

New Coalition Plans to Expand War against Eastern Ukraine

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Five fractions in the recently elected Ukrainian Parliament agreed on a coalition pact November 21. Although the coalition still has to agree on the division of posts, it has already announced that it intends to step up its aggression in the east of the country and exacerbate Kiev's confrontation with Russia.

The coalition chose the date of the one-year anniversary of the Maidan protests to announce its program. The demonstrations on the Maidan were supported by Western governments and led to a bloody coup that brought right-wing, pro-Western forces to power. The coup then led to the development of separatist movements in eastern Ukraine.

Now, one year on, five parliamentary parties, all of which supported the Maidan protests, have formed a coalition that plans to intensify a policy of war and enforce vicious cuts in social spending.

The five coalition partners agreed to increase military spending to three percent of GDP. They plan new methods of military mobilization and a renewal of the country's security strategy. Their proposed "most urgent task" is NATO membership for Ukraine.

Up to now, the Ukrainian constitution guaranteed the nonaligned status of the country. With 285 seats in the 423-seat parliament, the new coalition now has the two-thirds majority necessary for the constitutional change, which would permit the country's integration into the Western military alliance.

On Monday, President Petro Poroshenko confirmed these plans and announced a referendum on joining NATO within six years. Until then, all the criteria for inclusion in the military alliance are to be met.

Just a few days earlier, Poroshenko had decided to slash all state funding and pensions to the areas of eastern Ukraine controlled by pro-Russian separatists. As a result, schools, hospitals and emergency services will no longer be funded, and pensions and benefits will not be paid.

Arseniy Yatsenyuk, who is likely to remain prime minister, rejected any negotiations with the separatists. "We will not conduct direct negotiations with Russian terrorists," he said.

The ruthless program of the new government is reflected in its personnel. The groups involved in the coalition are right-wing and ultranationalist forces. The Bloc Petro Poroshenko, with 127 deputies, constitutes the largest fraction in the new coalition.

Included in the ranks of other coalition partners, the Popular Front (76 seats), the Self-Help Party (34 seats) led by the Lviv Mayor Andriy Sadovyj, and the Fatherland Party (23 seats) headed by former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko, are numerous right-wing extremists.

Amongst the ten leading deputies of the Popular Front are three commanders of extreme right volunteer militias (Andrij Teteruk, Arsen Avakov and Yuri Beresa), which fought alongside the Ukrainian army against the separatists and are held responsible for serious human rights violations.

In addition to these three, Andrij Bilezkij also entered the Ukrainian Rada as a candidate of the Popular Front. Bilezkij founded the notorious Azov Battalion and was a longtime member of the right-wing grouping Patriots of Ukraine. According to the Kiev-based German historian Andreas Umland, Bilezkij is an “expressly biological racist” who “openly propagates the Aryan myth.”

The fifth coalition partner is the Radical Party of Oleh Lyashko, with 25 seats. Prior to the election, Lyashko had abducted and tortured suspected separatists in many parts of the country. The human rights organization Amnesty International has accused Lyashko of breaching international law. During the election campaign his party called for Ukraine to have its own nuclear weapons.

Although the new government has a large majority of seats, it by no means reflects the will of the people. In the parliamentary elections in late October, broad layers of the population were barred from voting. Opposition parties were suppressed and banned. Only 53 percent of the electorate went to the polls.

The integration of right-wing thugs into the government makes clear that the new regime can only enforce its reactionary program with the use of force against the population. In this respect it can rely on the support of the NATO powers.

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg welcomed the government’s announcement that it would seek membership in the military alliance. “The door is still open,” he said. “I recall that we had decided at the summit in Bucharest [in 2008] that Ukraine should be a member of NATO.” This decision is still valid if the Ukraine fulfills all the criteria for membership, he suggested.

On Monday, the Lithuanian President Dalia Grybauskaite promised weapons supplies to the regime during a state visit to Kiev. “We have agreed on the training of officers and participation in multinational exercises on the territory of Lithuania, a military-technical cooperation and supplies of certain types of weapons for the Ukrainian armed forces,” Grybauskaite said.

The talks between Grybauskaite and Poroshenko reportedly concerned a tripartite military alliance between Ukraine and two NATO members, Poland and Lithuania.

In a government statement on Wednesday, the German Chancellor Angela Merkel once again fiercely criticized Russia. “Nothing justifies or excuses the annexation of the Crimea by Russia,” Merkel said. She repeated her recent claim that Russia had broken international law. On Tuesday, the Chancellor addressed a conference of businessmen in Berlin and called for a continuation of sanctions against Russia.

According to a US military official, Lt. Gen. Ben Hodges, the Pentagon is planning to station

100 armored vehicles permanently in Eastern Europe. The combat vehicles could be stationed “in the Baltic States and Poland, Romania and Bulgaria”, Hodges explained.

Given the aggressive policy of NATO and the integration of right-wing forces in the Ukrainian government, a vote held last Friday in a committee of the UN General Assembly was of especial significance.

Russia put forward a motion opposing the glorification of Nazism and other practices which incited racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related forms of intolerance.

The resolution singled out for condemnation practices “which denigrate the memory of the countless victims of crimes against humanity committed during World War II.” In addition to the crimes of the SS, the motion named crimes committed by those “fighting the anti-Hitler coalition and who collaborated with the Nazi movement.”

There were 115 countries voting in favor of the motion, while 55 countries, including Germany abstained. Three countries voted against—Canada, the US and Ukraine.

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