

Should the West cooperate with the “fascists” in Ukraine’s interim government?

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I have been asked this question multiple times by the German media: why should German and other Western European governments cooperate with Ukraine’s interim government that’s full of “fascists” and “neo-Nazis”? Moreover, why would the German government be interested in forging a relationship with right-wing extremist parties, like Svoboda, when it refuses to cooperate with the NPD?

This line of reasoning is wrong. As Ukraine’s government faces an uncertain future in which the role of the West will play a decisive role, it’s important to understand the fact and fiction of the “fascist question.”

First, some basic facts about Ukraine’s current government and Svoboda:

1. Out of the twenty appointed posts in the interim-government, only three are now held by Svoboda, the far-right nationalist party that has become the boogie man for the West. They are: Vice Prime Minister (Oleksandr Sych), Minister of Agrarian Policy and Food (Ihor Shvaika), and Minister of Ecology (Andriy Mokhnyk). Notably, Andrii Paruby (commander of Maidan Self-Defense) is the head of the interim government's National Security Council. The rest of the most important positions are held by Batkivshchyna (Interim-Prime Minister Yatsenuk’s and Yulia Tymoshenko’s party) or are non-partisan.
2. Prior to the revolution and Yanukovich’s ousting, Svoboda held 37 out of 450 seats in the Ukrainian parliament (Verkhovna Rada), which the party received after garnering 10.4% of the popular vote in the 2012 parliamentary elections. 2012 was the first time in Ukraine’s post-Soviet history that a far-right party received enough votes to have representation in parliament. Much of this support was driven by protest votes against Yanukovich’s Party of Regions.
3. It is true: Svoboda is a far-right nationalist party. Its leaders have made infamous anti-Semitic comments in public speeches. The party emerged under its current name (which means Freedom) and friendly looking symbols in 2004. Svoboda’s predecessor was SNPU - the Social National Party of Ukraine - that employed blood and soil colors and symbols. Svoboda also directly links its ideology to the interwar ultranationalist organizations UPA and OUN.
4. Also true: in May of 2013, some members of Svoboda (one actually, MP Mikhail Holovko), met with NPD leaders in Germany. This meeting, which was generally unnoticed at the time, was recently picked up by the [Spiegel](#) to make the argument that Svoboda and the NPD are one in the same. And this is where the facts start to become fiction.

Clearly, Svoboda should not be mistaken for a liberal-democratic party, as the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung seemed to do when it sponsored a [conference](#) attended by Svoboda MPs. However, equating Svoboda's ideology with the entire interim-government is a logical fallacy. It even has a name: the [fallacy of composition](#), whereby one assumes that what is true for the part is also true for the whole.

Because Svoboda is a minor part of the interim-government, it does not mean that the entire Ukrainian government can nor should be written off as ultra-nationalists, fascists, bandits, or whatever other term the Russian media propaganda machine has come up with. Svoboda is not clearly neo-Nazi party like the NPD. It is far-right and extremist, and because of this, it will never receive majority support in Ukraine. When this false logic is adopted by the Western media, it accomplishes exactly what propaganda is meant to do: delegitimize a real mass democratic movement born out of Ukrainians anger and dissatisfaction with a blatantly corrupt government.

If we were to apply the part-to-whole logic indiscriminately, rather than just to Ukraine, then what would one say when looking at the governments of Austria, Denmark, France, the Netherlands, Italy, Hungary, and Switzerland, where far-right parties perhaps no less “rightist” than Svoboda enjoy positions of power as coalition members or even ruling parties? Answer: we would insist that Western European governments are all full of fascists and should not cooperate with each other. As absurd as this sounds, this is exactly the logic that is reproduced in the Ukrainian “fascist question.” And this is the logic that the Russian government is using to justify unlawful Russian military intervention in Ukraine.