitic remarks of one of the deputies.

Igor Miroshnichenko, a former sports commentator, and now – the head of the Sumy regional organization of "Svoboda", a newly elected MP, harshly commented childhood memories of an American actress Mila Kunis, born in Chernovtsy. According to the tabloid "The SUN", Hollywood beauty, in particular, told reporters that while at school she had seen anti-Semitic inscriptions, and one of her schoolfriends even noticed a swastika drawn on a chair, that made her return home in tears. Besides, Mila Kunis reminded of the Holocaust on that territory and of the fact that "in Russia" at that time there "was not allowed to confess religion". "Obviously, this is a country that does not want you", – summed up the actress her story about the difficult childhood in the Soviet Chernovtsy.

Words of Mila Kunis, of course, can be interpreted differently. One can well understand people who adopted her approval, to say the least, with perplexity. Kunis family left in 1991. That is really Chernovtsy in the late 1980-s and early 1990-s that was not the city, the Jewish population of which would have real grounds for fear of anti-Semitism. At the time of departure, the future actress, whose name at that time was Milena, was a little girl, and it is likely that a new version, formulated, for example, by her parents to explain the departure, could have layered over her real memories, or simply her point of view was formed later under the influence of common stereotypes.

However, it should be noted that the article in "The SUN", as far as it can be estimated, just retells an interview with the actress, made in 2005, having exaggerated it to some extent. In the quotes from the interview of Kunis there is, for example, no assertion, reflected in the headline, that she has escaped from Ukraine, fleeing from intolerance. The information as if Mila was forced to hide she was Jewish for fear of persecution was also found in the comments of journalists, but not in her words. Taken out of context from an old interview in "The SUN's", Mila Kunis quotes rather point to the absence of external forms of manifestations of religiosity in her childhood in the Soviet Union. From the full text of the interview it should be quite clear – by answering questions about her own religion, she only describes the usual Soviet situation, where children were brought up with "a sense of Jewishness inside", but without the celebration, such as bar mitzvah.

"She is not Ukrainian, but Yid by birth. She is proud of it, and let the star of David help her. She made no effort to say a single positive word about the country, where she has been born. Therefore, it is hard to me to take her as ours. Let her

love America or Israel, but there is no need to associate her with Ukraine!" – wrote an angry Igor Miroshnichenko in comments in the social network facebook.

In social networks, such statements, causing controversy and emotional reaction, are spread rapidly. The amount of feedback – comments, expressions of support or opposition – on these sharp statements of Miroshnichenko, has been growing exponentially, both from the "ordinary" users of social networks and from the part of journalists, the public and political activists. The topic "Igor Miroshnichenko against Mila Kunis" has remained one of the most discussed topics in the Internet for several days, having flown from there onto the pages of publications and TV screens, creating less and less adequate response.

The greatest public attention was attracted to the fact of the use of the word "Yid" in speech of the deputy.

Of course, the use of the word "Yid" is a sign of personal anti-Semitism, as well as incontinence, bad language culture and lack of upbringing. When these qualities are demonstrated by the MP, it is, of course, unpleasant, and this describes not in the best way both his personality and the society, where sports commentators with such views may become lawmakers.

However, in my opinion, the quoted statement is demonstrative not only by its incorrect form, but also by a very interesting content. Miroshnichenko's message is a vivid example of "exclusive" understanding of a nation, inherent to the ideology of "Svoboda". Its representatives seem to really believe that only persons, ethnic Ukrainian by origin, have the right to say something about Ukraine, to consider Ukraine their Motherland.

This statement is the quintessence of what "Svoboda" is dangerous for the country. The nationalism of the "People's Movement of Ukraine" (Rukh), for example, bore emphasized "inclusive" character: representatives of all nations, residing in the country and consider it their homeland, were accepted as the part of the Ukrainian political nation. This model of a civil nation has been laid into the Foundation of modern Ukrainian statehood, which is embodied in the Constitution of the country, though in a little bit obsolete Soviet terms, talking about "the Ukrainian people – citizens of Ukraine of all nationalities". On a symbolic level, the same principle is enshrined in the Ukrainian passports that have no options to specify ethnicity. The concept of a civil nation, consolidating society, is that in Ukraine everyone is a Ukrainian, that is not contrary to the ethnic and cultural diversity of society. In his emotional reply deputy from "Svoboda" reacts to irritants with the spirit, dictated by the party's ideology. The same logic of "exclusive" understanding of the Ukrainian nation makes them demand the return of the section "nationality" back to the passports.

It is the fact that the American actress is "Jew by birth", makes her a stranger to Ukraine in the eyes of the MP. I would be willing even to understand the

logic, due to which, in a moment of irritation, you can require not to "implicate" to Ukraine the person, who has left this country. This hypothetical emigrant has chosen the citizenship of another country, and we, its former compatriots, have no moral right to be proud of its achievements, as well as should not be ashamed of stupidity it allows in speech. But for Miroshnichenko Kunis has nothing to do with Ukraine not because she has left the country, choosing to be an American, but because of her origin. Expressing his surprise afterwards – "well, what is this fuss about?", – Miroshnichenko with artless candor decrypts the idea, saying that under the internet pictures of Mila Kunis there was a comment "beautiful girl, a wonderful actress, but also Ukrainian", and he "just said, that she is not Ukrainian, she is Yid by origin".

After the public became outraged by the deputy's use of the word "Yid", a variety of speakers from "Svoboda", including MPs, rushed excitedly to defend teammate, convincing people in normativity of usage of this word when denoting Jewish ethnicity.

Some of them, however, blabbed out even more than Miroshnichenko. For example, the official party spokesman Alexander Aronets, launched into a digression on the "Yids, who do not recognize the Holodomor". Besides he called the American actress "little Yidess". The original contribution of the party spokesman to the strategy of defense of Miroshnichenko was the idea that the use of the word "Yid", as opposed to the Russism "Jew", promotes the integration of Ukraine into the European cultural space.

In general, conversation on the admissibility or inadmissibility of the use of the word "Yid" and the difference in the emotional shades between its use in Russian and Ukrainian speech has been held by "Svoboda" for a long time – from the moment when the party leader Oleg Tyagnybok gave his famous apologetics to a struggle against "Yids, Moskals and other scum". Having passed to the Parliament from a single-mandate constituency, Irina Farion, who is considered to be a specialist in the field of Philology, while protecting Miroshnichenko, has revived the text that eight years ago was intended to justify not a less bold word-usage of the party leader. Referring to the literary works of the XIX century, a "distinguished scholar of our time" I. Farion argued that the "Yid" is a standard word in the Ukrainian language, and "little Yidess" is even an affectionate form.

I really do not think that we need any expertise to make a judgment whether the word "Yid" is insulting or not. Enough, perhaps, to say that a large part of the Jewish community considers it to be insulting both in Russian and Ukrainian speech. None of the modern Ukrainian language dictionaries confirms the truth of I. Miroshnichenko, A. Aronets, I. Farion and the party leader – O. Tyagnybok. The latter once again did not miss the opportunity to say, to my view, in a not quite appropriate context that: "Svoboda" is not an anti-Semitic party, and the word "Yid"

---



does not bear negative connotations". Bears, bears, – argue dictionaries, describing it as either offensive or as obsolete. In the texts of a century ago, it could just be a neutral term, but not today. As notes the statement of the Vaad (The Association of Jewish Organizations and Communities) of Ukraine, made on this occasion, "after the appeal to 'the Yids of Kiev', which precessed shootings at Babiy Yar, references to the language-use of Taras Shevchenko and Ivan Franko look false, hypocritical and unacceptable". Yes, in the western regions of the country, partly under the influence of the Polish language, in part because of the archaic existing of spoken dialects in the rural areas, this word, used in everyday speech, indeed often bears no offensive sense. However, in general, the statement that the word "Yid" bears no negative emotional colorings is totally untrue. Besides, it is doubtful, that Galician regional dialectal connotation could really (and not as hypocritical justification) become decisive for the head of the organization "Svoboda" in Sumy.

During the same short "test" period, separating elections and the first day of the new parliament, the party managed to participate in a number of unattractive actions. The leader of the Kharkov branch of "Svoboda" Igor Shvaika, also elected as MP on the the party lists, was an organizer of an unauthorized march, participants of which threw up their right arm in a Nazi salute and sang a song, containing the call to "stab the Yids with knives". I. Shvayka and A. Aronets then tried to write off extremism to "separate masked provocateurs", and refused to take any responsibility for their actions. However, the video of the march shows that about two-thirds of the participants cover their faces with masks, and "provocateurs", who were singing the above-mentioned song, and who were raising their right hands, peacefully and kindly communicate with other participants of the action, including the leaders of the column.

A. Aronets was also related to the following "anti-Semitic" scandal that had occurred just a few months later. On April 13 this year, during the cooking show "Smak" of the First Channel Russia a showman Ivan Urgant said an instantly became known phrase – "I has chopped greens as red commissar the residents of the Ukrainian village". This extremely incorrect statement, insulting and cynical, sparked a wave of indignation. A condemning statement was even made by the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry. "In the modern world such jokes are considered bad manners and disrespectful to the memory of millions of victims of the totalitarian regime," the statement noted. Ivan Urgant in his microblog twitter apologized: "I apologize to all residents of Ukraine, who were offended by my inappropriate comment". However, the showman, unfortunately, did not stop and continued in a clearly inappropriate ironic form: "As a self-punishment I'm going to prepare in this show only borsch, curd dumplings and dumplings up to 2018 year inclusive. And all my children, who will be born from now on, regardless of gender, will be



named Bogdans". After that, however, he apologized again, and quite seriously, and not in a blog, but on television: "Believe me, I did not want to offend anybody, I just said stupidity without thinking".

Although all of the commentators were unanimous in condemning the statements of the Russian showman, it occurred only to representatives of "Svoboda" to associate incorrect jokes with his origin. It is no wonder – who else would think to say that ignorant fool says dirty stupidity solely by virtue of his ethnic origin? Meanwhile, in the opinion of "Svoboda", which can be considered official, it is true. A. Aronets wrote on his page on facebook: "...Urgant, Yid by birth, is the ideological Moscow chauvinist and Ukrainophobe. And if it comes to those times again, he would easily wear the uniform of the "red commissars" and would "chop Ukrainians like the greens", as his grandfathers and great-grandfathers did. [...] And who will then say that ethnicity doesn't matter?"

A. Aronets is the press-secretary of this political force. His words can be interpreted as the official position of the party. Thus, we can say that the ideology of "Svoboda" implies that all the Jews by origin (or rather "the Yids" – members of the party insist on this formulation) hate Ukrainians, and are the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of "red commissars", killing the Ukrainians. These words contain a quintessence of a concept of "Yid-Bolshevism" or "Yid-commune", popular throughout Central and Eastern Europe in the interwar period, according to which, Jews are identified with the Russian communism. There is no need to explain how important this idea was for the preparation of the conceptual basis of the destruction of Jews by the Nazis and their accomplices.

Also, there is probably no need to analyze in details the incorrectness of accusations of modern Jews in that their "ancestors" had been killing Ukrainians (note also that, unlike the nationalists, Urgant did not use ethnic terms, he did not say "Ukrainians", he said "residents of the Ukrainian village"). It is quite obvious that during the civil war the ethnic factor was not the marker for Bolsheviks to justify violent actions. But the Jews during the bloody pogroms of the civil war were killed by ethnicity.

The fact that the most eloquent reaction of the representatives of "Svoboda" to the statements of Urgant did not receive equally wide resonance, as similar (perhaps even more soft) statements in the address of Mila Kunis, is solely due to the less famous status of the Russian showman, as well as the unanimous public condemnation of his statements, indeed inadmissible.

