



The ideology and development of the Social-National Party of Ukraine, and its transformation into the All-Ukrainian Union “Freedom,” in 1990–2004



Artem Iovenko

Institute of Political Science, Friedrich Schiller University Jena, Germany

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ABSTRACT

In this article the author examines the political development and activities, ideological and political positions, networks and relationships of the Social-National Party of Ukraine (SNPU) since 1990 to 2004. The party's successor, the All-Ukrainian Union “Svoboda” (VO Svoboda), joined the Ukrainian parliament since 2012 to 2014. VO Svoboda was part of the opposition to the Party of Regions and former pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovich. The SNPU has ethnocentric and nationalist positions that are expressed in political statements and documents published by the leadership and functionaries of the party. Much attention is paid to the party's ideology and the way it positions itself. The official and disparate ideological views of SNPU functionaries will also be illustrated. These views became consolidated due to the changes within the party leadership, and the party finally changed its name and image, in order to appeal to the wider masses.

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Only a small number of political scientists have classified the SNPU and its ideology. Andreas Umland and Anton Shekhovtsov characterize it as neo-fascist and extreme right (Shekhovtsov and Umland, 2012, pp.206–207). Tadeusz A. Olszanski (2011, p.1) describes the ideology as radically nationalist with radical social rhetoric. There is also a study which describes the ideological positioning of the SNPU as national-centric and even liberal, but that also finds that the party leader has opinions that differ from the party program (Kononchuk and Yarosch, 2013, p.40).

There are many more classifications of its active and politically successful successor, VO Svoboda. Andreas Umland (2010, pp.8–9; 2012, p.7) classifies the party as ultra-nationalist, radically ethno-nationalist and xenophobic. Irena Cantorovich (2013, p.95), describes the party as right-wing, Anton Shekhovtsov (2011, p.203) refers to it as far-right and radical right, Alina Polyakova (2012, p.2) as radical right, Vyacheslav Likhachev (2012) as extreme right and Per Anders Rudling (2013, pp.228, 237) as ultra-nationalist and far-right. Taras Kuzio (2009) characterizes the party as populist-nationalist while Andriy Martynov (2011, p.91) highlights the party's nationalist-populist slogans.

Externally, the SNPU has distanced itself from the classification as pro-fascist. It rejected this in 2001 in the party political magazine *Oriyentiry* and criticized this designation of the party by Vadym Dolganov from the state public broadcaster UT-1 (Parubiy, 2001a, p.2). The party's new leader Oleh Tyahnybok said in a 2004 interview following a party image transformation, “We were not fascists. We never shared the ideology of German National Socialism. I tell you honestly that neither I, nor my companions are supporters of this ideology” (Tyahnybok, 2004). In this article the author examines the following issues: establishment and development of the SNPU; party program and ideology; Russia as the main opponent; international cooperation; networking; anti-immigration and language as a topic; and, at the end, I show the party's transformation.

1. Establishment and development

The party draws its origins from the coming together of activists from nationalist civil society organizations: Varta Ruhu, Studentske Bratstvo, OUM Spadshchyna and the Ukrainian Veterans of Afghanistan (Tyahnybok.info, ca. 2011). The SNPU was founded in 1991 and has been active in the western regions of Ukraine since 1992 (Kulyk et al., 2000). The first party chairman was Yaroslav Andrushkiv a psychiatrist from Lviv. The party was first officially registered on 16 October 1995 as the Social-National Party of Ukraine by the Ukrainian Ministry of Justice (Tyahnybok.info, ca. 2011).

The SNPU arose at the time when Ukraine, newly independent from the disintegrated Soviet Union, was a young state in a period of nation building. In this process, Ukraine was confronted with the persistent internal influence of Communist nomenclature, the massive spread of the Russian language and the external cultural and political influence of Russia. The 1994 and 1998 parliamentary elections were mainly fought out between national democratic and left-wing parties. In the 1990s there was not enough space in the parliament for radically anti-Russian and ethno-nationalist sentiments like the ones that SNPU had.

From the beginning, the party presented itself as a new alternative to all of the ruling politicians. The party went to the 1994 elections under the slogan: “We – the Social Nationalists, belong neither to the old communist, nor to a new democratic nomenclature. (...) At that time, the party has also had its first experience of an election campaign, won the support of tens of thousands of voters, four deputies mandates on the oblast council of Lviv and some deputies mandates on district and city councils in western Ukraine” (Tyahnybok.info, ca. 2011). The results were insignificant not only across Ukraine as a whole but also in more traditional and patriotic western Ukraine. However, the positions that were won brought political experience for the functionaries.

The first fierce confrontation between SNPU followers and communists took place in Lviv on 7 November 1997. An aggravating factor was that the communists, some of whom had travelled from other areas, started demonstrating at the monument of the Ukrainian writer Ivan Franko, while this demonstration had not been authorized. Court proceedings were launched only against the SNPU members but were dropped after one year. VO Svoboda claimed that “(...) for the first time since the times of the Ukrainian Resistance Army we gave dignified resistance against ‘the Reds’” (Tyahnybok.info, ca. 2011). As is often the case with left-right confrontations in Ukraine, the dispute intensified because of emphasis on and different interpretations of the issues of the Soviet annexation (or liberation?) of western Ukraine from Poland in 1939 and Ukrainian guerrilla resistance against the Soviets until the mid-1950s.

The SNPU together with the State Independence of Ukraine party took part in the 1998 parliamentary elections in the Fewer Words electoral bloc (Tyahnybok.info, ca. 2011). The bloc received 45,155 votes, just 0.16% of the total vote (Central Election Commission of Ukraine, 1998a). Among other points, the bloc’s election program emphasized social problems ostensibly caused by Western influences: “We are against the propaganda of violence, crime and amorality. The propaganda of the decayed lifestyle, imported from abroad, leads to a callousness of the soul, primitivism, drug abuse, crime and sexual promiscuity” (Fewer Words electoral bloc, 1998).

In contrast to the party’s overall result, its agent for organizational work Oleh Tyahnybok achieved independent electoral success. In constituency No 119 in Busk in the Lviv region he was chosen as a direct candidate to the Ukrainian Parliament with 53,369 votes or 39.5% (Central Election Commission of Ukraine (1998b)). Therefore, he received much more support in this constituency than the bloc did throughout Ukraine as a whole. He was one of the leaders and participants of the Revolution on the Granite – a student hunger strike in 1990 on the main square in Kyiv. Oleh Tyahnybok became a member of the SNPU in 1991. After studying to become a surgeon, he followed a law degree (Tyahnybok, 2004). In the neighboring constituency No 118 Yuriy Kryvoruchko, an independent, was elected to become an MP (Central Election Commission of Ukraine, 1998b). Kryvoruchko was no longer connected to the SNPU, but it was characteristic of the election geography of the region because he was a head of the Varta Ruhu organization from 1991 to 1992 and in charge of the ideological work of the SNPU from 1991 (Vidkryta Ukrayina, ca. 2003).

In addition to Tyahnybok, one of the major functionaries and co-founders of the SNPU was Andriy Parubiy, who came from the Organization of Ukrainian Youth (OUM) “Spadshchyna”. In the 1990s he was already a deputy in the oblast council of Lviv and city council of Lviv (Parubiy, 2005). From 1996 he was also director of the Society for the Support of the Army and the Navy of Ukraine – Patriot of Ukraine, a militant youth organization that worked with the SNPU. From 2002 he was a deputy mayor and a deputy chairman of the regional council of Lviv (Gazeta.ua, 2012). He later became the head of the Lviv section of VO Svoboda (Vgolos, 2004a). The SNPU did not participate in the 2002 parliamentary elections. However, Oleh Tyahnybok was elected for the second time as a direct candidate in constituency No 120 in Busk in the Lviv region. This time he was elected as a representative of Viktor Yushchenko’s Our Ukraine bloc. Tyahnybok won with 82,236 votes or 62.16%. According to the Central Election Commission (2002), he had no party affiliation at that time. Affiliation to the SNPU was not possible because the SNPU was not one of the founding parties of the national-democratic Our Ukraine bloc (Tyahnybok, 2004).

Political scientist Anton Shekhovtsov (2013, pp.37–38) considered the party’s “militant youth organization, National Socialist/neo-Nazi symbols and propaganda of racist attitudes” as ample grounds to revoke its registration. The regulatory authorities did not agree, however. Registration was revoked from 29 of 125 parties when they were tested according to the new law in 2003. The legitimacy of the SNPU was reconfirmed by the Justice Department.

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