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Responses to Information Requests

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19 July 2016

UKR105553.E

Ukraine: The Rodina Party, including information on leaders, membership, representation in government, political platform; relations with authorities and the general public (2013-July 2016)
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

1. Overview

Sources describe the Rodina [Motherland; Fatherland; Homeland] Party as a "pro-Russian" (BBC 28 Jan. 2014; PONARS Eurasia Apr. 2014) or "radical pro-Russian" party (*The Ukrainian Week* Sept. 2013). Sources indicate that the party is based in Odessa (ibid.; PONARS Eurasia Apr. 2014; Professor 17 June 2016). A Professor of political studies at the University of Ottawa, who researches Ukrainian politics, stated that Rodina "has been a small, regional party" (Professor 17 June 2016).

According to the Professor, the Rodina Party stopped issuing public statements in 2015, its website no longer functions, and "the party de facto suspended its official activity in 2015" (ibid.). Corroborating information on the status of the Rodina party post-2015 could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response. For information from 2012 on past activities, leadership, membership and treatment of the Rodina Party and its supporters, see Response to Information Request UKR104081.

2. Political Platform

The Professor stated that the Rodina Party supported closer integration of Ukraine with Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan, the federalization of Ukraine, and making Russian the second official language of the country (Professor 17 June 2016). In December 2013, TASS, a Russian news agency (TASS N.d.), reported that representatives of the Rodina Party attended a march in support of Ukraine's accession to "the Customs Union created by Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia" (ibid. 14 Dec. 2013). Further reporting by TASS in 2014 notes that a Rodina Party representative spoke at a rally in Odessa, which was held to support a referendum on the de-centralization of power in Ukraine, the status of the Russian language, and the country's foreign policy (ibid. 10 Mar. 2014). Further information on these events could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

According to the Professor, the party and its leaders opposed the 2014 Euromaidan and the Maidan-led governments (Professor 17 June 2016). Without providing further details, the same source added that "some Rodina activists supported and participated in the separatist movement that emerged in Odessa" after the overthrow of president Yanukovich [in 2014] (ibid.). He further explained that the party's "official position and political platform since 2015 are not certain because Rodina stopped issuing public statements in the last year and the party website no longer functions" (ibid.). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

3. Leadership and Membership

Sources indicate that Ihor [Igor] Markov is the leader of the Rodina Party (Interfax 12 September 2013; TASS 15 May 2015; *The Ukrainian Week* Sept. 2013). The Professor stated that Markov is a businessman and politician from Odessa, who both "founded and led" the Rodina Party, and provided the view that he used it to "advance his political and business objectives" (Professor 17 June 2016). According to TASS, Markov is a "federalization supporter" (TASS 15 May 2015). The Kyiv-based National News Agency of Ukraine, Ukrinform, "the only national news agency of Ukraine" (Ukrinform n.d.), describes the party leader as an "ardent supporter of Ukraine's accession to the Customs Union of Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan" (ibid. 16 Sept. 2013). *The Ukrainian Week*, a Kiev-based weekly news magazine (*The Ukrainian Week* n.d.), also notes that Markov was among a group of MPs who "prevented the passing of some European integration laws" in 2013 (ibid. Sept. 2013). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Sources report that the following people occupy a leadership position within the Rodina Party:

- Vadym Savenko, Odessa regional councillor, who was elected as acting chairman when Markov was in custody in 2013 (*Vechernyaya Odessa* newspaper qtd. in BBC 5 Nov. 2013);
- Serhiy Bovbalan, Odessa councillor (ibid. 21 Nov. 2013);
- Grigory Kvasnyuk, deputy of the Odessa City Council (TASS 10 March 2014).
- Oleg Muzyka "one of the leaders of Rodina Party" (RT 1 May 2014).

The Professor stated that there is "no reliable data" about the Rodina Party's past or current membership numbers (Professor 17 June 2016). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

4. Representation in Government

According to the Professor, the Rodina Party had deputies in the Odessa regional and city councils between 2013 and 2015; however, the party "currently" does not have any representation in either national or local governments (Professor 17 June 2016). The same source added that the Rodina Party has not been represented in the national parliament since the October 2014 parliamentary elections, nor in regional councils since the local elections of October 2015 (ibid.). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Sources indicate that Ihor Markov was elected as a member of parliament in October 2012 (Interfax 12 Sept. 2013; Ukrinform 12 Sept. 2013). Ukrinform indicates that Markov joined the Party of the Regions [the party of then President Yanukovich] faction after the 2012 election (ibid.). According to sources, Markov was stripped of his mandate as a member of parliament on 12 September 2013 on the basis of allegations of election fraud (Interfax 12 Sept. 2013; Ukrinform 12 Sept. 2013). The Professor similarly stated that Ihor Markov was a member of the Ukrainian Parliament from 2012 until his election was declared void in the fall of 2013, on charges of election fraud and physical violence against protesters in 2007 (Professor 17 June 2016).

For 2015 information on the Party of the Regions, refer to Response to Information Request UKR105308.

5. Relations with Authorities

Sources report that Markov has claimed that the election fraud charges brought against him were a consequence of his opposition to the Ukraine's integration with the European Union (Ukrinform 16 September 2013) or what he described as "an act of intimidation aimed at other [dissenting] deputies" (qtd in BBC 30 Sept. 2013). Interfax, a news agency focused on Russia, China and Eurasia (Interfax n.d.) quotes Markov in a September 2013 article as stating that when he refused the [Party of the Region's] demands regarding parliamentary voting, the ruling party told him that if he did not comply: "we will deprive you of your parliamentary seat, seize your business, and put you in prison" (ibid. 13 Sept. 2013). Ukrainian News, a Kiev-based news agency, reported on 23 October 2013 that the police detained Ihor Markov on "suspicion of masterminding and beating up demonstrators in Odessa in 2007" (Ukrainian News 24 Oct. 2013). Similarly, a report by Interfax indicates that Markov was detained on 22 October 2013 for "disorderly conduct in 2007" when he allegedly orchestrated an assault on demonstrators who were protesting "against the installation of a monument to the Russian Empress Catherine the Great" in Odessa; he was released on 25 February [2014] and was later put on the Ministry of Interior's wanted list, after which he "disappeared on 4 November 2014" (Interfax 12 Aug. 2015).

BBC quotes *Vechernyaya Odessa* newspaper, a Russian-language newspaper in Odessa (Mondotimes n.d.), as indicating that in November 2013, supporters of Markov, who was in custody at that time, stormed the Odessa regional police directorate (BBC 21 Nov. 2013). The same source reports that on 18 January 2014, the Ukrainian police put "a number of members" of the Rodina Party on a "wanted list" in connection to the

incident under charges of "hooliganism connected to resistance to authorities;" Oleh Markov, Ihor Markov's brother, was arrested in Moscow in January 2014 for his participation in the event (ibid. 28 Jan. 2014). In November 2013, the BBC reported that according to od-news.com, an Odessa-based news website, those on the wanted list included Vadym Savenko, Odessa regional councillor and acting head of the party; Ihor Markov's brother Oleh Markov; Ihor Markov's bodyguard; a former employee of special services, as well as two other men (ibid. 27 November 2013). The BBC also cites Odessa media sources from December 2013 as noting that Rodina Party member Serhiy Bovbalan, was sentenced to two months of house arrest for his alleged involvement in the storming of the police directorate (ibid. 10 Dec. 2013). Further and corroborating information on the status of those on the wanted list could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

According to the Professor, Markov was released from prison after the overthrow of Yanukovych and fled to Russia in 2014 (Professor 17 June 2016). UNIAN, a Kyiv-based information agency (UNIAN n.d.), similarly indicates that Markov "decided to hide" in Russia after ex-President Yanukovych fled there [in 2014] (ibid. 12 Aug. 2015). Without providing further details, the Professor further indicated that "some other leading activists of the Rodina Party fled to Russia, Russian-annexed Crimea, or other countries, because of a threat of prosecution after the Odessa massacre [on 2 May 2014] [1]" (Professor 17 June 2016).

Sources indicate that Igor Markov was arrested in Italy on 12 August 2015 (UNIAN 12 Aug. 2015; Interfax 12 Aug. 2015; ANSA 14 Aug. 2015). ANSA, a Rome-based Italian news agency (ibid. n.d.), reports that Markov was detained as per an "Interpol arrest warrant on behalf of Kiev," on charges of assaulting anti-Russian protesters in 2007 (ibid. 14 August 2015). According to the Professor, Markov was arrested in Italy in 2015 on an extradition request of the General Prosecutor's office [of Ukraine], however the Italian court denied the extradition request, deeming it politically motivated (Professor 17 June 2016). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Sources indicate that Yuri Tchakov [Tchakev], the editor of the Timer, a news website linked to the Rodina Party, was detained in 2015 and that his residence was searched by the State Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) (ibid.; BBC 18 May 2015; TASS 15 May 2015). According to TASS, the Timer is owned by Markov, and the SBU searched apartments of several journalists associated with this website; Tchakov as reportedly stated that he and two other journalists were interrogated (ibid.). Citing trassae95.com, a Ukrainian news website, the BBC indicates that three employees of the Timer website were detained and their houses searched on 14 May 2014; the journalists were allegedly arrested for publishing "anti-state materials" that "encroached on the territorial integrity of Ukraine" (BBC 18 May 2015). Corroborating information on the reasons for the detentions and house searches could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response. Further information on the treatment of the Rodina Party's general membership by state authorities could not be found within the time constraints of this Response.

6. Relations with the General Public

According to the Professor, the Rodina Party had, what he described as "weak support and recognition" from the Ukrainian public, except in Odessa, and support has

significantly declined since the overthrow of the Yanukovych government, the Odessa massacre, the fleeing of the party leader and many activists to other countries, the government prosecution of separatists, the Russian annexation of Crimea, and the Russian military intervention in Donbas in support of separatists (Professor 17 June 2016).

Without providing further details, the same source further noted that "there were media reports in Ukraine describing the Rodina party as a supporter of separatism and [bearing a] Pro-Russian in orientation;" consequently, there have reportedly been calls in the media in Ukraine to have the party banned (ibid.). Further and corroborating information on relations with the general public could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

Note

[1] According to the *Guardian*, on 2 May 2014, a march before a football match in Odessa turned into a fight between pro-Russian and pro-Ukrainian activists, resulting in hundreds of injuries and 48 deaths; 42 pro-

Russian people who had taken refuge in the Trades Union building died due to a fire that was set during the brawl (30 April 2015).

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Internet sites, including: 112.international; Agence France-Presse; Amnesty International; APKinform; Brama; Brookings Institution; Center for Civil Liberties; Council of Europe; Crimean News Agency; Day.Kiyv; ecoi.net; Euractiv; Factiva; Fédération internationale des ligues des droits de l'homme; Freedom House; Human Rights House Network Kiev; Human Rights Watch; *The Independent*; Institute for War and Peace Reporting; International Crisis Group; ; IRIN; Jamestown Foundation; Jane's Intelligence Review; Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group; *Kyiv Post*; Minority Rights Group International; *The Moscow Times*; National Democratic Institute; Open Democracy; Open Society Foundations; Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe; *Political Handbook of the World*; Radio France Internationale; Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty; Reuters; Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union; Ukrainian Journal; United Nations – ReliefWeb, Refworld, UNHCR; United States – Department of State; *The Washington Post*.

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