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The far right, the Euromaidan, and the Maidan massacre in Ukraine

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Abstract

This study examines the role of the far right in the Euromaidan in Ukraine, primarily in the Maidan massacre and other key cases of violence. The involvement of far-right organizations in these crucial events in the Ukrainian and world politics has been politicized and polarized in Ukraine, the West, and Russia. This study analyzes various data sources, such as online live streams and TV broadcasts, videos, broadcasts of the Maidan massacre trials, the database of court decisions in Ukraine, media reports, and field research on the Maidan. The findings reveal that radical nationalist and neo-Nazi organizations had significant but minority representation among the Maidan leadership and protesters. However, the analysis shows that the far-right organizations and football ultras played a key role in political violence such as attempting to seize the presidential administration and the parliament. It reveals involvement of the Right Sector in violent clashes with the Berkut special police force during the highly publicized dispersal of Maidan protesters on November 30, 2013. The Right Sector and Svoboda had crucial roles in the violent overthrow of the Yanukovych government, in particular, in the Maidan massacre of the protesters and the police.

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1 | RESEARCH QUESTION AND DIVERGENT NARRATIVES CONCERNING THE CONTEMPORARY FAR RIGHT IN UKRAINE

The main purpose of this article is to examine the role of the far right in Ukraine during the Euromaidan and the Maidan massacre. These events are the most significant and the most controversial ones in politics in Ukraine since its independence in 1991. They also affected the politics of other countries, such as Russia and the United States, as well as international politics. They ultimately led or contributed to various extent to the Russian annexation of Crimea, the civil war in Donbas, Russian military intervention, the conflict between Russia and the West, and the Ukrainian-conflict related impeachment hearings against the US President Trump (Black & Johns, 2016; Katchanovski, 2015a, 2016a; Kudelia, 2016; Pikulicka-Wilczewska & Sakwa, 2015; Sakwa, 2015).

The research question of this study is as follows: What was the involvement of the far right in the Euromaidan and the Maidan massacre? This issue has a direct bearing on understanding the origins of the conflict in Ukraine and conflict between Russia and the West from an academic perspective. In contrast to their historical antecedents, the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, the far-right in contemporary Ukraine has not been well researched and the number of the academic studies examining the far right, especially their involvements in the Euromaidan and the Maidan massacre is very limited. This issue is also important because of sharply divergent narratives propagated by the governments and the media in Ukraine and the West on the one hand, and Russia on the other hand. The governments and the mainstream media in Western countries, the Maidan opposition, and then the Maidan government in Ukraine generally either presented the role of the far right in the Euromaidan as marginal or ignored the issue. Euromaidan has been typically presented as a democratic and peaceful mass-protest movement which was led by pro-Western parties and overthrew the authoritarian and pro-Russian government in a revolution, which was often called as the “Revolution of Dignity.”

The governments and the mainstream media in Ukraine and the West, with a few exceptions, attributed major cases of violence during the Euromaidan to the Viktor Yanukovich government, the government forces, government-hired “titushki,” or agents provocateurs working for Yanukovich or the Russian government. Specifically, they almost universally attributed the violent dispersal of Euromaidan protesters on November 30, 2013 to a Yanukovich order and presented it as one-sided violence by the Berkut special police force against peaceful student protesters. Similarly, the killings of Maidan protesters in January and February 2014 were almost universally attributed to the orders of Yanukovich, his internal affairs and security ministers, government snipers, and/or Berkut special police force. Other major cases of violence, such as attacks on the presidential administration on December 1, 2013, the parliament on January 2014, the parliament and the headquarters of the Party of Regions on February 18, 2014 were blamed on agents provocateurs or far right organizations acting as agents provocateurs for the Yanukovich government or the Russian government.

For instance, Open Society Institute (OSI) documents, that were hacked and made public, apparently by the Russian intelligence, revealed that the U.S. ambassador to Ukraine at least partially agreed with a statement by George Soros that the Right Sector was a Russian FSB plot aimed at destabilizing Ukraine.¹ In a letter signed by many researchers, journalists and other commentators were asked to refrain from commenting on the far right in Ukraine during the Euromaidan. This petition was accompanied by a statement claiming that Dmytro Korchynsky,

the leader of a far right Bratstvo organization in Ukraine, was in fact a Russia-linked provocateur in “supposedly far right attack” of the presidential administration on December 1, 2013.² However, there is no reliable evidence to support such claims. Besides, these radical nationalist and neo-Nazi organizations formed their own military formations and fought on the Maidan government side during the war in Donbas.

In contrast, Russian and separatist politicians and the media, former President Yanukovych and members of his government after the Euromaidan often labeled the Euromaidan as a “fascist coup” and the Maidan government as a “fascist junta” organized by the U.S. government. Sergey Lavrov, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russian Federation, stated that the Russian government had evidence that the Right Sector coordinated “sniper” shootings” during the Maidan massacre and it was claimed that the U.S. government maintained contacts with the Right Sector during the Euromaidan and that the U.S. representatives visited the Right Sector location from which this organization coordinated the shootings. However, no evidence to verify these claims has been made public by the Russian government.³

A certain exception was an intercepted and leaked telephone conversation, apparently by the Russian intelligence, between the European Union (EU) foreign affairs chief and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Estonia discussing evidence provided by Maidan medics that the Maidan massacre was staged by some elements of the Maidan opposition.⁴ However, these elements were not identified during this conversation, and therefore it was not clear whether the far right was mentioned in the intercepted conversation.

The Russian media often exaggerated or misrepresented the role of the far right in these events. For instance, Russia Today (RT) and Komsomolskaya Pravda, incorrectly described advancing Maidan protesters on February 20, 2014 as the Right Sector, while NTV wrongly claimed that the special Berkut special police force members were in fact disguised Right Sector provocateurs because they allegedly wore yellow armbands.⁵ However, different parties of conflicts were often engaged in propaganda and disinformation, and this concerns Ukraine, including the Euromaidan and the Maidan massacre (Black & Johns, 2016; Boyd-Barrett, 2016; Pikulicka-Wilczewska & Sakwa, 2015).

Some studies on the Ukrainian far right during the Euromaidan focused on numerical strength and electoral support for the far-right parties and ignored other aspects of the influence of the radical nationalist and neo-Nazi parties, specifically their roles in the political violence, such as the Maidan massacre (see, e.g., Risch, 2015). Some previous studies attributed the Maidan massacre to various government units, such as the Berkut special police force, Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) Alfa snipers, and the Omega unit of the Interior Troops or considered that they were likely involved, while ignoring or dismissing as unlikely the involvement of the far right in this massacre (Marples & Mills, 2015; Onuch & Sasse, 2016; Wilson, 2014). Such conclusions, however, were based on uncritical acceptance of Maidan politicians' statements and media reports without systematic analysis of evidence.

Some scholars cited presence of a few Jews in the Right Sector as an evidence of its relative tolerance; however, they were not representative of its membership and leadership (Onuch & Sasse, 2016, p. 578). A number of studies argued that red and black flag and “Glory to Ukraine. Glory to the heroes!” slogan, which were adopted by Maidan leaders and protesters, originated, respectively, in Cossack times and in the Ukrainian Peoples Republic before they were used by the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) (Onuch & Sasse, 2016, p. 576; Risch, 2015, p. 143). However, the flag and the greeting in the forms adopted by far-right organizations, such as the Right Sector, during the Euromaidan were derived from the flags and the greeting of the Bandera faction of the OUN. This greeting was

first adopted and used along with a fascist-style hand salute as the party greeting of the Bandera faction of the OUN. It was modeled on similar greetings accompanied by hand salutes of other fascist and semi-fascist parties, including the Nazi Party in Germany. There is no reliable and corroborated evidence of the use of the greeting in a form of the greeting before it was adopted by the OUN in slightly different form and then in its current form by the Bandera faction of the OUN (Katchanovski, 2014; Rudling, 2011).

Some other studies on the far right reached different conclusions. A quantitative research on the mass protest actions revealed that Svoboda party was the most active organization in pro-Maidan protests, while the Right Sector was the most active organization in violent events in Ukraine during the Euromaidan (Ishchenko, 2016). Other studies concluded that the far right played a key role in the attacks of the parliament in January and on February 18, 2014 and in seizures of regional administrations in Western and Central Ukraine during the Euromaidan (Katchanovski, 2015b, Kudelia, 2016).

A comprehensive study concluded that the Maidan massacre of the protesters and the police was a successful false flag operation conducted covertly by the elements of the Maidan opposition in order to overthrow the Yanukovych government and seize power in an asymmetric armed conflict (Katchanovski, 2015b, 2016b). These findings were replicated by Hahn (2018). However, these studies did not take into account newly available evidence, which was made public during the ongoing Maidan massacre trial.

The Maidan massacre trial and the investigation by the Prosecutor General Office of Ukraine revealed various evidence that protesters were massacred by snipers in Maidan-controlled buildings on February 20. The absolute majority of wounded Maidan protesters, with whose shooting Berkut policemen were charged, testified at this trial and the investigation that they were shot from Maidan-controlled buildings, in particular, the Hotel Ukraine or that they witnessed snipers there and were told about them by other protesters during the massacre (Katchanovski, 2015b, 2018).

The official forensic investigations which were made public at the Maidan massacre trial revealed that on February 20 the absolute majority of the protesters were shot from side and back directions and from top to bottom directions, while videos and photos of the massacre showed them facing the Berkut special police force on the same ground level. In January 2015, a forensic ballistic examination conducted upon the request of prosecution concluded that bullets extracted from killed protesters did not match the bullet samples from any Kalashnikov assault rifle which members of the Berkut special police force were then armed. The findings of this computer-based ballistic examination and results of the other 40 ballistic examinations were reversed in a couple of ballistic examinations conducted manually in the very end of the investigation. Such unexplained reversals which contradicted other evidence, such as testimonies of wounded protesters and results of forensic medical examinations, suggested that the findings of the new examinations of bullets were unreliable and likely falsified. The forensic ballistic examinations also found that many protesters were killed on February 18–20 by hunting pellets and expanding hunting bullets, in particular, with caliber that did not match calibers of weapons used by the special police company, whose members were charged with killings these protesters (See Katchanovski, 2018).

Government ballistic experts in at least seven on-site investigative experiments determined that Maidan protesters were killed and wounded from Maidan-controlled buildings. But the investigation did not employ ballistic experts to determine bullet trajectories in the absolute majority of the cases and did not do this even after the Maidan massacre trial ordered such examinations, specifically determining whether these trajectories were from the Maidan-

controlled buildings. No evidence of orders by then President Yanukovych, his internal affairs and security service ministers, or police and security service commanders to massacre unarmed protesters has been revealed by the trials and the investigations or made public by the prosecution or the media. But despite the evidence, the government investigation denied the existence of snipers in the Maidan-controlled buildings (Katchanovski, 2018).

A U.S. architecture company argued in the 3-D model created for Maidan victims' lawyers that three Maidan protesters were killed from Berkut sectors. However, the wound locations of the killed Maidan protesters in the 3-D model did not match the wound locations in the autopsy reports, which were used in this simulation to determine the locations of the shooters and published on the its website.⁶ A study by Katchanovski (2018) showed that their wounds locations in this 3-D model were moved sideways and made from top to bottom to nearly horizontal in order to fit Berkut positions, while actual locations of entry and exit wounds pointed toward Maidan-controlled buildings.

Bandeira (2019, pp. 206–207), Cohen (2018), Hahn (2018), Katchanovski (2016b, 2018), and Lane (2016) noted the far-right involvement in the false flag Maidan massacre of the protesters and the police. However, they did not focus on this specific issue comprehensively. Kudelia (2018) also found that the violence was initiated by the far-right Maidan protesters, who killed and wounded many policemen, but argued based on government investigation that the Berkut special police force then massacred unarmed protesters in response to such provocation.

This study focuses on the involvement far right organizations in the violence during the Euromaidan in Kyiv, primarily in the massacre of the Maidan protesters and the police on February 18–20, 2014 and in the dispersal of protesters by the Berkut police on November 20, 2013. These events are selected because they were turning points, respectively, in the violent overthrow of the Yanukovych government and the start of the mass anti-government protests.

They are also important because the Euromaidan is presented by the Western and Maidan governments, the media in the West and Ukraine, and many researchers, primarily, non-academic ones, as a nonviolent mass protest and a popular democratic revolution against the undemocratic government, which massacred the Maidan protesters on February 18–20, 2014 and violently dispersed the peaceful protest of students on November 30, 2013. The involvement of the far right in these crucial cases of violence is often ignored, denied, or attributed without evidence to Yanukovych government or Russian government agent provocateurs.

This article does not examine other issues of the far-right involvement in the Euromaidan and in the violence in other regions of Ukraine during the Euromaidan, with the exception of the massacre in Khmelnytskyi. These issues are analyzed by other scholars (see Ishchenko, 2018a).

2 | DATA AND METHODOLOGY

This case study analyzes the involvement of the far-right organizations in the Euromaidan protests and major cases of violence, in particular, the Maidan massacre. The analysis relied on political science theories and definitions of the far-right organizations. Far right is classified according to a traditional left–right classification as radical or extreme organizations on the right side of the political spectrum. The far right ideology includes various forms, such as radical nationalism and fascism. For instance, neo-Nazi organizations are defined as contemporary far right organizations that use elements of national-socialist ideology and Nazi symbols in the original or modified forms. The neo-Nazi organizations are part of neo-fascist or fascist political spectrum (see Griffin & Feldman, 2003; Lipset & Raab, 1970).

The study analyzed numerous original and secondary data. These sources included a large number of videos, live and recorded online streams, and TV broadcasts of the Maidan protests and the Maidan massacre. The analysis also employed the official online Ukrainian database of court decisions concerning investigations of these cases of political violence, official video footage of the Maidan massacre trial on YouTube, websites and social media groups of the far-right organizations, and media reports in Ukrainian, Russian, and English languages. The author also conducted a field research in the Maidan and, in particular, the Maidan massacres sites, soon after the Euromaidan.

3 | THE EUROMAIDAN

The analysis showed that all major far-right organizations in Ukraine, participated in the Euromaidan. Their common goal was more or less a national revolution which would overthrow the pro-Russian Yanukovych government and forge the Ukrainian nation. Svoboda party was the most significant and popular of such organizations. Svoboda was founded as the Social National Party of Ukraine (SNPU) around the time when Ukraine became independent in 1991. It combined radical nationalism and some neo-Nazi features, which were exemplified by its name and its use of modified Wolfsangel as the party symbol. However, the party changed its name in 2004 to Svoboda, which means Freedom in Ukrainian. It tried to moderate publicly its ideology in order to increase its popularity beyond the far-right supporters and beyond its base in Galicia (Bustikova, 2015; Katchanovski, 2012; Rudling, 2013). Svoboda reported that between 2,000 and 5,000 out of some 15,000 party members during this time were permanently present on the Maidan.⁷ While this number of Svoboda protesters is likely to be exaggerated, videos and livestreams of protests often showed that there are large numbers of Svoboda flags representing a significant proportion of the flags in many protest actions.

The Right Sector was formed by smaller far-right political organizations and groups of football (soccer) ultras in the early stages of the Maidan protests. It was an alliance of radical nationalist Organizations, such as Tryzub (Trident) named after Bandera and the UNA-UNSO, and neo-Nazi organizations, such as the Social National Assembly (SNA), Patriot of Ukraine (the paramilitary wing of the SNA), and the White Hammer, and groups of ultras who mostly had similar ultranationalist and neo-Nazi orientation. The Right Sector can therefore be classified as a partially radical nationalist and partially fascist or semi-fascist organization based on the definition of political science.

The Right Sector reached several hundred members by the end of the Euromaidan. Members of Svoboda and the Right Sector combined with members of other relatively small far-right organizations, such as the Congress of Ukrainian Nationalists, the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists, Bratstvo, and ultras constituted a minority of the Maidan protesters during the Euromaidan in Kyiv City. In comparison, the peak number of protesters during the biggest Maidan demonstration on December 1, 2013 was ~80,000–120,000 people. This estimate was calculated from an aerial video of the protest, a Google Earth Professional map-based estimate of protester-occupied area on Kyiv's Maidan (Independence Square) and surrounding streets of some 40,000 square meters, and the average density of two to three people per square meter.

However, the analysis showed that the role of the far right in violent attacks and other cases of political violence during the Euromaidan was much more significant than their numerical presence among protesters. The Euromaidan protests started at the end of November 2013 following a decision by the Yanukovych government to postpone a signing of the association and

free trade agreement with the EU. These protests in downtown Kyiv were largely peaceful at first, but some of them also included the far-right protesters. For instance, a group of protesters with Svoboda flags and other far-right symbols attacking the police in front of the Cabinet of Ministers building were filmed.⁸

The turning point came with a highly publicized violent dispersal of a few hundred protesters by the anti-riot Berkut special police force on the Maidan on November 30, 2013. Videos, photos, and later admissions by Right Sector leaders and other Maidan protesters showed that the Right Sector activists occupied a part of the Maidan square near a monument to mythical Kyiv founders at the time of the dispersal. Their analysis also showed that during the initial police dispersal of other protesters by force nearby Right Sector area-based protesters threw burning wood chunks and various other things at the Berkut special police force, which then beat other protesters in the Maidan square and surrounding streets.⁹ Ihor Mazur, a Ukrainian National Assembly—Ukrainian People's Self-Defense (UNA-UNSO) leader, admitted that Right Sector members were present in the Maidan during this dispersal on November 30, 2013 and that they then retreated after a confrontation with the police.¹⁰ The website of Tryzub named after Bandera admitted the Right Sector involvement in the clashes with the police on November 30, 2013 in the Maidan, but it was later taken down. The lists of injured and detained protesters revealed that the absolute majority of them were much older than typical age of students in Ukraine. At the Maidan massacre trial, the Prosecutor General Office (GPU) revealed that 18 policemen were also injured on that day.¹¹

There is various evidence that the opposition leaders, including the far-right ones, had advance information about this dispersal but did not inform the protesters in order to use this violent dispersal to greatly galvanize the mass protests, which were coming to the end on that night. Anatolii Hrytsenko, one of the Maidan politicians, stated that the Maidan leaders knew in advance about this dispersal, because the opposition was able to intercept radio communications of Berkut concerning their deployment for this operation.¹²

The unusual presence of Inter TV crews along with a number of other TV crews at the time of the dispersal around 4:00 a.m. local time, the Inter broadcast of this dispersal also indicate advance knowledge of the police dispersal. Inter TV and other Ukrainian media along with Maidan politicians misrepresented this dispersal of Maidan protesters as an unprovoked and unexpected beating of students and children by the Berkut police on the Yanukovich government order. They generally ignored or omitted the presence of the Right Sector activists and their violence against the police. The Inter television channel was owned by Dmytro Firtash and Serhii Liovochkin. Firtash was an oligarch who supported Yanukovich during the 2010 presidential campaign, but then switched to covert backing of Viktor Klychko, who headed Ukrainian Democratic Alliance for Reform (UDAR) party and became one of the Euromaidan leaders. Liovochkin then headed the Yanukovich's presidential administration, but he belonged to the Firtash-led clan. After Yanukovich and several members of the Yanukovich government and the Kyiv police chief fled to Russia they stated or suggested that Liovochkin ordered to disperse the protesters, but they did not provide any specific direct evidence. Avakov, the Minister of Internal Affairs of Ukraine, in all post-Maidan governments made a similar statement concerning the involvement of Liovochkin.¹³ In a leaked telephone conversation, Ihor Kolomoisky said that Liovochkin was aware of the dispersal order because he was the patron of Oleksander Popov, the head of the Kyiv City administration, who was involved in implementing the dispersal order.¹⁴ The official investigation accused and charged Popov and other members of the Yanukovich government for issuing this order and supervising the dispersal. Liovochkin was the most senior Yanukovich official, who did not flee Ukraine and who was not prosecuted, in contrast to many other Yanukovich associates.

In a TV interview, an eyewitness reportedly stated that shortly before November 30, 2013 she accidentally overheard a discussion among senior Maidan leaders about the planned police dispersal of the Maidan protesters and possibility that it would lead to violence.

She identified Andrii Ilienکو, Andrii Parubiy, and Serhii Pashynsky as the Maidan leaders who involved in this discussion.¹⁵ They were not well-known names at the time but would be linked to other cases of violence later during the Euromaidan. Ilienکو was a member of the parliament from Svoboda Party. Parubiy was a former leader of the neo-Nazi Patriot of Ukraine, a paramilitary wing of the Social National Party of Ukraine, before this party was rebranded as Svoboda in 2004 and before the Patriot of Ukraine became a paramilitary wing of the SNA, which was formed by the Kharkiv organization of the SNPU. Parubiy and Pashynsky were members of the Ukrainian parliament from the oligarchic Fatherland Party at the time of the Maidan protests.

In an article published in a SNPU publication in 1999, Parubiy referred to both the U.S. and Russia as barbarians fighting against the “white race spirit” and approvingly quoted a French National Front representative statement that France and Ukraine were stopping the “Asian hordes” in Western Europe and the East, respectively.¹⁶ After leaving the Patriot of Ukraine and the SNPU in 2004, He projected a more moderate image, but he never publicly renounced his neo-Nazi background. In an interview with a Ukrainian newspaper published in 2008, Parubiy publicly stated that his political orientation and ideological foundations have not changed since he left the Social National Party of Ukraine.¹⁷ He became the commander of the Maidan Self-Defense, a paramilitary organization, which was organized during the Euromaidan and included various companies, including the Right Sector company.

The footage and live streams and admissions by the Right Sector leaders and activists showed a key role of the far right in the violent attack on presidential administration on December 1, 2013 during a massive protest rally against the violent police dispersal of the demonstrators on November 30. These videos and footage showed some of the attackers with neo-Nazi symbols of the Patriot of Ukraine.¹⁸ The footage also showed other groups of attackers shouting “Ukraine above all” slogans used by far-right organizations and obscene chants used by Ukrainian ultras. There are recordings of Andrii Dzyndzia hijacking a bulldozer, then trying to ram into the Interior Troops line protecting the presidential administration.¹⁹ He joined the Azov battalion at the time of its formation by the Patriot of Ukraine and the SNA in spring 2014. Similarly, Korchynsky, the leader of the far right Bratstvo organization and a former leader of the UNA-UNSO, was filmed on this bulldozer during the attack. He fled Ukraine soon afterward to avoid prosecution but returned after the overthrow of Yanukovych and organized and led the St. Mary's battalion on the basis of his Bratstvo organization under the formal command of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukrainian. A leader of the Kyiv branch of the SNA and UNA-UNSO leaders admitted the involvement of the Right Sector, which included both organizations, in the December 1 attack.²⁰

Similar video evidence, symbols of certain groups of neo-Nazi attackers, and later admissions of their involvement by the Right Sector leaders and activists, including Yarosh, showed that the far-right organizations played a key role in the attack attempt on the parliament in January 2014.²¹ Although Svoboda publicly distanced itself from violent attacks of the presidential administration and the parliament, the evidence, such as presence of some Svoboda flags and activists, live streams, and social media posts, clearly indicated that at least some Svoboda and C14 members and activists linked to them were involved in these violent attacks. There was similar evidence of Svoboda's participation in seizures of regional administrations, primarily, in Western Ukraine and storming and occupying Kyiv City administration on December

1, 2013. Svoboda and its C14 affiliate also formed some paramilitary self-defense companies during the Euromaidan. C14, a Neo-Nazi youth organization affiliated with Svoboda, led a paramilitary Self-Defense unit, which helped Svoboda to forcibly occupy the Kyiv city administration during the mass protests against the Yanukovych government and the police violence. Yevhen Karas, the C14 leader, was photographed with a fascist salute, and the group used neo-Nazi symbols.²²

There is also certain evidence of the far-right involvement in killings of the first three Maidan protesters on January 22, 2014. These killings greatly escalated the conflict by turning it into conflict with fatalities. Their killing was attributed to the Berkut special police force by Maidan leaders and most of the Ukrainian media. However, unreported Pechersk court decisions suggested that the Prosecutor General Office investigated members and leaders of UNA-UNSO, one of the founding organizations in the Right Sector, for shooting these protesters.²³

The official investigation determined that they were killed from a few meters distances in the Maidan-controlled areas, while the police lines were several dozen meters away from the Maidan positions. Like in the case of the Maidan massacre investigation, the results of forensic examinations that these protesters were shot from such close distance was reversed without any explanation a few years afterward. The distance of their shooting was increased to between 7 and 21 m. But the same investigation stated before that the Berkut police was then located further from the protesters.²⁴

Another evidence that these were false flag killings is the absence of the moments and exact locations of killings of two of these protesters in livestreams, videos, photos, and confirmed eyewitnesses of these killings in the heavily covered area of a violent confrontation between the protesters and the police. A video published by a Ukrainian media outlet 5 years after these killings also provided evidence that a Belarusian far right protester was killed from a Maidan-controlled area and not by the Berkut police. The video shows that he was shot while he was behind a barricade from burned buses that covered him from the Berkut police.²⁵

The evidence confirmed that another protester was shot by pellets used in hunting. This first victim was Armenian, while the second killed protester was a Belarusian member of the UNA-UNSO. The ethnicities of these killed protesters also suggest that they were not random victims but were selected in order to propagate the Euromaidan as ethnically inclusive and diverse and to garner support for the Euromaidan among people from these countries. A Ukrainian reporter wrote on her Facebook page that a leader of the neo-Nazi White Hammer told her off the record that these two protesters were killed by their own and that this one of the reasons for the subsequent split of the White Hammer from the Right Sector.²⁶

Displays by a part of Maidan protesters of neo-Nazi symbols, such as swastika, SS signs, the Celtic cross, and 14/88 sign, referring to a White supremacist statement and “Heil Hitler,” in different Maidan-controlled areas also indicated presence and toleration of members of neo-Nazi organizations, groups, or their sympathizers among the protesters. Field research and photos taken by the author in the Maidan soon after the Euromaidan showed many such far right symbols in the area (Online Photo Appendix).²⁷

However, many far-right organizations in the Maidan regarded themselves to various extent as the ideological heirs of the OUN and the UPA and used symbols adopted from the OUN and the UPA, their historical predecessors, such as a red and black flag, and salutes and chants of “Glory to Ukraine - Glory to Heroes,” “Glory to the Nation,” and “Ukraine above all.” For instance, Tryzub was named after Bandera, the OUN leader, and it was created shortly after independence of Ukraine as a paramilitary branch of the Congress of Ukrainian Nationalists, which was organized in Ukraine by the Bandera faction of the OUN active in the Ukrainian

diaspora in North America. The Right Sector used the red and black flag of the Bandera faction of the OUN (OUN-B) and along with other far-right organizations, such as Svoboda, the OUN-B “Glory to Ukraine” greetings. The Bandera faction of the OUN adopted this flag and the greeting at the time of its collaboration with Nazi Germany at the beginning of 1941. They were modeled after symbols and greetings of other fascist or semi-fascist parties, including the Nazi party. Red and black colors of the OUN-B flag symbolized Blood and Soil that resembled Blut und Boden concepts in Nazi ideology and symbols. “Glory to Ukraine. Glory to the heroes!” greeting was adopted by a 1941 OUN-B congress and accompanied by a fascist-style hand salute. In this form it resembled greetings and the hand salutes used by the Nazi Party in Germany, the National Fascist Party in Italy, and Ustasha in Croatia.²⁸ “Ukraine above all” resembled “Germany above all,” a German anthem reference emphasized during the Nazi rule. The non-far right Maidan leaders, parties, and protesters also started to use the “Glory to Ukraine. Glory to the heroes” greeting during the Euromaidan by borrowing it from the far-right parties, but they ignored or denied the fascist origins of this greeting.

Oleh Tiahnybok, the leader of the far-right Svoboda party, stated that the term “Revolution of Dignity” was invented by a deputy of his party.²⁹ Like the “Glory to Ukraine” slogan, this term was adopted by the entire Maidan opposition and then by the Maidan governments.

The influence of such far right organizations, as the Right Sector, and its members, such as Tryzub, UNA-UNSO, and Patriot of Ukraine, far exceeded their relatively small membership during the Euromaidan because they were paramilitary organizations and relied on violence. Many of their leaders and members had training in use of violence, including weapons, and experience of participation in violence in Ukraine and other post-Soviet states. The UNA-UNSO, for example, participated in the war in Chechnya on the side of the Chechen separatists and Islamists and in the civil war in Moldova on the side of the pro-Russian separatists in Transdnistria.

4 | THE MAIDAN MASSACRE

The violent clashes of protesters with the police and “titushki” and the mass killing started when the protesters tried to break police barricade and tried to attack the parliament on February 18, 2014. These clashes and mass killing happened during a “peaceful march,” organized by the Maidan opposition leaders, specifically Oleksander Turchynov, a leader of the Fatherland party Andrii Parubiy, the commander of the Maidan Self-Defense, and Dmytro Yarosh, the leader of the Right Sector.³⁰ Personal observations via live online streams of this march and violence that followed showed that the protesters included the Maidan Self-Defense companies, in particular the Right Sector company. At the Maidan massacre investigation, some Maidan Self-Defense company commanders testified that Parubiy had ordered to start “a bloodshed” during this “peaceful march” toward the parliament around noon on February 18, 2014.³¹

The live streams recordings of the rally showed that the protesters led by Svoboda deputies tried to break through and attacked police barricades near the parliament. Footage disclosed that another group of the Maidan protesters attacked and set the Party of Regions headquarters on fire nearby.³² The head of the Kyiv branch of the SNA later stated that they burned this building.³³ Footage from the scene also revealed that Tetiana Chornovol, a former activist of the UNA-UNSO, was among the attackers. During this attack and during the burning of the headquarters of the Party of Regions, a Party of Regions computer specialist was killed,

becoming the first casualty of the Maidan massacre. The Maidan government investigation accused the Yanukovych government agents provocateurs for the attack and burning of the Yanukovych party headquarters without any evidence and included the computer specialist among the killed Maidan protesters.

There is also evidence of the involvement of the Right Sector in killings of the police and Internal Troops during these clashes and subsequent attempts by the Berkut special police force to disperse the protesters from the Maidan on February 18–20, 2014. A Kyiv court ruling specifically referred to the Right Sector activists as suspects in an investigation by the Prosecutor General Office in killings and wounding the police in the Maidan. In addition to two wounded attackers of a separatist checkpoint in Sloviansk during the Right Sector attack on April 20, 2014, the court decision listed at least 12 cell phone numbers belonging to the Right Sector activists, who were also investigated for their involvement in the killing and wounding the police in the Maidan. The same court ruled that these two wounded attackers used the same weapons in the Sloviansk checkpoint attack as those were used to kill two Internal Troops servicemen and wound three other policemen in the Maidan on February 18.³⁴ Other court rulings revealed that GPU investigated use of weapons, which were seized by the Right Sector during an attack of the SBU regional headquarters in Ivano-Frankivsk, in shooting the police on the Maidan.³⁵

A member of the “Vikings” neo-Nazi unit of the Right Sector during the Euromaidan publicly stated that he killed two policemen on February 18 and that his associate, a deputy commander of the “Vikings,” also killed two policemen on the same day. They both served in the Ukrainian Voluntary Corps of the Right Sector during the war in Donbas.³⁶ Another Maidan activist said that the Right Sector had its own armed group among several covert Maidan groups of shooters, who were armed primarily with hunting rifles. He also said that on February 18–20, 2014, two such covert armed groups, in particular, from the Trade Union building and from the Music Conservatory, shot 20 Berkut special police force officers and Internal Troops servicemen.³⁷

Oleh Tiahnybok, who was one of the top Maidan leaders and the far-right Svoboda party leader, and Ruslan Koshulynsky, the deputy head of the parliament from Svoboda, stated in their separate interviews that a Western government representative during their meeting told them that the Western governments would turn on Yanukovych after casualties among protesters would reach 100 (Kapranov, 2017). Such specific conditionality contained at the very least a moral hazard to provoke the government to commit such casualties or to “sacrifice” 100 protesters covertly and attribute them to the government forces killings to fulfill such condition for turning on Yanukovych.

Dmytro Yarosh, the leader of the Right Sector, issued a statement shortly after the midnight on February 20 announcing that the Right Sector did not accept the truce agreement and would undertake decisive actions against the government forces to “force them into peace.”³⁸ The analysis of numerous footage, recordings of live streams, intercepts of radio communications of the Internal Troops and SBU Alfa unit commanders, and testimonies by the Maidan protesters and the police officers show that four Berkut special police force members were killed and nearly 40 Berkut special police force officers and Internal Troops were wounded by concealed shooters when they were besieging the Maidan, specifically from the Music Conservatory building in the early morning of February 20. Berkut officers said that they noticed protesters with the Right Sector insignia in this building on February 19 and that the armed protesters took positions there.³⁹ It is unlikely that the presence of such an armed unit in the Maidan square building, which was located next to the Maidan stage, could have been possible without the knowledge of the Maidan Self-Defense commanders and the Maidan leadership.

Volodymyr Parasiuk stated that he organized his special Maidan company, which included armed protesters with experience fighting in armed conflicts, following negotiations with the Right Sector and that this company was based in the conservatory building at the time of the massacre.⁴⁰ Parasiuk admitted that he had been a member of the far right Congress of Ukrainian Nationalists in the past and trained to shoot in its camps. He also de facto admitted in his various interviews that his unit shot at the police.⁴¹ Berkut policemen testified that they saw Maidan protesters with Right Sector symbols in the Music Conservatory after it was seized by the Parasiuk company.⁴²

On February 21, 2014, Parasiuk gave an ultimatum for Yanukovych from the Maidan stage to resign by next morning and threatened the use of force if he would not resign. Parubiy said this ultimatum was a decision made by “the institutional bodies of the Maidan” and it was adopted by a military council set up by the Maidan Self-Defense and the Right Sector on February 21.⁴³ After playing a key role in the violent overthrow of the Yanukovych government, Parasiuk served as a company commander in the Dnipro battalion, which was organized with the direct involvement of the Right Sector. Dmytro Yarosh issued a similar ultimatum from the Maidan stage and a threat of use arms by the Right Sector.

Ivan Bubenchyk also admitted in his Lviv TV interview in 2014 and then in other Ukrainian media interviews in 2016 that he opened fire from the Music Conservatory building, acknowledging that he killed two policemen with his AK assault rifle.⁴⁴ His shooting from this building and his joint photos and interviews with Parasiuk in the Conservatory building suggest that Bubenchyk was a member of the Parasiuk led special company based there. Another link of this company to the far right is Bubenchyk's statement that the Right Sector promised him more ammunition during the Maidan massacre of the protesters after he spent his ammunition shooting into the police from the Conservatory building. He also said that Yanukovych was supposed to be killed on February 20.⁴⁵ The GPU charged him with felony of killings two police officers but then after intervention of the Prosecutor General of Ukraine, who was one of the Maidan leaders, his charges were changed to a lesser crime, and he was released. The new charges were covered by a law that gave the amnesty to the Maidan protesters.

This Maidan “sniper” also joined the Dnipro battalion and became the commander of Zakhid-2 battalion, which was formed by a part of the Right Sector activists and Voluntary Ukrainian Corps (DUK) commanders during a split in these far-right organization and its paramilitary wing in fall 2016. Bubenchyk became one of the leaders of Radical Right Forces—the UPA, formed in February 2016 by a part of the Right Sector activists and DUK commanders, attempting to launch a new Maidan protest.⁴⁶

Another Maidan protester initially said in his Vesti newspaper interview and then in his BBC interview that he also shot at the police from the Conservatory building.⁴⁷ He noted that their guns came from the main post office building. This building was then used as the Right Sector headquarter. He reported that his service in the summer of 2014 in a volunteer battalion in a town near a sea most likely refers to the SNA/Patriot of Ukraine-led Azov special police battalion, which was then based in Mariupol.

The testimonies of five Georgian ex-military members in Italian and Israeli TV documentaries, Macedonian TV, and Russian media interviews, and their depositions to Berkut lawyers for the trial revealed that their groups of snipers allegedly received weapons, payments, and orders from specific Maidan and Georgian politicians, in particular, Parubiy, to massacre both police and protesters. They stated that they received instructions from an ex-US Army sniper, who was linked to the Right Sector. They reported that they saw snipers from Georgia and the

Baltic States, and specific far right Right Sector-linked special Maidan armed company shooting from the Music Conservatory and the Hotel Ukraine after receiving such an order.⁴⁸

While the Ukrainian government investigation, mass media, and “fact checking” websites claimed that these Georgians are fake or hired actors and were not in Ukraine. However, their identities and presence in Ukraine, and their Georgian military services were corroborated by supporting evidence and personal information that they provided and by some other sources. An Israeli documentary, for instance, showed a video of one of these Georgians in the burning Trade Union building along with other activists during the Odesa massacre. The Maidan massacre trial initially approved a defense request to allow at this trial video testimonies of the two Georgians as witnesses in this case. The Armenian and Belorussian government authorities confirmed to the Maidan massacre trial court that the names and the identity documents of these Georgians are real after their visits to these countries.⁴⁹ Three of these Georgians gave testimonies at the Prosecutor General Office of Belarus for the Prosecutor General Office of Ukraine following a request of defense lawyers. They wrote notarized letters to the Ukrainian courts and offered to testify via a video link from Belarus concerning the Maidan massacre.⁵⁰

An SBU Alfa officer, who led one of the SBU groups during storming of the Trade Union Building in the Maidan on February 18, stated that their task was to seize the fifth floor, which contained a lot of weapons.⁵¹ The Right Sector then occupied this entire floor which served as both the headquarter and a base of the Right Sector company of the Maidan Self-Defense before the burning of this building by the Maidan protesters later on February 18 to stop its seizure by the SBU Alfa.

Various footage and photos also proved that the Maidan protesters controlled the Kozatsky Hotel area on February 20 when protesters pointed out that there were snipers there. A police report noted that this hotel was used as one of the bases by the Right Sector, specifically by the White Hammer and the Patriot of Ukraine.⁵²

There is various evidence that Svoboda controlled the Hotel Ukraine before and during the Maidan massacre, specifically at the time when snipers there massacred the Maidan protesters and the police. In an official statement, Svoboda stated that its activists took the Hotel Ukraine under their control and guard on January 25, 2014.⁵³ Similar statement was made by the Svoboda leader from the Maidan stage. Numerous videos showed that inside the hotel remained under control of the protesters when the government forces seized the territory around in the late afternoon on February 18 and that the outside perimeter of the hotel was unblocked by the protesters around the time when the Maidan massacre started on February 20. This is consistent with the hotel CCTV recordings and statements of the Maidan Self-Defense unit commander and hotel staff saying that the police never entered the hotel and that this unit guarded the hotel entrance all this time since the end of January, specifically during the Maidan massacre.⁵⁴ Videos also showed that a Svoboda deputy and the Maidan protesters guarded the Hotel Ukraine before, during, and after groups of covert shooters killing protesters from this hotel.⁵⁵

Moreover, there is evidence that the Maidan “snipers” were shooting, specifically at the protesters and a BBC crew or taking cover in at least three or four Hotel Ukraine rooms on the 11th floor, which were occupied by the Svoboda deputies of parliament or their aids. The evidence also indicated that snipers positioned on this floor were shooting at the protesters, taking cover from the Maidan protesters searching for snipers, or shooting in the direction of the protesters from these and two or three other hotel rooms in which or near which Svoboda deputies lived. More than 30 Svoboda deputies of parliament stayed on this floor at the time of the Maidan massacre. The footage proved that many of the MPs were in the Hotel Ukraine soon after the start of the massacre of the protesters.⁵⁶

The Prosecutor General Office investigation disclosed that at least three Svoboda deputies stayed on the 11th floor in this hotel and one of them occupied the same hotel room from which the BBC and ICTV filmed “snipers” firing at the BBC television crew and at the protesters.⁵⁷ The BBC correspondent, in both his news report and in his tweet, identified the shooter in this room window as having a green helmet worn by the Maidan protesters.⁵⁸ A protester stated that he saw a few other protesters shot by “a sniper” from the same hotel window.⁵⁹ The official investigation only reported that they found no signs of anyone breaking into that room or tampering with a lock. However, in a time-stamped recording of live Spilne TV broadcast from the 11th floor of the Hotel Ukraine, a chat between Ukrainian reporters and an unidentified person refers to man from two groups of Maidan “snipers.” These armed protesters were recorded as looking for suitable shooting positions in the same broadcast and in a CNN video a few minutes before that sniper was filmed by the BBC and ICTV, went to that side of the hotel and that there was a sniper position on that side of the floor.⁶⁰

A Ukrainian publication, based on its own investigation and a reported BBC correspondent statement, suggested that there was a sniper in a different Hotel Ukraine suite, in which another Svoboda deputy stayed at that time. The BBC correspondent reportedly said that after his crew was shot from the 11th floor of the hotel he went to this floor and saw a warning note to not enter the suite number 1109 because of a request from the SBU. This was the same suite searched by the Maidan activists. One of the Svoboda leaders admitted that a female member of the Ukrainian parliament from this far-right party stayed at the time of the Maidan massacre in this suite.⁶¹ An English-speaking foreign reporter said in the same Spilne TV broadcast that he saw a shooter hiding in the Hotel Ukraine and firing shots from an open and moving window. The open and moving window that is visible in this video matches a room on the seventh floor which was used to record a widely publicized video of the Maidan massacre. This video was recorded by a former press-secretary of the Lviv Regional Council, which was then headed by a Svoboda deputy who occupied one of the hotel rooms on the 11th floor at the time of the massacre. A break in this video, which was used as evidence of the massacre of the protesters by the Berkut, matches the time when the sniper was spotted there.⁶²

Unbroadcast segments of a widely reported Belgian VRT News TV video show that Maidan protesters were lured to the massacre site by other protesters, one of who was later filmed entering the Hotel Ukraina with a commander and armed members of the Right Sector-linked Special Maidan company (Katchanovski, 2015b, p. 33, 2018). Unbroadcast segments of this Belgian VRT News TV video also show that this lured Maidan protesters were shouting that snipers in the Hotel Ukraina shoot and kill the protesters and asked the snipers there not to shoot after a gunshot from the Hotel Ukraina hit a tree near them. But this group of the protesters was massacred then, and almost all wounded protesters from this group testified at the Maidan massacre trial and the investigation that they were shot by snipers in the Hotel Ukraina and other Maidan-controlled buildings or that they and the soon to be killed protesters noticed gunshot flashes from the hotel windows or that they were informed by other protesters about snipers there.⁶³

A leader of the Patriot of Ukraine branch in Kyiv stated that he personally witnessed that “a sniper” was located in one of the hotel rooms booked by some Svoboda deputies and this room was on one of the top floors of the hotel. Recordings of Spilne TV livestream referred to two other rooms on the same 11th floor from which snipers were shooting during the massacre of the protesters.⁶⁴

Time-stamped recordings of radio communications of the SBU Alfa commanders, an investigation by a journalist from the Fatherland Party, and statements by the former SBU head all

refer to snipers from the Music Conservatory moving to the Hotel Ukraine before or in the beginning of the massacre of the protesters on February 20. The analysis and synchronization of videos filmed by French, German, Russian, and Ukrainian television journalists showed an armed group of the Maidan protesters under the command of Parasiuk arriving to the hotel, shooting from a 14th floor room, and then moving to other floors during the massacre of the protesters. Videos also showed Svoboda deputies, in particular the deputy speaker of the Ukrainian parliament, armed with handgun, accompanying armed members of this special Maidan company in the Hotel Ukraine or guarding entrances to the hotel elevators. Svoboda deputies also went to negotiate with snipers, whom the Maidan protesters spotted shooting at them from the roof of this hotel. Bubenchyk stated that he was in Hotel Ukraine and Zhovtnevyi Palace during the massacre, but denied that there were any snipers there in spite of the testimonies of the Maidan protesters, public announcements from the Maidan stage, videos and photos pointing to snipers in both these locations at the time when they were under the Maidan control.⁶⁵

The presence of the armed Maidan shooters and their shooting from the Hotel Ukraine cannot be explained by shooting the police. Both the official investigation and the comprehensive study of the massacre found that not a single Berkut or any other policeman was killed or wounded from the Hotel Ukraine after the killings of the protesters started on February 20. In contrast, there were numerous police casualties of the Maidan shooters when they were based in the Music Conservatory building earlier in the day (see Katchanovski, 2015b, 2018).

A defense lawyer revealed at the Maidan massacre trial that a Maidan protester, in his testimony to the investigation, said that he saw a sniper shooting from the roof of the Main Post Office, killing a person on the Maidan behind the Maidan stage.⁶⁶ His testimony matched the killing of a protester, who was shot along with a female medic in the same area of the Maidan. This building was then used as the headquarters of the Right Sector. Katchanovski (2015b, 2018) reported an eyewitness testimony of another protester about a sniper shooting at this female medic from the same building direction and a video of snipers on the roof of the building close to the times of the shooting. It is noteworthy that the prosecution charges omitted wounding of this female medic, Olesia Zhukovska. Her shooting was attributed to the government forces by politicians and the media in Ukraine and the West. Berkut lawyers referred to testimonies of protesters to the government investigation about armed people in the Right Sector headquarters building during the Maidan massacre. Government forensic experts determined that a Hotel Ukraine room of a female producer working for German ARD was shot at from the Main Post-Office direction and shooter narrowly missed her.⁶⁷

A former Berkut officer said that a sniper accompanying the Berkut special police force had a task to look for a Right Sector sniper in the Hotel Ukraine.⁶⁸ Some snipers were caught by protesters in this hotel. A Maidan protester recorded a brief radio communication of another group of shooters when they were shooting from the Maidan-controlled areas.⁶⁹ A Hotel Ukraine employee, in a 1 + 1 TV program, said that he witnessed a group of snipers having Maidan style uniforms with weapons carried in cases entered the hotel shortly before the mass killing started on February 18.⁷⁰

Various evidence has indicated a cover-up of the far-right-linked Maidan “snipers” and falsification of the official investigation of the Maidan massacre. The government investigation, for instance, concluded that unknown shooters of unknown affiliation shot the police during the Maidan massacre. A report of the International Advisory Panel, set up by the Council of Europe, revealed that contrary to the public statements, the official investigation had evidence of “shooters” killing at least three protesters from the Hotel Ukraine or the Music Conservatory

and that at least 10 other protesters were killed by unidentified “snipers” from the rooftops.⁷¹ The failure of the investigation and an amnesty law releasing Maidan participants from the responsibility for killing the police suggested unwillingness of the Maidan-led government to investigate and prosecute the far-right organizations for their role in the mass killing of the police during the Maidan massacre. Such unwillingness, along with various other evidence, suggested involvement of elements of other Maidan organizations in the Maidan massacre.

Footage showed the Right Sector members evacuating the nearby Hotel Dnipro several weeks after the massacre with weapons in such cases, and Yarosh, the leader of the Right Sector, later admitted this.⁷² Their evacuation was supervised by Parubiy, a former leader of the neo-Nazi Patriot of Ukraine, and their weapons were not examined by the police to check whether they were used during the massacre of the protesters and the police. A Berkut officer reported during the Maidan trial that a Mosin rifle was found by his group in the Hotel Dnipro around that time and that the investigation was not interested in checking whether this rifle was used during the massacre even though forensic ballistic examinations determined that at least two protesters were shot with a 7.62×51 caliber bullet designed for this 1908 model rifle. Government units were not equipped with the Mosin rifles. In contrast, the Spilne TV recording, which was later removed from the web, referred to protesters, who were in the Hotel Ukraine at the time of the massacre, claiming that they were not only armed with hunting rifles and AKMS, but also with Mosin rifles.⁷³

The only solved case by the GPU investigation with a court verdict confirming the responsibility but granting an amnesty and a long-withheld video revealed that a Svoboda company commander was driven over by a protestor after this protestor seized a track and drove it into the police. An unreported court ruling revealed that another protestor was killed by slashing his throat with a knife on February 18 soon after he took a knife from a UNA-UNSO tent in the Maidan. The decision cited witnesses who provided evidence that the knife owner was involved in this killing, and that he used a pseudo, like UNA-UNSO members, and that the body of this killed protestor was found in the same tent soon afterward.⁷⁴ The description of the killed protestor as a former policeman and the mode and the date of his killing matched Viktor Prokhorchuk, one of the victims who was found with his throat cut. But his killing was attributed to the police by the Ukrainian media, and President Poroshenko posthumously awarded him Hero of Ukraine title along with other killed Ukrainian protesters included in the “Heavenly Hundred.”

Investigation by the Military Prosecutor Office in Lviv in Western Ukraine determined that the Maidan protesters in Khmelnytskyi were killed and wounded in a false flag shooting by an unidentified Maidan shooter from the SBU regional headquarter porch that was occupied by the Maidan protesters. This is consistent with content analysis of the videos of this massacre (see Katchanovski, 2018).⁷⁵ The SBU there received information that “radicals,” that is, far right activists, arrived there prior to this to seize their building, which contained a lot of weapons, after similar seizures of the SBU and Berkut headquarters and their weapons in neighboring regions of Western Ukraine. However, the investigation was reversed after this result was revealed.⁷⁶

There was also “dog that didn’t bark” evidence indicating either involvement of the Right Sector and C14 in this mass killing of the Maidan protesters or their prior knowledge about the massacre. In contrast to its leading role in previous violent attacks during the Euromaidan, the Right Sector did not appear during the massacre on February 20, and none of members of this far right organization was reported among killed or wounded protesters on that day. A Maidan protestor said that he learned that the Right Sector members were absent during the massacre,

because they received advance warning from their leadership.⁷⁷ The former leader of the Right Sector in the Sviatoshyn District in Kyiv also suggested that there was such a Right Sector order.

The leader of the Svoboda-affiliated C14 admitted that his C14-based Maidan Self-Defense company took refuge in the Canadian embassy in Kyiv on February 18 and stayed there during the Maidan massacre.⁷⁸ A leading member of C14 stated that the C14 leader told his company that he received advance information about the impending Maidan massacre and therefore he and his company took refuge at the Canadian Embassy and stayed there during the Maidan massacre.⁷⁹ Similarly, no single member of C14 or its company was killed or wounded by “snipers” during the massacre on February 20. But the killed and wounded Maidan protesters included Svoboda members or sympathizers.

A prominent Ukrainian pro-Maidan journalist publicly requested the new Prosecutor General of Ukraine to meet with him because he wanted to reveal who hid weapons and from where Maidan protesters and policemen were massacred. He identified them on a Ukrainian TV program in 2019 and said that a witness testified that they took weapons from the Kyiv City Administration. They were Svoboda activists during the Euromaidan and commandants of the Kyiv City Administration when it was occupied by Svoboda. They became aides of a Svoboda deputy and were detained by the SBU on May 2014 with a large stash of Kalashnikov rifles (AK47) and other weapons in their apartment in Kyiv. Both continued to be publicly supported by the far right after the Maidan and were not investigated by the SBU under the Maidan governments for their involvement in the Maidan massacre.⁸⁰

There is also evidence of cover-up of the captured Maidan snipers by the far right and other Maidan leaders. The former leader of the Right Sector in Sviatoshyn District in Kyiv publicly stated that Yarosh along with Petro Poroshenko evacuated captured snipers following the Maidan massacre.⁸¹ He said that his Zahrava unit of the Right Sector was given an order to protect the evacuated snipers from the protesters.⁸² One of the leaders of the neo-Nazi White Hammer, which was in the Right Sector during the Euromaidan, stated in media interviews and on social media that he knew about three groups of the Maidan snipers. He said that he was involved in the seizure of the Ukrainian House in order to enable establishing sniper positions there for them and that such groups of Maidan snipers in the Kozatsky Hotel and the Ukrainian House shot at the police. A Right Sector sponsor during the Maidan massacre stated in the Ukrainian media that he and other Right Sector activists found and photographed three positions of snipers and their exit routes, and one of the “snipers” found there was released by the Maidan leaders. He said that these snipers’ positions were located in a building behind the Music Conservatory, on the sixth floor of an abandoned building between the Dnipro Hotel and Ukrkoopspilka building, and on the roof of the Ukrainian House.⁸³

The head of the Kyiv branch of the Patriot of Ukraine stated that snipers captured by the protesters, in particular the one captured with his involvement in a Svoboda-booked room in the Hotel Ukraine, were evacuated by Poroshenko along with the captured Internal Troops.⁸⁴ A Maidan Self-Defense activist separately stated that he tried to stop this evacuation of snipers who were captured in the Hotel Ukraine and other locations along with other protesters.⁸⁵

Videos showed a confrontation between the protesters and the Maidan leaders, such as Yarosh, Parubiy, Svoboda deputies, Poroshenko, and Pashynsky, who protected and tried to evacuate a few dozen of men around 2:00 a.m. on February 21, 2014. All of them, including captured Internal Troops soldiers and officers, were all dressed in civilian clothing, and some of them had different haircuts than military-style short haircuts of captured Internal Troops soldiers and officers.⁸⁶ While specific Maidan leaders might have been unaware that there were

purported snipers in this group, the lack of any investigations of these claims independently made by three Maidan activists fits the pattern of the cover-up and falsification of the Maidan massacre investigation from the top of the Ukrainian government.

The Maidan massacre played a key role in the violent overthrow of the Yanukovych government. Because it was immediately attributed to the government snipers and the police by the Maidan opposition, the Western leaders, and the media in Ukraine and the West, it undermined his, his government, and the police and security forces legitimacy and their use of force. In particular, the massacre prompted a part of the Party of Regions deputies to leave their faction and support the Maidan opposition and the parliament vote on February 20 to withdraw the government forces from downtown Kyiv and subsequent votes to dismiss then President Yanukovych and his government. The use of force and threat of force by the far-right leaders in alliance with elements of the oligarchic Maidan parties, and their refusal to accept the Western-mediated deal also forced Yanukovych and most senior members of his government to flee Kyiv and then Ukraine on February 21, 2014 or soon afterward.

The Yanukovych treason trial revealed various testimonies and other evidence confirming that he fled from Kyiv and then Ukraine not because of his assumed responsibility for the Maidan massacre but because of a number of assassinations attempts by the Maidan forces, in particular the far right, and after their attempts to capture him and his residence near Kyiv and likely execute him. Witnesses testified at this trial that right after the Maidan massacre presidential motorcade was shot at a checkpoint, which was manned by Right Sector Svoboda activists and that the bullets hit one of the cars and a gun of one of the Yanukovych bodyguards. The witness testimonies also referred to information received by his security personnel about a plan involving Svoboda activists to assassinate him during a congress in Kharkiv where he flew after the Maidan massacre.⁸⁷ Similarly, Leonid Kravchuk, the first president of Ukraine, revealed that he received information about plot to assassinate Yanukovych around the time of the Maidan massacre. He stated that this plan was called “Ceaurescu” after the last name of the last communist leader of Romania, who was assassinated by soldiers soon after unidentified snipers massacred the anti-government protesters.⁸⁸

Parasiuk stated that members of his special Maidan company, organized with the Right Sector involvement, forced certain members of the parliament to participate in the votes to dismiss Yanukovych and his government from power and to elect the former Maidan leaders in their place.⁸⁹ The far right force factor also prompted a part of members of the Party of Regions faction in the parliament to support his dismissal and approval of the new Maidan-led government, which included the far right Svoboda members.

The far-right organizations activists did not have significant positions in the national governments and the law enforcement agencies of Ukraine prior to the Euromaidan. Several of them after the Euromaidan occupied senior government positions. This is another indirect evidence of the involvement of the far-right organizations in the violent overthrow of the Yanukovych government in alliance with elements of oligarchic parties. Svoboda had four ministers from the first post-Yanukovych government and a member of Svoboda was appointed the Prosecutor General, and his office investigated the Maidan massacre. These included the Minister of Defense, who was not a party member and resigned because of his criticism on the Ukrainian military performance during the Russian annexation of Crimea. The other ministers lost their positions after the October 2014 parliamentary elections, and the GPU head was replaced by Poroshenko with his own candidate after he was elected as president in May 2014.

Right after the Euromaidan, Parubiy offered Yarosh and Parasiuk the positions of the first deputy head and the deputy head of the National Security and Defense Council, respectively.⁹⁰

Yarosh was later appointed as an advisor to the Chief of General Staff of Ukraine. Vadym Troian, who was a member of the neo-Nazi Patriot of Ukraine and one of the commanders of the Azov battalion, became the first deputy head of the National Police. Yuri Mykhalchyshyn, a Svoboda deputy, who expressed his neo-Nazi views, stated that he held a senior position in an SBU department in charge of information. As noted, far-right organizing and leading battalions and other units were formally integrated into the police and the National Guard. In addition, Right Sector members were included in the special Alfa unit of the SBU.

Parubiy, a former neo-Nazi Patriot of the Ukraine/SNA leader, became the head of the National Security and Defense Council after the Euromaidan. He was elected as the speaker of the parliament of Ukraine in 2016. A criminal investigation of Parubiy's involvement in the Odesa massacre was opened by the State Bureau of Investigations of Ukraine right after losing his parliamentary head position after the early parliamentary elections of 2019.⁹¹

As result of their involvement in the crucial Euromaidan violence that led to the overthrow of the Yanukovych government, the far right after the Euromaidan radically increased their influence in the Ukrainian politics. The far-right members became integrated in the Ukrainian government, the police, the military, and the security services, took active part in starting and waging the civil war in Donbas. The far-right organizations, leaders, and members are treated as mainstream by the Ukrainian government and the media. The far right also obtained power to overthrow the Maidan and post-Maidan governments by force or threat of force (see Katchanovski, 2015b, 2016a). Far-right paramilitary organizations significantly increased their street mobilization, legitimacy, and veto power and contributed to radicalization and shift toward nationalism of the Ukrainian politics and government policies after the Euromaidan (see Ishchenko, 2018b).

5 | CONCLUSION

The findings of this study reveal that the far-right organizations had significant but minority representation among the Maidan leadership and protesters. However, the analysis also shows that the far-right organizations and football ultras played a key role during violent attacks. They include violent attempts to seize the presidential administration on December 1, 2013 and the parliament of Ukraine in January and on February 18, 2014, and involvement in clashes with the Berkut police during its dispersal of protesters on November 30, 2013.

The results of the analysis show that the Right Sector and Svoboda had crucial roles in the violent overthrow of the Viktor Yanukovych government, in particular, in the Maidan massacre of the protesters and the police on February 18–20, 2014. Such mass killing aimed at overthrowing the government are consistent with their illiberal ideology of a national revolution. The far-right organizations and members were involved in the Maidan massacre of the protesters and the police and covering-up of the Maidan snipers.

These findings indicate that as a result of the far-right involvement in the violent overthrow of the Yanukovych government by means of the Maidan massacre the far-right organizations achieved their strongest influence in Ukraine since its independence in 1991. Because of their involvement in Euromaidan violence, in particular, the Maidan massacre that led to the overthrow of Yanukovych government and because of their reliance on violence, the far right radically increased their power and influence in Ukraine and attained the ability to overthrow the Ukrainian governments, including the newly elected President Volodymyr Zelensky.

This study also suggests that the narratives of the Euromaidan and the Maidan massacre by the governments and the media in Ukraine, the West, and Russia have been inaccurate to a various extent. The governments and the media in Ukraine and the West and even many researchers examining the Ukrainian far right either ignored, minimized, or denied the far-right involvement in the violent overthrow of the government, the Maidan massacre of the protesters and the police and other significant cases of violence during the Euromaidan. Contrary to the narrative by Russian and separatist politicians and the media, and the Yanukovich government, the Euromaidan was not a “fascist coup” and the Maidan government was not a “fascist junta” because the neo-Nazi organizations did not have dominant roles among the Ukrainian far right. The far-right organizations were involved in the violent overthrow of the Yanukovich government and in the Maidan governments in the alliance with oligarchic Maidan parties and leaders.

The findings of this study have major implications for understanding the Euromaidan, the Maidan massacre, and the origins of the civil war in Donbas, Russian annexation of Crimea, Russian direct military intervention, and a conflict between the West and Russia. Such understanding of the far-right involvement in the events of the Euromaidan and cases of violence having crucial impact on the Ukrainian and international politics and produced or contributed to spill-over conflict are also important for their resolution.

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information may be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

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