

# Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

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## Responses to Information Requests

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Responses to Information Requests (RIR) respond to focused Requests for Information that are submitted to the Research Directorate in the course of the refugee protection determination process. The database contains a seven-year archive of English and French RIRs. Earlier RIRs may be found on the UNHCR's [Refworld](#) website. Please note that some RIRs have attachments which are not electronically accessible. To obtain a PDF copy of an RIR attachment, please email the [Knowledge and Information Management Unit](#).

22 July 2016

### UKR105554.E

Ukraine: Information on the Right Sector, including affiliated groups and activities; involvement in eastern Ukraine; relations with authorities (2013-July 2016)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

#### 1. Overview

Sources describe the Right Sector [*Pravyi Sektor* (*Jane's Intelligence Review* 17 Apr. 2014; Council of Europe 3 Nov. 2015, para. 59)] as a "small radical far-right group" (ibid. 28 Jan. 2014), a "paramilitary" group (*PHW 2015*, 1531) or a "volunteer militia" (AI May 2015, 6). According to sources, the Right Sector was founded in late 2013 (AI Jazeera 20 May 2014; BBC 28 Apr. 2014) during the Maidan protests (ibid.; AI May 2015). Sources further note that it became a political party in 2014 (BBC 28 Apr. 2014; *PHW 2015*, 1531).

In the parliamentary elections held in October 2014, the Right Party obtained approximately 2 percent of the overall vote, securing one seat (OSCE 19 Dec. 2014, 35; IWPR 3 Nov. 2014); their leader, Dmytro [Dmitri] Yarosh, won the seat, representing Dnepropetrovsk (ibid.). According to sources, Yarosh ran for president in the May 2014 election and received approximately 1 percent of the vote (*PHW 2015*, 1531; Jamestown Foundation 30 May 2014).

A July 2014 article in *Jane's Intelligence Review* indicates that the Right Sector has an estimated strength of 10,000 armed militia members (2 July 2014). According to a 2014 article by AI Jazeera, there are no official statistics on the number of people who are members of the Right Sector, but approximately 450,000 people were affiliated with them through their Facebook page in 2014 (20 May 2014).

Sources indicate that some Right Sector members are heavily armed (AI Jazeera 20 May 2014; *Jane's Intelligence Review* 2 July 2014). According to *Jane's Intelligence Review*, weapons in the possession of the Right Sector include AK-47 assault rifles, handguns, light machine guns and rocket launchers, which were seized from a military arsenal in western Ukraine in February 2014 (ibid.). The same source reports that following the Maidan protests, the Right Sector refused to surrender all of their unregistered weapons to the Ukraine military (ibid.).

#### 1.1 Affiliated Groups

Sources indicate that the Right Sector is an alliance of Ukraine's "ultra-nationalist" groups (BBC 28 Apr. 2014; AI Jazeera 20 May 2014), including:

- Trident (Trizub) (ibid.; *National Interest* 12 Aug. 2015);
- The Ukrainian National Assembly - Ukrainian National Self Defence (UNA-UNSO) (AI Jazeera 20 May 2014);
- The Patriots of Ukraine (ibid.; *National Interest* 12 Aug. 2015);

- The Social National Assembly (Al Jazeera 20 May 2014).

In a profile of the Right Sector, Al-Jazeera reports that these right-wing groups had "relatively low visibility" until the Maidan protests began in November 2013 (ibid.). *The Political Handbook of the World (PHW)* 2015 notes that during the Euromaidan movement, the Right Sector gained "attention" or "notoriety" (*PHW* 2015, 1531).

According to the *Interpreter*, a journal affiliated with Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), the Ukrainian Volunteer Corps (DUK) is also affiliated with the Right Sector (*Interpreter* 13 Nov. 2015).

## 1.2 Ideology

According to Al Jazeera, the Right Sector's ideology is based on the "ultranationalist values" of the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), a party founded during the interwar years in Western Ukraine and directly supported by Nazi Germany between 1939 and 1941 (20 May 2014). The International Crisis Group states that the Right Sector "rejects democracy, has no interest in the EU and routinely describes the mainstream Maidan protesters as part of the system, or part of the problem" (14 May 2014, 10).

*The Interpreter* indicates that the Right Sector "radicalised its rhetoric and actions after the signing of the Minsk II agreement in February 2015," is "the most radical opposition" to the Ukrainian government, believing that the Euromaidan protests were "an unfinished revolution, or was not a revolution at all" (*Interpreter* 13 Nov. 2015). However, the same source notes that the Right Sector has neither the manpower nor the public support to stage a coup d'etat against the government (ibid.).

A 2014 report by the UN Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) indicates that the Right Sector's goals include "combatting homosexuality" (UN 15 May 2014, para. 87). According to the US Department of State's *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2015*, on 6 June 2015, Right Sector members were among a group who attacked an LGBT "Equality March" in Kyiv (US 13 Apr. 2016, 48). The same source notes that during the incident, attackers physically assaulted both protestors and police and threw firecrackers laced with shrapnel, injuring 9 participants and 10 police officers (ibid.).

An article in *the New York Times* indicates that The Right Sector issued a joint statement with the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists prior to the planned gay pride parade in Kyiv on 12 June 2016, stating that "[i]n short, it will be a bloody mess on June 12 ... in Kiev" (*New York Times* 13 June 2016).

According to *PHW*, the Right Sector is "a strident opponent of pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine" (2015, 1531). According to *Jane's Intelligence Review*, they have threatened to bomb Russian gas pipelines if Russia intervenes beyond Crimea (2 July 2014).

## 1.3 Leaders

Sources indicate that Dmitry Yarosh was the leader of the Right Sector in 2014 (Al Jazeera 20 May 2014; BBC 28 Apr. 2014) and 2015 (Jamestown Foundation 23 July 2015; *PHW* 2015, 1531). Al Jazeera reports that before the Right Sector, Yarosh led Trident, a "conservative paramilitary organisation that ran training camps in case the time came to defend Ukraine from invaders" (Al Jazeera 20 May 2014). According to Amnesty International (AI), in April 2015, Yarosh was appointed as an advisor to the Ukrainian chief of staff and tasked with bringing "volunteer battalions under central command" (AI May 2015, 6). According to Ukrainian News Agency, a Kiev-based news provider, Yarosh reportedly left the Right Sector in December 2015 in order to found a new movement (20 Mar. 2016). Ukrayinska Pravda, a Ukrainian-language news source, also states, in an article translated by BBC, that in February 2016, he started a national movement called "'Yarosh's Statehood Initiative,'" which aims to "'unite many patriotic forces'" and "restore order" in Ukraine (Ukrayinska Pravda 24 Feb. 2016). According to the *Interpreter*, Yarosh's resignation meant that he would no longer act as a "mediator between the state and the Right Sector's extreme wing" (13 Nov. 2015).

In a 2014 article, the BBC reported that Andriy [Andrii] Tarasenko was a "leading figure" in the Right Sector (28 Apr. 2014). Ukrainian News Agency notes that Tarasenko was elected chairman of the Right Sector in March 2016 (20 Mar. 2016). *The New York Times* names Artem Skoropadsky as the spokesperson for the Right Sector in a June 2016 article (13 June 2016).

Media sources describe Oleksandr Muzychko [also known as "Sashko Bily" (BBC 25 Mar. 2014)] as "a leader" (ibid.) or "a prominent member" of the Right Sector (RFE/RL 25 Mar. 2014). According to RFE/RL, Muzychko was under investigation by a Ukrainian organized-crime unit (ibid.). The BBC reports that Ukrainian authorities described Muzychko as "a criminal gang leader" (BBC 25 Mar. 2014). Sources indicate however, that Muzychko was shot and killed (ibid.; RFE/RL 25 Mar. 2014) during a shoot-out with police in March 2014 (BBC 25 Mar. 2014).

## 2. Activities

According to sources, during the Maidan protests, the Right Sector called for the removal of former President Yanukovich (Al Jazeera 20 May 2014; *National Interest* 12 Aug. 2015) and was a "catalyzing force that eventually helped to remove Yanukovich from power" (ibid.). The BBC states that the Right Sector were "the most radical wing of Ukraine's Maidan protest" and "played a leading role" in the violence during the protests (BBC 28 Apr. 2014). Sources indicate that they were involved in violent confrontations with the police (ibid.; Al Jazeera 20 May 2014; Council of Europe 28 Jan. 2014, para. 43; UN 4 May 2016, para. 34), engaging in activities such as throwing stones, firecrackers and Molotov cocktails at the police (ibid.).

Sources report the following examples of the Right Sector's activities:

- In April 2014, Right Sector activists prevented a non-affiliated political candidate from leaving a press conference at his hotel in Odessa (UN 15 May 2014, para. 69).
- In April 2014, Right Sector activists reportedly "picketed, burned documents and then sealed off the office of the Communist Party" in Rivne due to their support of separatist activities in south-east Ukraine (ibid.).
- In April 2014, there was an incident in which graffiti depicting swastikas was painted on tombs at a Jewish cemetery; the Right Sector was accused of the vandalism, although the group denied it and helped clean it up (ibid., para. 83).
- On 2 May 2014, some members of the Right Sector took part in a rally in Odessa (TASS 22 Apr. 2016; UN 15 May 2014, para. 63) and were armed with "bats and metal sticks" (ibid.). There was a confrontation between "radical members" of the Right Sector and Maidan self-defence unit and armed pro-federalism activists that turned violent and disorderly; the incident ended in a fire at the Trade Union building where the protesters supporting federalism had taken refuge (ibid.; TASS 22 Apr. 2016). In total, at least 46 people were killed and at least 230 people were injured (ibid.; UN 15 May 2014, para. 63). Five people were reportedly taken into custody in connection with the incident, and, as of April 2016, were in pre-trial detention (TASS 22 Apr. 2016).
- From 13 June to 26 July 2015, Right Sector members raided, stole equipment from, and occupied the office of the Odessa branch of the Communist Party (UN 15 Aug. 2015, para. 82).
- In August 2015, Right Sector members were among a group who attacked a rally in Kharkiv organized by the Opposition Bloc party, a group affiliated with the administration of former President Yanukovich (ibid., para. 80).

Reporting on the time period from 16 May to 15 August 2015, the UN OHCHR states that the Right Sector organized a number of rallies to "express distrust" in the government, to end corruption, to introduce martial law, and to "stop persecution of members of volunteer battalions" (ibid., para. 74).

On 11 July 2015, 20 members of the Right Sector shot a man in Mukacheve (Zakarpattia region), attacked and destroyed three police cars, and blocked the Kyiv-Chop highway, in an operation that they claimed was to stop illicit trafficking in the area; two Right Sector members surrendered to the police while the others could not be found (ibid., 20). Jamestown Foundation, a research and analysis organization with experts in 50 countries whose "mission is to inform and educate policy makers ... about events and trends in those societies which are strategically or tactically important to the United States" (n.d.) reported on the same event, stating that the Right Sector attacked the local police with machine guns and grenades, that three people were killed and at least 13 people were wounded (23 July 2015). According to Freedom House, in response to the incident in Mukacheve, authorities "began a crackdown on Right Sector members, with a dozen arrested on various charges" (2016).

Following the confrontation with police in Mukacheve, the Right Sector organized rallies across Ukraine (Jamestown Foundation 23 July 2015; UN 15 Aug. 2016, para. 74), including in Cherkasy, Dnipropetrovsk, Ivano-Frankivsk, Kherson, Khmelnytskyi, Kramatorsk, Kyiv, Lviv, Mariupol, Odessa, Poltava, Rivne, Sumy, Ternopil and Zaporizhzhia, demanding that "persecution of patriots" be stopped (ibid.). According to the Jamestown Foundation, the Right Sector also erected "self-styled checkpoints on highways" in order to prevent the army and police from sending reinforcements to Transcarpathia following the events in Mukacheve (Jamestown Foundation 23 July 2015).

On 21 July 2015, the Right Sector arranged a rally in Kyiv and called for a referendum of no-confidence in the government (*National Interest* 12 Aug. 2015; Jamestown Foundation 23 July 2015). Estimates of the number of people at the rally range from "several hundred" (ibid.) to "over 5,000" people (*National Interest* 12 Aug. 2015). The Jamestown Foundation indicates that there are allegations that the Right Sector is involved with smuggling and racketeering, particularly in Transcarpathia province (23 July 2015).

## 3. Involvement in Eastern Ukraine

According to the *National Interest*, a magazine focused on US foreign policy issues (*National Interest* n.d.), the Right Sector "has played a significant role in providing paramilitary support for Ukrainian troops in the Dombas" and "is the last militia force to operate in the east independent of the government-controlled army" (ibid. 12 Aug. 2015). A report by the UN Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions, who visited Ukraine in September 2015, similarly indicates that the Right Sector remained an active and independent militia "both in the Dombass region and in wider Ukraine" at that time (UN 4 May 2016, para. 50).

The same source expressed concern that there have been physical attacks on journalists, writers, defense lawyers and judges perpetrated by militant groups, such as the Right Sector (ibid., para. 51). In their 2015 report *Breaking Bodies: Torture and Summary Killings in Eastern Ukraine*, AI has expressed particular concerns with how Right Sector members have treated prisoners in eastern Ukraine, stating that former prisoners of Right Sector, who they interviewed

detailed a horrifying spectrum of abuses, including mock executions, hostage-taking, extortion, extremely violent beatings, death threats and the denial of urgently needed medical care. Using an abandoned Pioneer camp near the village of Velykomyhailivka, near Dnipropetrovsk, as an ad hoc prison, Right Sector has reportedly held dozens of civilian prisoners as hostages, extorting large amounts of money from them and their families. (AI May 2015, 6).

The Right Sector reportedly denied these allegations (ibid.).

AI also provides an example in which Right Sector members manned a checkpoint in the city of Volnovakha and subjected a man to physical and verbal abuse (ibid., 21). A Right Sector spokesman reportedly told AI that members of his organization "conduct elements of military and policing operations, including stop and search roles at checkpoints," which he alleged was in agreement with Ukrainian authorities (ibid., 25). He further stated that the Right Sector detains suspected separatist fighters for up to a week and later hands them over to Ukrainian authorities, but denied all allegations that captives were mistreated in any way (ibid.).

According to the International Crisis Group, the Right Sector is used as a "propaganda tool" by Russia, and "[n]early all clashes in and around separatist-held towns have been attributed to it, though evidence is usually sparse" (14 May 2014, 10). The International Federation for Human Rights (Fédération internationale des ligues des droits de l'homme, FIDH) also indicates that the Right Sector is a "symbol of the anti-Russian movement in the Russian media" and that people in the conflict area are "often targeted simply because of a suspicion that they belong to or support it" (FIDH Oct. 2015, 27).

Sources state that the Right Sector has supported Crimean Tatars in blocking food supplies from entering Crimea (Jamestown Foundation 14 Dec. 2015; Human Rights Watch 2016).

#### 4. Relations with Authorities

Media sources report that, in March 2014, prominent Right Sector figure Oleksandr Muzychko was shot and killed in the western Ukrainian city of Rivne (RFE/RL 25 Mar. 2014; BBC 25 Mar. 2014). BBC quotes Ukraine's Deputy Interior Minister as stating that Muzychko was killed during a police raid after opening fire on the police and special forces and that three other Right Sector members were arrested at this time (ibid.). The same source indicates that a Right Sector representative was quoted by a Ukrainian newspaper as accusing authorities of ordering a contract killing of Muzychko (ibid.).

According to the UN OHCHR, in May 2014, the Right Sector was banned in the Luhansk region by the "'people's council'" (UN 15 June 2014, para. 135).

A 2014 article by *Jane's Intelligence Review* reports that the Ukrainian government "faces the challenge" of getting the Right Sector and other nationalist groups to surrender weapons seized from the military and police, particularly in Lviv oblast (17 Apr. 2014). Al Jazeera also states that the government's "inability to successfully clear out ultra-right groups from the Maidan contributes to an overall impression that the new government is unable to control protesters who helped bring down the last government" (20 May 2014).

According to the UN OHCHR, in August 2014, seven members of the Right Sector, who were found with a large number of rifles, shells and explosives in their vehicle in the Lviv region, were detained and investigated for illegal possession of weapons, but were released later the same day (UN 17 Aug. 2014, para. 48).

In a visit to Ukraine from 29 June to 3 July 2015, the Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights said that he was aware of "credible reports" of armed groups, including those affiliated with the Right Sector, who "enjoy a high degree of independence and do not appear to be fully incorporated in the regular chain of command" (Council of Europe 3 Nov. 2015, para. 59). The Jamestown Foundation noted, in July 2015, that Right Sector members are able to openly travel throughout Ukraine fully armed, despite strict gun

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.

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**Internet sites, including:** ecoi.net; EurasiaNet; Factiva; *The Guardian*; Russia Today; UN – Refworld.

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Date modified: 2016-01-05