

Greek Government Mired in Controversy After Azov Battalion Fighter Speaks to Parliament

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Controversy gripped the Greek political scene on April 7 as Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, who was invited by Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis to speak before Greece’s parliament in a virtual address, appeared alongside two fighters of the neo-Nazi Azov Battalion. Although the Greek government and its media arms attempted to whitewash the Azov Battalion in the first weeks of the war in Ukraine, which failed, it actually ended up being counterproductive as it made Greek civilians aware to the fact that the neo-Nazi group were oppressing the 100,000+ ethnic Greeks living in Mariupol and its surrounding villages like [Sartana](#).

Zelensky’s invitation to speak to the Greek Parliament was already mired in controversy as the Communist Party of Greece (KKE), left-wing MeRA25 and right-wing Hellenic Solution boycotted parliament that day. The appearance of the Azov fighters prompted MPs from the official opposition SYRIZA to storm out of parliament, despite the party initially being enthusiastic for Zelensky to speak before parliamentarians.

With Greek media and opposition parties, even those who supported Zelensky, blowing up at the appearance of the Azov Battalion, it took the Greek government almost three hours to try and distance themselves from the debacle, with government spokesperson Yiannis Economou saying: “including a message from an Azov Battalion member was wrong and inappropriate.

For their part, Mitsotakis and President Katerina Sakellaropoulou highlighted Zelensky’s speech but made no reference to the appearance of the Azov Battalion. SYRIZA, MeRA25 and fellow left-wing party KINAL (third largest party in Greece) are demanding explanations from the ruling New Democracy government. Even former Prime Minister Antonis Samaras of the New Democracy party characterised the speech from the Azov Battalion fighter as “a big mistake.”

This scandal is now being moved to the forthcoming Conference of [Party] Presidents, and the opposition are seeking explanations as to whether the government was aware or agreed with Zelensky to give the floor to Azov Battalion fighters.

The appearance of the Azov Battalion in the Greek parliament should not be surprising when the Greek mainstream media were whitewashing the group to the point of even lionising them in interviews and claiming they had “nothing to do with the Ukrainian government” despite being a unit of the Republican Guard, which falls under the command of the Interior Ministry.

In addition, Manolis Androulakis, the last EU diplomat to evacuate Mariupol, deliberately lied to the Greek public and claimed in an interview that the “Azov do not kill their own”, i.e. civilians. This not only contradicts all available evidence from Mariupol civilians themselves, including from ethnic Greeks, but even contradicts Western liberal human rights organizations who have documented Azov Battalion crimes since 2014. With a Greek diplomat and mainstream media whitewashing the Azov Battalion, it is little wonder why Zelensky had the audacity to play a video message from the two Azov Battalion fighters claiming to be ethnic Greeks from Mariupol.

One of the biggest questions being raised in Greece at the moment is why did the two Azov Battalion fighters appear in Zelensky’s virtual address to the Greek Parliament to begin with when the Ukrainian president has always appeared alone during his tour of receiving the applause and adulation of European parliaments.

One of the supposed ethnic Greek fighters of the Azov Battalion identified himself as Mikhail. The other kept his face hidden. Speculation is rife whether the Azov Battalion member, who spoke in Ukrainian to the Greek parliament, is actually an ethnic Greek or not – but at this time it is impossible to verify, and more importantly, irrelevant to the fact that the Greek government has exposed itself to a massive humiliation at a time when its popularity is already dropping due to the declining economic situation and decision to send weapons to Ukraine.

As the Azov Battalion has the disdain of all Greeks – from liberals to the Far Right and the Far Left, except from the most radical neoliberal circles, it can be assumed that Zelensky attempted to foster a good image for the neo-Nazi group. The beginning of the war in Ukraine saw the pro-government Greek media engage in a massive whitewashing of the Azov Battalion, but as the weeks passed on, more and more testimonies from Greeks in Mariupol revealed the suffering they had endured under the Kiev regime and the Azov Battalion.

More revealing, ethnic Greeks from Essentuki, Chechnya and other parts of Russia were joining the Russian military to fight against the Azov Battalion in Mariupol, especially after news filtered that one ethnic Greek in the Russian military [was killed](#), public opinion towards the Azov Battalion began to sway significantly. It can only be assumed that Zelensky attempted to restore the image of the Azov Battalion by presenting their own alleged ethnic Greek fighters.

What began as an exercise to tick off the Greek Parliament’s participation in Zelensky’s tour of Europe’s Parliaments, has now turned into a massive debacle. As Greece has a special responsibility for the 100,000+ Greeks in Mariupol, the country should not just blindly follow Western interests who have been silent about Donbass’ suffering since 2014. But alas, as

New Democracy serve the interests of NATO and the West rather than Greek citizens and diaspora Greeks, it will once again have to deal with another blow to its already diminishing popularity.

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