Will Western Ukraine Become the new Northern Ireland?

On 15.10.2015, a "March of heroes" was held in Kiev to mark the Day of the Defender of Ukraine, a holiday established by President Poroshenko which falls on the anniversary of the founding of the UPA. During the march, Nazi symbols were seen on display. In this context, the sociological research group "Rejtynh" reported that in Ukraine more and more people are perceiving the genocidal UPA formations as heroes. For the first time in the history of the UPA, supporters are more than mere opponents. I talk with Dr. Andrzej Zapałowski, a Polish State Security expert, historian and lecturer, about how the situation in Ukraine is likely unfold.

Why does the Ukrainian nation have this great desire to cultivate parts of their criminal history, such as the OUN and the UPA, for example?

I would like to emphasize one thing – if we refer to the issue of genocide, we must identify clearly that we are talking about Ukrainians, but only those from Western Ukraine. This matter does not concern Central and Eastern parts of the country. We cannot perceive the whole of Ukraine through the prism of what Ukrainians did in Western Ukraine. Another thing which is very important is that the UPA leadership, which in the earlier incarnation of OUN, collaborated with Germans in 1942, actively participating in the genocide of the Jewish population. They practiced their killing skills on their Jewish neighbours, and a year later used this knowledge to kill Polish nationals in Volyn. So this primary element in this community is very worrying. Today, the youth in Western Ukraine are unable to understand that the matter of the struggle for national liberation is one thing and another is referring to the tradition of the original murder of their neighbours. The first were the Jews. This is a legacy that really brings this community closer to some primitive reflexes rather than to a civilized society.

Ukrainian nationalists are increasingly speaking about Poles as their friends, saying that currently they are 'new Banderovites' and they 'like' Poles. Is this true?

The situation Right Sector is in at present, it has no choice but to take a tactical stance in relation to Poland. Currently, their main enemy is Russia and so Poland is now a friend. Why? Because Poles naively, selflessly fight for the interests of Ukraine, incurring only the cost of the aid. Today, nationalists in Western Ukraine are looking for a strategic friend. It turns out that, because of border issues, only Poland is likely to be their ally, as Hungary definitely cares more about the rights of the Hungarian minority in Ukraine. The Hungarian State clearly expresses its anti-Bandera attitude. What happens when, for example, in the event of federalization, western Ukraine secures very high autonomy? If Russia takes control of people's minds in Ukraine, then it will want to push out Western Ukraine from the area of its influence because they no longer want Western Ukraine. So Western Ukrainians have only one way out, and this is Poland. Therefore, at this point they need to edit out all territorial claims in relation to Poland from their political programme, along with any anti-Polish statements. Because in the end it may turn out that Poland is the only neighbour through which they can have some cooperation with Western Europe. For some time now, I have watched feigned gestures from Right Sector in relation to Poland. They want to drop anchor here, on the basis of cooperation with some Polish national organizations. These nice gestures are purely a technical action on their part.

Right Sector enabled a recent attack on an institution which issues Ukrainian documents. As a result, 8000 Ukrainian identity documents fell into the hands of ISIS. Will Ukrainian nationalists therefore
cooperate with ISIS?

At the time of the annexation of Crimea, representatives of these Tatar organizations, which in Russia were recognized as terrorist organizations, fled from Crimea. A substantial group of these people were given premises and stopped in Lviv, in Western Ukraine. Chechens also fought on the side of Ukrainian nationalists, and were really involved in terrorist attacks in Moscow or Budyonnovsk. Besides, as one of the leaders of this organisation boasted, twice he crossed the Polish border illegally to get to meetings of the group in Denmark. This could not be done without the organizational support and perhaps even administrative support in Western Ukraine. So it is clear that this cooperation has been active for over a year, and especially at this time it will further develop as a result of the fact that Russia has started to intervene in Syria.

Do you allow for a scenario in which Ukraine experiences something like a revolution?

In the event of an outbreak of a social revolution in Ukraine, nationalists will definitely want to take over these movements. Please note that there is an estimated hundred thousand automatic firearms in Ukraine, outside the control of the State, and which is likely to be under the control of the nationalists. Approximately sixteen thousand soldiers have deserted from Donbas to the Ukrainian side, and most of them took a gun with them. So there is potential in Ukraine for a public uprising on the social background. The worst case scenario, which I fear is likely to happen, is that there will be a civil war and a real threat in the form of penetration or attempts to create logistics for some radical movements in Poland. People who remain in Ukraine with nothing to live on and with weapons will become involved in organized crime.

Are Ukrainian nationalists able to take over the governments in Kiev?

In Ukraine, as it is today, there is no chance of this. Why? It is the only country in Europe where about a hundred oligarchic families govern the entire State. These people treat Ukraine as their area of influence, which they can divvy up as in business if they have to. The seizure of power by Ukrainian nationalists in any form would be associated with what nationalists say in their political programs. First of all, these are social circles, so they want to get wealth back and socialization of the means of production. Therefore nationalists beyond certain limits of influence will be the enemy of the ruling oligarchs. For this reason, I don't predict this to happen in the whole of Ukraine. Since the oligarchs can simply tactically begin to cooperate with Russia, and Russia absolutely does not wish for morbidly and fanatically anti-Russian circles to hold a substantial part of power over Ukraine.

Can Western Ukraine break away from Ukraine, considering this part of Ukraine is definitely pro-Bandera?

I fear that the process of forcing out Western Ukraine will continue. Please remember that in February 2014, years before the constitutional assassination in relation to President Yanukovych, Lviv authorities publicly declared that if Yanukovych remained in power the whole region of western Ukraine would leave Ukraine and strike for independence. There, such an awareness exists. Up until the Eighties, the chief adviser to the cell of CIA was Mykola Łebed. This is the person who was in the government of Ukrainian nationalists. He was one of those people who took a political decision on the genocide of Poles in Volyn and later worked for the US government. The United States use Ukrainian nationalists in the fight against Russia. For me, Ukrainian nationalists coming to power is only possible in western Ukraine - should they fall into the process of becoming autonomous or completely exit from Ukraine, and I am afraid that this process of pushing out western Ukraine will continue. The area around the Ukrainian-Polish border may then become territory where various terrorist groups will penetrate. Assassinations could take place. In the event of any action by oligarchs against nationalists, armed groups in the framework of escape can penetrate frontier areas in order to hide. Here you can list an entire catalog of threats to national security. We will have to deal with the development in western Ukraine of a situation we had in Northern Ireland. So that means a creeping conflict which is very real and this conflict could spread to the entire border area.

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