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Ukraine: The Rodina party, including its leaders, its membership, its representation in the government, its political platform; its relations with the authorities and the general public

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1. Creation, Location, Leaders and Members of the Rodina Party

The Rodina party was created in 2009 (Crimean News Agency 17 July 2009a), and its headquarters is in Odessa (OpenDemocracy 12 Sept. 2011; Odessa Region Media Highlights 14 Aug. 2011; The Jamestown Foundation 17 Aug. 2009). The Rodina party is also represented in Crimea (Crimean News Agency 17 July 2009a). Additional information to this effect could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate. Several sources identify Ihor (or Igor) Markov as the leader of the Rodina party (Odessa Region Media Highlights 4 July 2011; *The Ukrainian Week* 23 May 2011; *Kyiv Post* 22 Apr. 2010). Information on the other leaders of the Rodina party and on its membership could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

The Rodina party has been described as "pro-Russian, semi-criminal [and] chauvinistic" (Interfax 28 July 2009), "pro-Russian chauvinist" (OpenDemocracy 12 Sept. 2011) and "pro-Russian ultra-nationalist" (*Kyiv Post* 13 May 2011) in sources consulted by the Research Directorate. According to the Crimean News Agency, Rodina promotes the preservation and learning of the Russian language and culture, reestablishment of "normal" relations with Russia, and it identifies itself as "firmly opposed" to cooperating with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) (17 July 2009a). Similarly, OpenDemocracy, an organization that publishes analytical articles on the way the world is governed (OpenDemocracy n.d.), reports that the Rodina party is more closely linked to Russia and the Soviet empire than to Ukraine. OpenDemocracy adds that the leader of Rodina, Igor Markov, reportedly funds a committee called Jews Against Anti-Semitism that is allegedly committed to defending the victims of the Holocaust against fascism and its proponents (12 Sept. 2011).

2. Representation of the Rodina Party Within City Council

In November 2010, the Interfax press agency reported that the Rodina party was one of the political parties represented on Odessa's regional council (17 Nov. 2010). In the municipal elections in late October 2010, the party won

11 of 120 seats on Odessa's city council, the Ukrainian News Agency reported (5 Nov. 2010). Sources confirm that the leader of the Rodina party, Igor Markov, is an Odessa city councillor (OpenDemocracy 12 Sept. 2011; *The Ukrainian Week* 23 May 2011; Odessa Region Media Highlights 4 July 2011). No additional information as to whether the Rodina party plays another role in Ukrainian politics could be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

3. The Rodina Party's relations with the Authorities and the General Public

3.1 Relations with the Authorities

In August 2011, Odessa Region Media Highlights, a media group that covers the Odessa region, noted that, according to a specialist from Odessa, the Rodina party has a "real" ability to influence the mayor of the city (14 Aug. 2011). The specialist argues that the Party of Regions-the party in power-and the Rodina party have ties, but that they protect their respective economic interests (Odessa Region Media Highlights 14 Aug. 2011). Similarly, in a November 2010 article, a Ukrainian studies researcher and specialist from the University of Toronto (*Kyiv Post* 22 Apr. 2010) noted that there is cooperation between the Party of Regions and the Rodina party (Kuzio Nov. 2010, 28). In May 2011, Kiev daily *The Ukrainian Week* reported that the leader of the Rodina party was close to Odessa's new mayor (23 May 2011). The three sources do not provide details of cases that show cooperation between the Odessa authorities and members of the Rodina party. However, Interfax reported that the Rodina party was one of the political parties that had supported the candidacy of Odessa's mayor during the municipal elections (4 Sept. 2010).

According to the specialist from Odessa, while the Rodina party's influence is limited to the local level, the national authorities have not reacted to their propaganda campaigns; however, the specialist gave no details on this subject (Odessa Region Media Highlights 14 Aug. 2011). In addition, in April 2010, the researcher from the University of Toronto reported in an article in the *Kyiv Post* that a criminal case involving Igor Markov was allegedly closed following the election of President Yanukovich; however, the researcher gave no details on this subject (*Kyiv Post* 22 Apr. 2010). Additional information in this regard could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

However, in 2009, the Crimean News Agency reported that, according to the Secret Service of Ukraine (SSU), the leader of the Rodina party and some party members were allegedly involved in criminal activities. They were reportedly arrested many times for illegal possession of firearms (17 July 2009a). In addition, between 1995 and 2003, Markov was reportedly a member of a gang that trafficked drugs at Odessa's entertainment venues (ibid.). The researcher from the University of Toronto also noted that Igor Markov's first criminal activity dates back to 1995 (Kuzio Nov. 2010, 28). The researcher stated that Igor Markov was allegedly implicated in corruption and organized crime, and funded by Russia to maintain an "anti-Ukrainian" network (ibid.). Similarly, an official of the People's Movement of Ukraine (PMU) in Crimea reportedly claimed that Ukraine's Rodina party receives financial support from Russia (Crimean News Agency 17 July 2009b). Moreover, according to the researcher from the University of Toronto, in August 2009, the Ukrainian authorities expelled two Russian diplomats from Ukraine for, among other things, providing financial support to the Rodina party and to Russian nationalists in Crimea (Kuzio Nov. 2010, 28). Additional information in this regard could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

3.2 Relations with the General Public

The *Ukrainian Week* reported that the organizations founded by Igor Markov, including the Rodina party, are conducting a campaign against "nationalist and fascist Ukrainians" (23 May 2011). Similarly, in his November 2010 article, the researcher from the University of Toronto claims that, in Odessa, Rodina party activists launched a campaign of "terror" against Ukrainian nationalists (Kuzio Nov. 2010, 28). According to the researcher, the "terror" sown by the Rodina party led to the 2009 murder of a 21-year-old nationalist Ukrainian student, which was blamed on activists from the Antifa (Anti-fascist) organization, which reportedly has ties to the Rodina party (ibid.). Those believed to be responsible for the murder reportedly fled to Russia, and their names appear on the list of fugitives wanted by the Ukrainian authorities (ibid.). Additional information in this regard could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

In 2007, activists from the Rodina party lashed out against Ukrainians who were protesting against the unveiling of a monument in memory of Empress Catherine, reports the researcher from the University of Toronto (Kuzio Nov. 2010, 28). Also, Odessa Region Media Highlights reports that, in September 2007, Markov and his bodyguards allegedly attacked Ukrainians who were peacefully protesting against the construction of a monument in honour of the Russian Empress Catherine II in Odessa (4 July 2011). Odessa Region Media Highlights explains that, after having been beaten, one of the protestors became disabled, and that despite the ample evidence against Markov, he was not charged because of his ties to the police (4 July 2011).

Media sources report that, on 9 May 2011, the anniversary of the Soviet victory over the Nazis, there were disputes between members of the Ukrainian nationalist parties and pro-Russian organizations in the city of Lvov (*Kyiv Post* 13 May 2011; RT 26 May 2011; *The Ukrainian Week* 23 May 2011). The nationalist organizations included the Svoboda party and the Rodina party was among the pro-Russian organizations (RT 26 May 2011). On 23 May, 2011, the *Ukrainian Week* claimed that Svoboda party supporters attacked members of pro-Russian organizations who were travelling to Mount Glory, a cemetery of Soviet soldiers. In addition to burning flags, Svoboda party supporters reportedly blocked the entrance to the cemetery and attacked Russian diplomats who were headed there (RT 26 May 2011). Similarly, the Kiev daily *Kyiv Post* reported that supporters of the Svoboda party burned red Soviet flags and threw stones at pro-Russian groups (13 May 2011). According to the RT television channel, a general information channel based in Moscow that broadcasts in over 100 countries (RT n.d.), following the attack by the Svoboda party supporters on representatives of pro-Russian organizations, 17 people were reportedly injured and two Ukrainian nationalists put under arrest; however, the source provides no information as to what happened to the two individuals who were arrested (26 May 2011).

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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