

The position of the Group of Belarusian Anarchists in Warsaw on the war in Ukraine

Prameń

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After February 24, among ourselves and with comrades from different countries, we often discuss the situation Europe found itself in. Why did the war start? How has it changed the political prospects of the region and, in particular, Belarus? How do we feel about NATO? Is it possible, while remaining anarchists, to serve in the state armed forces? Finally, what should we do in the context of the war, being part of the diaspora in Poland? We have come up with a collective position on these and other issues, which are outlined in the following text.

General perspective on the situation

We think it is a mistake to talk about the conflict as a proxy war between Russia and NATO. At this stage, it is the Ukrainian people's war against the invasion of Russia. This vision is substantiated by two arguments:

1. The idea of a proxy war implies that the Ukrainian state and the Ukrainian people are only "puppets of the West." In fact, Ukraine has its agency. Apart from the fact that we, as anarchists, always strive to see the will of the weak and oppressed, this agency has been proven in practice. Today, we know that at the very beginning of the war, Western political leaders were confident of Russia's imminent success. Therefore, for example, there were no serious arms supplies, and Biden offered Zelensky evacuation. "The Great of the World" decided everything in advance, but the will of the Ukrainian people broke their plans.
2. The active participation of the population is the second component of the "people's war" concept. On the part of Russia, it is a professional military who are fighting with the passive support of the majority of the population. On the part of Ukraine, the whole society has banded together and is actively participating in the resistance. This is confirmed by many studies and facts: from the rise of donations to funds for the needs of the military and huge queues to join the militia to the mass volunteer movement. Moreover, this social cohesion is not the result of military propaganda, but a natural response to an armed invasion, the desire to protect one's life and physical security, as well as political freedoms achieved in previous struggles. In this case, the Ukrainian people dictate the position of the authorities rather than the other way around.

On the causes of the war

The Kremlin sells aggression under the guise of the fight against Ukrainian Nazism, but this is only an ideological screen. The dominance of the far-right in Ukraine is greatly exaggerated. They had dominated in the streets and were represented in some state bodies, but the overwhelming influence in all state institutions, in the media, and in public opinion has been enjoyed by the liberal democratic forces.

One of the main reasons for the war is the greater number of political freedoms in Ukraine compared to Russia. Ukraine is a regional example of alternative statehood and the successful overthrow of the government. In addition, the ruling elite in Russia understands that when a revolution breaks out in their country and they want to suppress it with armed force, the culturally close Ukraine can become an important military ally of the Russian rebels. Many of our

comrades who were forced to flee Russia and Belarus found refuge in Ukraine and viewed it as a place where they could continue the fight against authoritarian regimes in their countries.

The second reason for the aggression is imperialist and revanchist logic. The Russian elite considers all territories that have ever been part of Russia or the USSR to be their own patrimony or a zone where satellite countries should be created. Russia has conducted military operations before, using the tactics of creating “hotbeds” that hinder the development of neighboring countries that are beyond the control of the Kremlin: Moldova, Georgia, and Ukraine before 2022. This tactic was used due to a lack of political strength. With the accumulation of economic resources and the development of the military-industrial complex, Russia has moved to a new tactic of a full-scale aggressive war.

Moreover, the war historically remains a common robbery, and Putin is counting on the seizure of resources and enterprises of the agricultural, energy, and industrial complex of Ukraine. In this sense, the Russian elite is the brainchild of capitalist expansionist logic, equally characteristic of Western political elites.

Imperialism of Russia and NATO

These three points are the initial interest of the Russian government that forms the basis of the war. Its implementation runs up against the imperialist interests of some Western countries. Let us dwell separately on the confrontation between Russia and NATO.

We are aware of the history of bloody conflicts unleashed by NATO countries and do not doubt their criminal intentions today. Moreover, we can see that Western politicians are partially to blame for the war. After all, it was not Putin who came up with the idea of solving issues by force, blackmail, deception, and bribery. In fact, he simply accepts and perpetuates the rules of the game by which politicians around the world operate. Even now we see the continuation of this approach when Western oil and gas companies continue to pump Putin with money, and followers of the “pragmatic” approach suggest that some Ukrainians surrender to occupation. We condemn such a policy based on greed and fear of losing power. At the same time, we hope for the pressure of the European peoples capable of forcing their authorities to provide real military assistance to Ukraine and abandon claims to colonial control over the country. At the same time, we consider the very situation when Ukraine, which opposes Russian imperialism, needs a powerful ally to be a sad reality of the global inequality system.

We are aware of the economic and military interests of Western elites in our region and unequivocally oppose the expansion of NATO to the east. In other places, NATO acts by military force, but in our region in recent decades, Western countries have been using the method of so-called “soft power”. Russia also uses this strategy, putting neighboring countries in economic dependence and exporting its culture here. But the Kremlin’s main method in the region is brute police and military force. We cannot equate these approaches. In the case of the “soft power” of NATO countries, we remain fooled and impoverished, in the case of the Kremlin’s “brute force”, we find ourselves beaten and thrown into prison or killed by rocket attacks.

In general, we have no illusions about NATO imperialism, but in our region, the main enemy here and now is Russian imperialism.

As anarchists from Belarus, we look at the Russian government as a regional “gendarme of revolutions”. The defeat of the 2020 uprising in our country is largely due to Putin’s support for

the Lukashenka's regime. We see a similar story in Kazakhstan. In such uprisings, the Kremlin sees exclusively the intrigues of the West and does not believe that they can be organized by society in its own interests. In the event of Russia's military defeat, we hope that Putin's power will waver and the main pillar of authoritarianism in the region will be destroyed.

Why we support Ukraine

What will happen if Ukraine loses? Firstly, Ukraine will not lose. But if something like this happens, the main result will be the genocide of Ukrainian society. In addition, we see two scenarios:

1. The Kremlin's victory may mean further aggression against Poland and the Baltic states, and possibly the outbreak of a world war and a nuclear clash. If Western countries do not support Ukraine sufficiently, Putin will see this as a weakness, see the success of his strategy, and want to move on.
2. If it doesn't escalate, we will witness a new Iron Curtain. Authoritarianism in our region will strengthen for decades, and the peoples of Belarus, Russia, and the occupied part of Ukraine will be doomed to poverty and police terror. We have lived in Belarus and know what a dictatorship is, what a mass violent suppression of discontent is. We do not wish such a fate on anyone and support those who resist it.

On the contrary, what will happen if Ukraine wins? Then Putin's regime will be seriously shaken and will pull the authoritarian regimes of neighboring countries down with it. This will open up opportunities for the expansion of political freedoms, and the emergence of new economic forms and ways of political participation. The strengthening of society and the weakening of the state will become a real chance for anti-statist transformations in the region.

Thus, we do not support pragmatic "lesser evil" tactics or any other form of realpolitik. We profess a values policy. In this case, we put the value of life and the physical safety of people at the forefront. This choice leads us to support Ukraine. We cannot accept tens of thousands of dead and millions of crippled lives if Russia wins. We know that this victory will reinforce dictatorships in our region and perpetuate for decades the terror that the people of Belarus and Russia suffer daily. Therefore, we want Russia's defeat and Ukraine's victory.

Participation of anarchists in the war

From the first days of the full-scale invasion, anarchists have been involved in the resistance. Some of the comrades formed international mutual assistance initiatives for the material support of anti-authoritarian fighters and civilians affected by the war. The other part operates within Territorial Defense and other units of the Armed Forces of Ukraine.

By participating in this war, anarchists are resisting the imperialist invasion and related war crimes and manifestations of genocide. That is, the most disgusting and violent forms of power.

We understand that joining state structures is a departure from the anarchist tradition, but we support the decision of our comrades. This is the only possible way at this stage to offer armed resistance to the invasion and advance in achieving the strategic goals of anarchism in the region.

Whenever possible, we help such fighters and encourage others to do so. We also support other, non-military, ways of resisting Russian aggression.

If the anarchists decided to act as an autonomous armed unit on the territory of Ukraine, they would simply be destroyed. Especially at the beginning of the war, when there were many raiding forces operating in the cities, there were frequent cases of friendly fire from the Ukrainian army. An unregistered group under an unknown symbol would definitely fall into this trap. Moreover, at the time of the outbreak of the war, the anarchists did not have the necessary skills, material support, and weapons to form an autonomous force.

Participation in military operations allows you to master the necessary resources and skills for future organizing, and participation in national resistance gives additional influence to anarchists to promote the interests of the oppressed strata of society and resist negative trends.

An alternative tactic could be flight and we support those who used it. At the same time, many men, the poor, or people that can't leave behind sick relatives or animals are deprived of such a privilege. For them not to resist means to live under occupation. For political activists and especially anarchists, occupation means guaranteed prison or death.

In addition, we, as refugees from Belarus, consider a flight to be the worst option, not the best. War is not a natural disaster from which one can only escape. So if there is an opportunity to continue to resist, it is better to do it where you are.

Belarus and the war in Ukraine

Despite the “anti-Nazi” rhetoric of the Belarusian regime, the state is developing increasingly fascist features:

- the cult of crude force and the transformation of physical violence into the only pillar of statehood, an overarching discourse about the external enemy;
- militarization of state institutions: security forces are in key positions, for example, in the Security Council that is created to take the power in case Lukashenka dies;
- regular military exercises accompanied by aggressive rhetoric, purchase of new weapons, increase in the army size;
- merging of big capital and the state;
- a discourse about the fusion of the state and society, where the latter is impossible without the former;
- state control over the cultural and media sphere.

Given the nature of the regime and Lukashenka's dependence on the Kremlin, his support for Russian aggression looks natural.

At the same time, anti-war sentiments are strong in Belarusian society. Even given the power of the repressive apparatus, people have launched widespread activity: sabotage on the railway, publication of intelligence and de-anonymization of the military, protests on the referendum day, and numerous symbolic actions with posters, leaflets, and graffiti. Many Belarusians have become

volunteers in the Ukrainian army. Belarusian diasporas have actively joined the international volunteer support network of the Ukrainian people.

We stand in solidarity with such actions and initiatives and believe that the contribution to the victory of Ukraine is likely a contribution to our victory over the Lukashenka's regime.

Key political struggle areas in the context of war

In the context of the war, the main task is the comprehensive support of the Ukrainian people. In addition, some specific goals are important for us as part of the Belarusian diaspora in Poland:

1. Under the massive resistance and unrest of the peoples of Russia and Belarus and with the growth of economic losses, the Kremlin can stop the invasion. Therefore, it is important to support the anti-war resistance and anarchist movements in these countries. It is also necessary to direct efforts to ensure that the Belarusian army does not enter the war at all or for as long as possible. This requires active campaigning among people of military age and assistance in leaving the country for those who do not want to participate in the war on the side of the aggressor.
2. We also see sense in criticizing nationalisms that cause the growth of xenophobia throughout the region. Awareness-raising campaigns are needed to explain the difference between society and the State, especially in the conditions of autocracies and regimes with increasing elements of fascism.
3. Among our diaspora, we observe uncritical support for the Belarusian battalions, so it is important to widely spread anarchist ideas as opposed to the right-wing currents that are raising their heads. This is important so that future political changes in Belarus are rather based on the ideas of expanding individual and collective freedoms in the economy and politics, than on nationalist myths.
4. It is also important to prepare for war on the territory of the European Union by developing knowledge and skills that increase the autonomy of individuals and collectives during emergencies.

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