



universität
wien

MASTERARBEIT / MASTER'S THESIS

Titel der Masterarbeit / Title of the Master's Thesis

„Geopolitical Conflicts Within the Far Right.
The Azov Movement's Struggle for Recognition Within the
Transnational Network of the European Far Right“

verfasst von / submitted by

Philipp Pfliegerl, BA

angestrebter akademischer Grad / in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts (MA)

Wien, 2021 / Vienna, 2021

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt /
degree programme code as it appears on
the student record sheet:

UA 066 824

Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt /
degree programme as it appears on
the student record sheet:

Masterstudium Politikwissenschaft UG2002

Betreut von / Supervisor:

Univ.-Prof. Dr. Saskia Stachowitsch

Table of Contents

Abstract (English).....	1
Abstract (German)	2
List of Abbreviations	3
CHAPTER I: Introduction.....	4
CHAPTER II: Conceptual and Theoretical Framework	11
1. The Azov Movement, its History, and its International Network.....	12
<i>1.1. The Right-Wing Extremist Milieu, From Which Azov's Leadership Originates</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>1.2. From the Fringes of Ukrainian Society to the Centre of International Attention</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>1.3. The Emergence of Azov in the Course of the War in Eastern Ukraine</i>	<i>18</i>
<i>1.4. The Consolidation of Azov into a Broad Ultranationalist Movement.....</i>	<i>20</i>
2. The Ideological and Organizational Spectrum of Far-Right Politics	24
<i>2.1. Far-Right Worldviews and Ideologies</i>	<i>24</i>
2.1.1. Core Elements of Far-Right World Views.....	25
2.1.2. Extreme and Radical Right-Wing Politics	27
2.1.3. Fascism, Neo-Fascism and Neo-Nazism.....	29
<i>2.2. Organizational Diversity Within Far-Right Politics.....</i>	<i>31</i>
3. Social Movement Approaches and the Study of Far-Right Politics.....	33
<i>3.1. The Concept of Social Movement</i>	<i>35</i>
<i>3.2. Social Movement Dynamics Within the Far Right.....</i>	<i>38</i>
<i>3.3. Studying Far-Right Politics with Social Movement Approaches</i>	<i>42</i>
4. Frame Analysis and Frame Theory	45
<i>4.1. Core Functions of Collective Action Frames.....</i>	<i>47</i>
<i>4.3. Variable Properties of Collective Action Frames.....</i>	<i>49</i>
<i>4.4. Framing Processes and Dynamics</i>	<i>53</i>
CHAPTER III: Methods and Methodology	55
1. Data Selection and Data Collection	56
2. Methods of Data Analysis.....	58
3. Limitations and Conceptual Notes	61
CHAPTER IV: Empirical Findings	62
1. Variables in Azov's Framing Activities	63
2. From Global to Local: The Azov Movement's Diagnostic Framing.....	65
<i>2.1. Global Narratives: The State of World Affairs</i>	<i>65</i>
2.1.1. Manichean Worldview and Rejection of Modernity	67

2.1.2. Society as an Organism of a Higher Type.....	69
2.1.3. Global Struggle for World Dominance	70
2.2. <i>Russia and Globalism: Russia as Agent of the Globalist World Order</i>	71
2.2.1. Russia's Foreign Policy as Neo-Soviet Imperialism	72
2.2.2. The Russian Federation as Haven of Globalism and Multiculturalism.....	74
2.2.3. The Kremlin and its Fight Against the Russian Nation.....	76
2.2.4. The Largest Mosque in Europe and Putin's Islamization agenda	78
2.3. <i>European Union and the West: The Self-Destruction of the European Union</i>	80
2.3.1. The European Union as Degenerate Political Entity Sui Generis	81
2.3.2. Economic Interests as Driving Force behind EU Foreign Policy.....	83
2.3.3. Eastern Europe caught between Russia and the West.....	84
2.3.4. National Chauvinism as an Obstacle to Transnational Cooperation	86
2.4. <i>Ukraine in the Grip of Globalist Elites</i>	88
2.4.1. Ukraine as a Failed State: Corruption, Mismanagement, Wrong Elites.....	89
2.4.2. The Degeneration of Ukrainian Society and its Values	92
2.4.4. No Surrender and No Concessions in the War with Russia and the Separatists	94
3. From Local to Global: The Azov Movement's Prognostic Framing.....	97
3.1. <i>Building the Ethnic Nation: Continuation of National Revolution on Ukrainian Soil</i>	98
3.1.1. Creation of a United National Movement.....	100
3.1.2. Winning the Hearts and Minds of the People	102
3.1.3. Ensuring Law and Order on Ukraine's Streets.....	104
3.1.4. Transforming the State between Entryism and Radical Opposition Politics.....	106
3.2. <i>Building Intermarium: Alternative Regional Integration in Central and Eastern Europe</i>	108
3.2.1. The East as the Starting Point of National Rebirth	109
3.2.2. Intermarium: Establishing Geopolitical Sovereignty	111
3.2.3. Step-by-step plan: Turning Intermarium into Reality	113
3.2.4. Bringing Together Nationalist Forces of the Region	116
3.3. <i>Building Paneuropa: A Europe of Sovereign Nations Based on Ethnic Principles</i>	119
3.3.1. Appropriation and Transformation of Pan-Europeanism.....	120
3.3.2. Forging Alliances in International Exchange.....	123
3.3.3. Alignment and Expansion: Tying Reconquista to the Intermarium project.....	126
3.4. <i>Building an Alternative World Order: Joint World-Wide Struggle against Globalism</i>	129
CHAPTER V: Conclusion	133
Primary Sources	139
Bibliography	140

Abstract (English)

The history of the European far right is characterized by the precarious attempt of some to establish enduring transnational cooperation. Attempts to date have largely failed due to internal conflicts. One of these continuing cleavages is the question of geopolitical orientation, which is being actualized today in the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. Drawing on approaches from social movement research, this thesis argues that the far right's contingent worldview is permanently renegotiated in contested discursive processes in which a variety of different actors participate and try to assert their interests. Within the European far right, and especially among radical right-wing populist parties, Russia has exerted strong influence for many years. For many far-right actors, Russia represents the hope for national-revolutionary aspirations and a geopolitical counterweight to the West. This thesis examines the Ukrainian Azov movement's attempt to convince its transnational far-right network of the opposite. Using social movement frame analysis, the Azov movement's English-language international communication with its far-right network is systematically analyzed for central narratives and applied framing strategies. This thesis shows that in the struggle for geopolitical hegemony within the transnationally oriented far right, the Azov movement offers a multi-layered counterproposal to the Russian narrative that transcends it and embraces the vision of an alternative world order in which liberal modernity is overcome and an ethnonational utopia is established instead.

Abstract (German)

Die Geschichte der europäischen extremen Rechten ist durch den prekären Versuch einiger gekennzeichnet, beständige transnationale Zusammenarbeit herzustellen. Bisherige Versuche sind in den meisten Fällen an internen Konflikten gescheitert. Einer der anhaltenden Konflikte ist die Frage der geopolitischen Ausrichtung, die im Konflikt zwischen Russland und der Ukraine heute Aktualisierung erfährt. Im Rückgriff auf Ansätze der sozialen Bewegungsforschung wird in dieser Arbeit argumentiert, dass das kontingente Weltbild der extremen Rechten im Rahmen diskursiver Prozesse, an welchen eine Vielzahl an unterschiedlichen Akteuren partizipieren und versuchen, ihre Interessen durchzusetzen, permanent neu verhandelt wird. Innerhalb der europäischen extremen Rechten und insbesondere bei rechtspopulistischen Parteien wurde von Russland seit vielen Jahren starker Einfluss ausgeübt. Für viele rechtsextreme Akteure stellt Russland die Hoffnung für national-revolutionäre Bestrebungen und ein geopolitisches Gegengewicht zum Westen dar. Diese Arbeit untersucht den Versuch der ukrainischen Azov Bewegung, ihr transnationales rechtsextremes Netzwerk vom Gegenteil zu überzeugen. Im Rahmen einer Frame Analyse sozialer Bewegungen wird die englischsprachige internationale Kommunikation der Azov-Bewegung mit ihrem rechtsextremen Netzwerk systematisch auf zentrale Narrative und angewandte Framing-Strategien untersucht. Diese Arbeit zeigt, dass die Azov-Bewegung im Kampf um die geopolitische Hegemonie innerhalb der transnational orientierten extremen Rechten ein vielschichtiges Gegenangebot zum russischen Narrativ anbietet, das dieses transzendiert und die Vision einer alternativen Weltordnung beinhaltet, in der die liberale Moderne überwunden und stattdessen eine ethnonationale Utopie weltweit etabliert wird.

List of Abbreviations

CAF	Collective Action Frames
CFT	Core Framing Tasks
CEE	Central and Eastern Europe
CC	Civil Corps Azov
DOS	Discursive Opportunity Structures
EDL	English Defence League
EU	European Union
ISG	Intermarium Support Group
ISIS	The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
LGBT	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender
NATO	The North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NSBM	National Socialist Black Metal
NPD	National Democratic Party of Germany
NWO	New World Order
OUN	Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists
PEGIDA	Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamicisation of the Occident
POS	Political Opportunity Structures
PU	Patriots of Ukraine
SA	Sturmabteilung
SNA	Social National Assembly
SNPU	Social-National Party of Ukraine
SS	Schutzstaffel
Svoboda	All-Ukrainian Association Svoboda
UN	United Nations
YC	Youth Corps Azov

CHAPTER I: Introduction

The Plomin Club is located inside the Cossack House in the old city of Kiev, a literary club used by the Ukrainian Azov movement as a venue for intellectual and metapolitical debate. The literary club is part of Azov's cultural-political concept, which is inspired by the squatted house project of the famous neo-fascist movement CasaPound Italy. Next to the literary club, visitors will find a martial arts center, a store selling right-wing extremist merchandise such as music, clothing, and books, and a library that contains the entire canon of well-known fascist authors from the interwar period and beyond. Collectors looking closely enough will discover postcards with portraits of fascist icons and leaders from all over the world, as Michael Colborne (2019), a journalist and expert of the Ukrainian far right, observed during a visit to the social center. The Cossack House is well known by radical nationalists in the country. It is an institution and meeting place for the Ukrainian far right and its various subcultures (Boichenko 2017). But the social center is also becoming increasingly well-known abroad, throughout the various nationalist milieus in Europe and beyond.

Many far-right actors in Europe are familiar with the Azov movement, which started as a volunteer battalion during the outbreak of conflict in eastern Ukraine and has since gained international notoriety because of its neo-Nazi symbolism and its close contact in right-wing extremist milieus throughout the West. Already during the outbreak of war in eastern Ukraine in 2014, Azov was a magnet for far-right individuals from all over the world who traveled to Ukraine in the wake of the conflict to fight with the battalion in the east of the country against Russia and the pro-Russian separatists (Rekawek 2020). That the phenomenon of far-right foreign fighters, alongside jihadist ones, has arrived in the public eye has a great deal to do with the conflict between Russia and Ukraine and militant associations like Azov, which have gratefully accepted battle-ready individuals from abroad into their own ranks (MacKenzie and Kaunert 2021). In the meantime, many things have changed, and Azov has become a broad nationalist movement. Besides a military arm subordinated to the Ukrainian National Guard, Azov is composed of a political party, a militant street militia and a variety of organizations and initiatives (Miller 2018a). Their common goal is the continuation of an ethno-national revolution in Ukraine, which in the eyes of the movement began with Euromaidan. However, Azov's activities are not limited to Ukraine, but the movement has expanded contacts with far-right organizations abroad and strives for a new alliance of ethno-nationalist forces in Europe to fight against so-called "globalism" of the Western *and* the Russian type (Colborne 2019a). With this intention in mind, Azov tries to establish a new meta-narrative within far-right

discourse, which is supposed to lead to the establishment of a new nationalist culture of mutual recognition and thus to new cohesion within the often-divided political family. To reach the intended audience and to strengthen Azov's position within the international far right network, the movement is increasingly working to make Ukraine a popular meeting place for the international far right and is involved in organizing a variety of events to bring like-minded audiences to the country.

It is mainly large international events of the militant neo-Nazi subculture, such as the annual *Asgardsrei Festival*, that regularly attract audiences from all over Europe to Ukraine and into the arms of Azov. The festival is fully dedicated to the genre of Nationalist Socialist Black Metal (NSBM) and features famous extreme right-wing bands from many European countries. Some international visitors to the festival also like to drop by the Cossack House to take selfies in front of its impressive scenery (Colborne 2020). At the social center, they can fully immerse themselves in the lifeworld of right-wing extremism and indulge in their subcultural passions. Against the backdrop of these major events, Azovs tries to place its messages and find allies in the fight against the enemy in the east and the west.

For example, on October 15, 2018, an event was held at Cossack House that was less about subcultural entertainment than about serious political and intellectual issues – at least that is how the parties involved would like to describe it. Far-right activists from all over Europe and the United States had come to this event to discuss the most urgent questions concerning the future and orientation of the European far right. Under the title of the *Second Paneuropa Conference*, representatives of some of Europe's best-known far-right parties and organizations gathered, gave speeches, and discussed the role of the far right in a rapidly changing world (Interregnum 2019). The attraction of the evening had come all the way from the United States to attend, among other events, the conference in Kiev, Ukraine. The person in question was Greg Johnson, one of the best-known figures in the U.S. alt-right movement, which has also been increasingly in touch with Europe in recent years. Greg Johnson, who is known as a passionate white supremacist and advocates for a white ethno-state in the U.S., symbolizes the increasing transatlantic networking of the far right and highlights the fact that the far right's intellectual frame of reference has become global (SPLC 2021). Johnson had come to Europe to promote his then-new book, *The White Nationalist Manifesto*, and took the opportunity to express his solidarity with the European far right, and Azov in particular. In his introduction, Johnson praised what Azov had already accomplished in Ukraine and highlighted how Azov could serve as a model for far-right organizations in other countries:

“I should say one thing about what I’ve seen here in Ukraine. You’re doing metapolitics, right? Not only are you serious about ideas, you’re serious about community building and I see you are actually building an alternative social order here, an alternative society and that’s what we all need to be doing in all white countries. We have to have some kind of organizational nucleus that can demonstrate that it can do all the things necessary to secure society’s future because that will give us the ability to actually take power someday ... and I think that process is most far along in this country and that’s what’s really impressive to me.” (Johnson 2018)

For Azov, statements of this kind from influential far-right actors like Johnson are important and valuable publicity because the movement, with its views on Russia and the conflict in eastern Ukraine, represents a minority position within the European far right. In the wake of the outbreak of war in eastern Ukraine, the movement found itself confronted with the situation that a large part of the European far right was showing solidarity with Russia (Polyakova 2014). The Russian government’s links to far-right milieus in Europe and especially to radical right-wing populist parties are well documented. In the imagination of many far-right actors, Russia is seen as a conservative, traditionalist counterweight to the West that can be counted on. Authors such as far-right researcher Anton Shekhovtsov (see 2018) have for years pointed to the relationship between Russia and the European far right, showing how the Russian government deliberately fosters far-right organizations and parties to destabilize Western states. The geopolitical conflict between Russia and Ukraine has thus drawn a cleavage through the Western far right and confronts far right actors with the decision whether to continue to rely on Russia in their plans for overthrow or to show solidarity with Ukrainian nationalists.

It is against this background that the research interest of this thesis must be understood. Since its founding as a battalion, Azov has tried to counter Russia’s influence on the European far right and to change the far right’s geopolitical orientation. The movement sees itself in a hybrid war with Russia, much of which is fought not on the front lines but through the means of information warfare. Azov understands itself as a meta-political actor, which means that the movement tries to influence political discourses to change the perception of its network regarding various political issues and especially its alignment with Russia (Colborne 2019c). To counter the Russian narrative, the movement actively interacts with its network, trying to build contacts and convince as many far-right actors as possible of its agenda (Miller 2018a). To achieve this, Azov has established a number of initiatives and created a variety of internationally oriented distribution channels through which the movement communicates its narratives to an international audience.

In conveying its narratives, the movement employs a variety of framing strategies that, like its narratives, have not yet been systematically studied. This thesis has set out to fill this research gap and to systematically examine Azov's communication with its transnational far right network. Understanding Azov's communication content and strategies not only provides a better understanding of what is arguably the most successful militant far right actor in Ukraine today, but also sheds light on the conflictual nature of a transnational formation process taking place within contemporary far right politics. In this context, it is necessary to understand that the geopolitical struggle for interpretive sovereignty and influence regarding the conflict between Russia and Ukraine reflects a dynamic that runs through the entire history of the far right. The research interest of this thesis is to be understood against this background and discusses challenges for contemporary transnational far right politics using the example of the geopolitical conflict between Russia and Ukraine.

In the eyes of the author, there are two tendencies that run through the history of the far right that are in fundamental tension with each other. On the one hand, the far right has always been characterized by national and transnational conflicts that have led to divisions and hostilities (Vejvodová 2011, 223–26). At the same time, despite these conflicts, there have always been attempts to establish and institutionalize transnational cooperation. A variety of parties, organizations, and individuals throughout the far right's history have claimed leadership, attempted to gain influence over others, and overcome historical conflicts to build a “fascist international” (Griffin 2018, 111–14). In retrospect, however, it can be said: all noteworthy attempts at long-lasting cooperation outside the subcultural sphere have failed mainly due to internal conflicts (Vejvodová 2011, 223). Looking at history, it seems that the far right is not able to cooperate successfully across borders on a consistent basis.

However, many researchers agree that a change within transnational far right politics has become visible in recent years. In view of the global and digital transformation processes that our societies are undergoing in the 21st century, the way the far right sees itself has also changed significantly. As far right researcher Thomas Grumke (2011) notes, the far right has grown closer in the 21st century than ever before, raising the question of whether it will be able to overcome old conflicts and work together for a unified cause. Grumke himself goes so far as to speak of a “globalized anti-globalist movement” that draws on a common ideological core and increasingly networks across borders. A recent report by the Counter Extremism Project (2020) broadly shares this diagnosis and concludes that “the 21st century, and the period after 2014 in particular, saw the emergence of a new leaderless, transnational and apocalyptic violent extreme right-wing (XRW) movement”. In this thesis, I would like to partially agree with this

diagnosis, but at the same time put it into perspective. I do not assume that one can speak of a consolidated global movement regarding the contemporary far right, but rather understand current dynamics within the transnationally oriented far right as the precarious attempt of some far-right actors to constitute a global social movement. Using the example of the geopolitical conflict between Russia and Ukraine, I would rather like to show how controversial this process of consolidation is and what tensions characterize it. By showing how the Azov movement attempts to promote a counter-hegemonic program against the Russian position, I want to show that geopolitical conflicts continue to divide the far right.

Now, much of far-right research is still lagging behind in conceptualizing these transnational and global dynamics within far-right politics. In the author's view, it is above all approaches from social movement research, which have been successfully applied to the field of far-right politics in recent years, that can make a significant contribution to explaining these cross-border dynamics. For this reason, this thesis conceptualizes the case under analysis through the lens of social movement research. To focus on a distinct dimension of the global far right, this thesis further limits itself to the discursive realm. Successful mobilization of social movements requires a relatively stable shared worldview among the actors involved in collective action. In relation to the far right, researchers have argued that an increasing globalization of far right discourses is taking place, which has the potential to generate a common ground for cross-border collaboration (Ramos and Torres 2020, 112–15). Using the example of the geopolitical conflict between Russia and Ukraine, I would like to show that although an increasingly global discursive frame of reference has emerged within the far right, it is by no means conflict-free. Transnational cooperation based on this global frame of reference is therefore by no means an automatism, but a challenge that is currently being fought out in conflict.

To conceptualize this discursive space of contestation within the transnational far right, this thesis draws on insights from social movement frame theory. Social movement frame theory (Benford and Snow 2000, 615–618) informs us that a central aspect to make collective action possible is to reach an agreement on what social issues exist that need to be overcome, how they should be overcome and by what means, and what a shared vision of the future should look like, a vision that guides action and provides a common frame of reference. Social movement frame analysis further informs us that the production of these *core framing tasks*, as Benford and Snow call them, are never finalized but contingent in nature and are produced through discursive processes by a variety of heterogeneous actors involved in the process of meaning production. Social movements are not homogeneous entities but are composed of a multitude of different actors whose interactions and cooperation are often conflictual in nature. Which

position becomes hegemonic in a social movement depends on a variety of factors. From this perspective, the struggle for interpretive sovereignty and thus ultimately for cultural hegemony takes place not only between social movements and their environment, but within social movements themselves. Based on this, the Azov movement can be considered an active part of this internal negotiation process that is currently taking place within the transnational far right.

This thesis aims to contribute to the emerging field of research at the interface of social movement research and far right studies with a case study examining the Azov movement's international communication with its mainly European far-right network. Through the application of a social movement frame analysis, Azov's international communication is examined for key narratives and their strategic orientation. The movement's international communication can be understood as a discursive intervention in the European far right's worldview, aimed at shaping it in favor of its geopolitical interests. By analyzing Azov's international communication, this thesis can significantly contribute to a broader and deeper understanding of the movement and its attempt to influence its international far-right network. At the same time, the case under investigation points beyond itself and exemplifies a dynamic within transnational far-right politics that is characterized by conflict and the simultaneous attempt of some to create a common frame of reference that enables transnational cooperation. In examining Azov's international communication, this thesis can thus provide additional insight into the nature of today's globalized far right in its attempt to constitute itself as a social movement. By taking into account the conflictual nature of geopolitical positions within the far right, it will be demonstrated that the far right is far from overcoming defining conflicts and remains divided on key issues.

There are few researchers who have studied the Ukrainian far right and even fewer who have written about the Azov movement. This contrasts with the attention the movement receives from international media, authorities, and policymakers. In the U.S., for example, there is discussion within Congress about whether to put Azov on the list of foreign terrorist organizations (Shekhovtsov 2020). Europol is also aware of the importance of the conflict in Ukraine and what influence it has on the transnational far right, as well as the role Azov plays in it and reflects this in its latest *European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report* (Europol 2020). Among the few experts, however, there is a great deal of disagreement about the assessment, relevance, and characterization of Azov. While some advocate classifying Azov as a terrorist organization (Rose and Soufan 2020), others speak out vehemently against it (Shekhovtsov 2020). Many point out that Azov poses a threat to the democratic state of Ukraine and, because of its international network, to the international community (Kuzmenko 2020). Others, however, emphasize that Azov's role is exaggerated by Russian media and that their actual impact

on Ukrainian society is marginal (Umland 2019). There is further disagreement about the relationship of the political movement to the Azov regiment. While some point to the danger of a right-wing extremist movement having a professional regiment and using it to promote itself (Colborne 2019c), others point out that the regiment is not part of the movement, is subordinate to the Ukrainian Ministry of Internal Affairs, and is loyal to the Ukrainian state (Shekhovtsov 2020). Although this thesis cannot answer all these questions, it can contribute to this debate and expand the state of research by examining Azov's communication with its transnational network. The analysis of Azov's international communication shows how the movement sees itself, how it wants to be seen by its international network, and what its vision of a global far right movement looks like.

This thesis therefore analyzes the majority of Azov's publicly available English-language statements. These statements are composed of articles, postings, lectures, and interviews published in the period from 2014 to 2020 either on the distribution channels of the movement itself or on the pages of other far right initiatives. Statements such as those articulated in speeches at far-right conferences, which initially existed only in spoken form, were transcribed, and added to the data material. In total, there are about 1.200 textual statements and 6.5 hours of audiovisual material that will be examined. The aim of this thesis is to identify the central articulated narratives in Azov's international communication, to name the framing strategies with which these are transported, and thus to provide insight into the discursive process of a forming transnational far right that is shaped by geopolitical conflicts in Central and Eastern Europe.

The research is guided by the research question of what communication strategy the Azov movement is pursuing to strengthen its own position within the contested discourse of the forming far right. Furthermore, this thesis asks what insights Azov's counter-hegemonic geopolitical positions provide about the current state of the far right's attempt to consolidate itself as a transnational social movement. In the context of geopolitical tensions in the region of Central and Eastern Europe, the question arises whether the transnationally oriented far right will be able to overcome these conflicts and act together against its declared enemies, or whether history will repeat itself and transnational efforts will fail because of internal conflicts. Even if this question can only be answered in the future, the analysis of the internationally communicated positions of one of the most strongly networked far right actors in the region, as the Azov movement is, can provide information about current tendencies and lines of conflict that stand in the way of or favor the challenge of transnational consolidation.

Before presenting the empirical results, however, it is necessary to address the conceptual and methodological framework based on which Azov's communication content was studied. In

the first chapter, Azov's history and organizational development will be discussed in the context of the specific socio-cultural conditions of post-revolutionary Ukraine. The aim of this chapter is to elaborate the organizational and ideological characteristics of Azov, to give an understanding of the regional background against which the movement emerged, and to provide an insight into its activities and network.

The second and third chapters take a step back and focus on terminological and conceptual determinations. To speak of the formation of a transnational far right movement, it is first necessary to explain what is meant by the concepts of “far right” and “social movement”. In addition to their definition, these chapters also address the extent to which it is beneficial to relate social movement research approaches to the phenomenon of far-right politics and the extent to which contemporary manifestations of far-right politics are characterized by movement dynamics. Since I assume in this thesis that contemporary far right politics is characterized by the attempt of some to create a global anti-globalization movement, the global dimension of far-right politics will be discussed, and Azov will be located within it.

The last conceptual chapter is devoted to the framing approach of social movements. Social movement frame theory can explain how, within movements, their orientation is permanently negotiated within discursive processes through the participation of a multiplicity of relatively autonomous actors. Since Azov is part of a transnational, movement-shaped network characterized by a shared relatively stable worldview, frame theory is therefore ideally suited to conceptually explain Azov's discursive intervention in it. After discussing the methodological procedure from data collection to data analysis in the methodological chapter, the results of the frame analysis are presented in the empirical part of this thesis. Finally, the results of frame analysis are summarized and discussed in a conclusion.

CHAPTER II: Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

This chapter aims to present the theoretical framework that forms the basis of this thesis. In this thesis I assume that transnational networking of far-right actors has become increasingly relevant in recent years. In addition to contacts between far-right individuals and organizations across borders, I assume that a common frame of reference is emerging, which can be seen as the ideological precondition for successful transnational cooperation. The combination of the emergence of a globalized worldview and ongoing transnational networking suggests that the far right is in the process of constituting itself as a globalized anti-globalist movement. At the same time, it must be noted that within the network of internationally oriented far right there

are conflicts regarding central political issues that can hinder transnational cooperation. One subject of these conflicts, and this is the narrow topic of this thesis, are geopolitical issues on which there is disagreement among the different far-right camps in Europe and beyond.

Now, Azov is part of this transnational far-right network and advocates for geopolitical positions that contradict the Russian government's geopolitical ambitions. Within the transnational far-right network, therefore, a struggle for the hegemony of geopolitical positions is taking place that is dividing it. However, to understand what holds this far-right network together, both ideologically and organizationally, it is necessary to make important terminological determinations and to address empirical studies that have already investigated it. Since this thesis further assumes that it is beneficial to apply social movement research approaches to the field of far-right politics, it will also discuss these approaches and present the framing approach which, in the case of this thesis, is intended to explain the nature of Azov's discursive intervention into the worldview of the transnationally networked far right. However, before going into the terminological and conceptual framework, it is necessary to introduce the Azov movement itself in more detail and explain the socio-historical context in which it emerged, developed, and tries to gain influence on the transnationally oriented far right.

1. The Azov Movement, its History, and its International Network

To date, relatively few studies exist on the Azov Movement. Most of these articles that revolve around Azov, or in which Azov is mentioned, additionally do not address the movement from a political perspective but discuss Azov mainly as a military actor in the war in eastern Ukraine. Currently, there are no studies that systematically examine Azov's ideology, its international network, or its political role in the geopolitical conflict between Russia and Ukraine. Therefore, instead of offering a systematic literature review, this chapter discusses Azov's development in the context of the upheavals in Ukraine, referring to the central authors in the research field. The aim of this chapter is to provide a better understanding of what the Azov movement is, how it should be understood in the context of developments in the region, and what its relevance is for the international far right network. However, before discussing Azov's development in more detail the few articles that have dealt explicitly with Azov as a political phenomenon should be mentioned. They are mainly relied upon in this thesis, and they constitute the current state of research on the Azov movement.

Andreas Umland and his colleague (Bezruk and Umland 2015; Umland 2019) have taken an in-depth look at the political background of Azov's leadership, as well as Azov's emergence

during the outbreak in the war in eastern Ukraine and its military relevance to the Ukrainian armed forces. Anton Shekhovtsov (2019) has written in depth about the far right during Euro-maidan and during the war in eastern Ukraine, repeatedly addressing Azov as well. The same can be said about Vyacheslav Likhachev's (2015; 2016) articles. All three authors have in common that they discuss Azov as a political actor or point out that an unsuccessful political party emerged from Azov, but do not systematically deal with Azov as a movement or its role in the far right's international network. The only exception in this context is Anton Shekhovtsov's blog former blog, which regularly reported on Azov and its international contacts and has provided valuable background information for this thesis.

Another article by Ivan Gomza and Johann Zajackowski (2019) can also be mentioned here, which analyzes Azov's consolidation into a movement through the perspective of political opportunity structure theory. From a theoretical approach, this article is relatively close to this thesis, as it also analyzes Azov from the perspective of social movement research. However, the authors only mention Azov's international efforts and distribution channels and do not address the movement's communicated content. An article that indirectly deals with Azov's worldview and its international network is that by Adrian Nonjon (2018) who wrote about Azov's international secretary, Olena Semenyaka. In Nonjon's article, one learns quite a bit about the international secretary's worldview, but there is no systematic analysis of Azov's communication content, which is why this thesis can extend the current state of research not only conceptually but also empirically. For the reconstruction of Azov's international network and further background information, a large number of journalistic articles were therefore further consulted. Above all, the investigative articles by the media platform Bellingcat and in this context especially articles by Michael Colborne and Oleksiy Kuzmenko are to be mentioned. Apart from these journalistic articles and the aforementioned contributions, no further research on Azov exists in the English-speaking world. This thesis can thus contribute to a deeper understanding of Azov and, moreover, show how much the geopolitical conflict between Russia and Ukraine draws a cleavage between the transnationally oriented far right.

1.1. The Right-Wing Extremist Milieu, From Which Azov's Leadership Originates

The emergence of Azov is closely connected to the upheavals in Ukraine during and after Euromaidan. The success of the movement, which first gained notoriety as one of the many volunteer battalions fighting pro-Russian separatists backed by Russian support in eastern Ukraine, cannot be understood without considering domestic and foreign policy developments

at the time. Looking at the country's history, Euromaidan represented a turning point that allowed far-right actors previously operating on the margins of Ukrainian society to consolidate and expand their influence, albeit with little success (Likhachev 2016, 27). In the first decades after Ukrainian independence, far-right actors only played a marginal role in the country's political and social life. Far-right parties were unable to achieve significant electoral success and had only very limited influence on Ukrainian society and its political elites. A comparison with other European countries shows that while far-right parties have been relatively successful in almost all Central and Eastern European countries and radical right-wing populist parties have entered the mainstream in Western Europe, the influence of the Ukrainian far right remained very marginal (Shekhovtsov 2013, 249).

To some extent, this began to change before Euromaidan, with the rise of Viktor Yanukovich. Yanukovich's proximity to the Russian government and some of his unpopular political decisions led some Ukrainians to worry about the country's national sovereignty. The call for Ukrainian independence – which had lost some of its weight since the country's factual independence – regained importance during the prime minister's term of office and contributed, among other political and economic factors, to the rise of the first somewhat successful far-right party in the history of modern Ukraine, the All-Ukrainian Association Svoboda, or short Svoboda (Polyakova 2014a, 217f.). Much could be written about Svoboda at this point, but to stay within the scope of this thesis, this chapter will be limited to merely pointing out Svoboda's strategic image change in 2004 and what significance it had for Azov's prehistory.

The name Svoboda was part of an image shift by the former Social-National Party of Ukraine (SNPU), which in 2004 superficially moved under its leader Oleh Tyahnybok toward a right-wing populist orientation and abandoned its particularly radical elements. The former SNPU had a paramilitary arm, adopted as its logo a modification of the "Wolfsangel" symbol used in National Socialism by units of the Wehrmacht and Waffen-SS, and pursued an extreme right-wing agenda (Polyakova 2014a, 217). The renewal and realignment of the SNPU under the name Svoboda led to conflicts within the party, as not all members were satisfied with the party's reorientation. The paramilitary arm, called Patriots of Ukraine (PU), split off from Svoboda or was disbanded and continued to exist independently as a small fringe group close to Svoboda (Shekhovtsov 2013, 255).

Unlike Svoboda, which enjoyed significant electoral success, the PU continued to exist on the margins of Ukrainian society, was known for its alleged involvement in organized crime and its high propensity to violence, but remained irrelevant as a political force. In 2008, the PU joined forces with other militant right-wing extremist organizations to form the umbrella

organization Social National Assembly (SNA), which repeatedly attracted attention for its violence against minorities and dissidents (Umland 2019, 111f.). Now, it is precisely these leaders of the PU/SNA who, after Euromaidan and in view of the outbreak of the conflict in eastern Ukraine, were involved in the establishment of the Azov Battalion. Azov's political leader and former first commander of the battalion, Andriy Biletsky, was also the leader of the Patriots of Ukraine when they became independent and later merged into the SNA. He and some of his comrades still form Azov's leadership and see themselves as the vanguard of national-revolutionary aspirations in Ukraine (Umland and Bezruk 2015, 39f.). So, regarding Azov's origins, its central actors come from Ukraine's militant extreme right-wing milieu.

Also, the PU/SNA cannot be discussed in as much detail as the author would like, but it is important to make a few comments about their ideology and their activities. The PU/SNA pursued a neo-Nazi and white supremacist ideology based on a racial understanding of society (Shekhovtsov 2013, 253f.). There are many statements documented by Biletsky himself from the early 2000s that give an insight into the worldview of the leader of the Azov movement. Even though Biletsky today largely denies these statements and prefers to be portrayed in public as a moderate patriot and nationalist, all leading experts of the Ukrainian far right agree on the authenticity of the statements (see Likhachev 2015; Shekhovtsov 2019; Umland 2019). In a 2007 programmatic article, for example, Biletsky stated that the "historic mission" of PU/SNA is to bring about the "racial cleansing of the nation" and "to lead the white peoples of the entire world in the last crusade decisive for their survival, the crusade against sub-humanity led by the Semites" (Biletsky as cited in Shekhovtsov 2019, 154). The PU/SNA also tried to enforce its political program with violence on the streets. For example, it is documented that they distributed leaflets denying the Holocaust, attacked foreign traders in the Kharkiv market, organized protests against Asian and African students, and held paramilitary trainings to prepare for combat (see Shekhovtsov 2013; Umland 2019; Umland and Bezruk 2015). Anton Shekhovtsov, a leading expert on the Ukrainian far right, also mentions the involvement of PU/SNA activists in organized crime. For example, there is evidence that members of the Patriots of Ukraine were extorting protection money and were hired by businessmen to solve "problems" for them (Shekhovtsov 2019, 154). The political prehistory of Azov's leadership thus took place in a militant milieu in which political violence was one of the central means of becoming effective. Although Azov differs strongly from the PU/SNA in certain elements, there are also important parallels to be found.

Despite its violent behavior, the PU/SNA was tolerated by the authorities for a relatively long time. One of the reasons given in the literature is of particular significance because it

shows a certain historical continuity. PU/SNA activists were active mainly in the Kharkiv region at a time when current Interior Minister Arsen Avakov was the head of the regional administration in Kharkiv. During this period, cooperation took place between Avakov's party "Fatherland" and the PU/SNA activists – the militant right-wingers were hired by Avakov's party as security guards at demonstrations, for example. This is particularly relevant because Arsen Avakov remains a protector of Azov to this day and maintains close relations with the movement's leader Andrei Biletsky (Likhachev 2018, 5).

However, with the rise of Viktor Yanukovych, the relationship between the authorities and the PU/SNA changed and the activists' actions were answered with regulatory persecution. After a foiled terrorist attack and an exchange of fire between a pro-Russian nationalist and members of the Patriots of Ukraine (PU), the leaders including the famous "Kharkiv terrorists" and Andriy Biletsky himself were arrested. The imprisonment of the PU/SNA leadership led to the temporary dissolution of the group (Shekhovtsov 2019, 155). It was not until Euromaidan and the events that followed in eastern Ukraine that PU/SNA activists remobilized, first in the Right Sector alliance and then after the release of the former PU/SNA leadership under the banner of the Azov Battalion. What can be taken away from this chapter is that Azov's right-wing extremist orientation is no coincidence, but is essentially due to its leadership, which originated in the neo-Nazi milieu of post-revolutionary Ukraine and has remained true to its worldview to this day.

1.2. From the Fringes of Ukrainian Society to the Centre of International Attention

On November 21, 2013, a large protest movement emerged in Ukraine, directed against then incumbent President Viktor Yanukovych and his government. In response to the Yanukovych government's public announcement that it would not sign the planned association agreement with the European Union, citizens from various political camps took to the streets to protest. For many, the refusal to sign the association agreement symbolized the abandonment of the process of integration into the European Union and the orientation of Ukraine towards the Russian government (Karagiannis 2016, 139). Ultimately, the protests led to the fall of the Yanukovych regime and went down in history as the *Euromaidan Revolution* or the *Revolution of Dignity*. Even though many of the demonstrators were pro-European, the Ukrainian far right regrouped during Euromaidan and took an active part in the protests, especially when it came to violent confrontations with the police (Likhachev 2016, 9).

As a reaction to repressive police violence, the initially peaceful protests turned into an open fight between some of the demonstrators and the regime's executive organs and paid thugs

(*titushkis*) only one week after the protests began. The escalation of violence played into the hands of extreme and radical right-wing forces, who represented only a small segment of the protest movement. In response to repeated targeted attacks on demonstrators by the regime, self-defense groups formed to protect peaceful protesters (Gomza and Zajackowski 2019, 780f.). The Ukrainian far right participated in these violent confrontations and organized themselves into a loose association that became internationally known as *Right Sector* (Pravy Sektor). The members of the Right Sector were particularly prone to violence, targeting not only the police but other protesters too. For example, attacks by the Right Sector during Euromaidan have been documented against left-wing demonstrators and feminist activists who were also protesting against the government (Likhachev 2015, 263). For the militant nationalist camp, Euromaidan was not supposed to be a pro-European revolution, but a nationalist one after which the country could finally be “cleaned up”. The future leadership of the Azov Battalion was still in prison at that time, but parts of the former PU/SNA activists found themselves among the ranks of the Right Sector (Umland and Bezruk 2015, 37).

During Euromaidan, the far right enjoyed newfound popularity and tried to translate it into political power. In the eyes of many, they became a symbol of national resistance against Yanukovich’s unpopular regime. The rise of the far right’s reputation in public perception is largely explained by a media exaggeration by the opposing side, which was gratefully accepted by the far-right activists. In the wake of Euromaidan and the related clashes between protesters and the police, the myth of the “Right Sector” was born and representatives of the extreme right found themselves at the center of Ukrainian and international public attention. Despite their relative insignificance, they successfully staged themselves as a symbol of national resistance against the pro-Russian regime of Viktor Yanukovich and were supported in their mythmaking by sensationalist media coverage. Apart from their excessive militarism and hatred of Victor Yanukovich, however, little held them together, which is why the alliance broke apart relatively soon after Euromaidan (Shekhovtsov 2019, 160).

After Yanukovich’s resignation, a transitional government was formed, which emerged in part from the protest movement itself. Yanukovich’s resignation also marks the high point of the far right’s success story. In the presidential elections that followed the upheaval, both Svoboda’s candidate, Oleh Tyahnybok, and the leader of the Right Sector, Dmytro Yarosh, received less than 2 % of the popular vote (Likhachev 2015, 267f.). Ultimately, the far right could not use its newly won popularity to translate it into political power. The fact that the Right Sector became so well-known in the first place also has a lot to do with the fact that Yanukovich’s media focused on it to stage the protests as a fascist coup. Through this targeted disinformation

policy, an exaggeration of the far right's role participating in the protests took place, which they tried to use for themselves. This dynamic would be repeated at a later stage in the war in eastern Ukraine.

1.3. The Emergence of Azov in the Course of the War in Eastern Ukraine

With the outbreak of the conflict in eastern Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea by covert Russian troops, self-defense this time took the form of volunteer battalions, and the far right was again at the forefront of mobilization. After Yanukovich's resignation and the establishment of an interim government, violent protests broke out in the east of the country, as the legitimacy of the events in Kiev was not universally accepted across the country. It was mainly radical pro-Russian nationalists and local elites supported by the Russian government who refused to recognize the new government. The demonstrations turned into a separation movement, which resulted in the referenda in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions calling for the regions' secession from Ukrainian state territory. In addition, Russian troops annexed Crimea, arguing that they needed to protect the local Russian population from a fascist junta, thus turning the conflict into an international one (Gomza and Zajackowski 2019, 781).

When the conflict in the east of Ukraine escalated, the Ukrainian army was not able to defend the country against separatist efforts. The army was notoriously underfinanced, and due to the political power constellation in the years following Ukraine's independence, it was divided between the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Defense. Furthermore, when the pro-Russian separatists began to organize militarily, a large part of the Ukrainian armed forces, including a relevant part of the Ukrainian Navy, switched sides and joined the separatist and Russian forces (Hunter 2018, 89). When Russia annexed Crimea in the spring of 2014, Ihor Teniuk, Ukraine's defense minister at the time, announced that a maximum of 6,000 troops out of 134,000 were deployable (Bukkvoll 2019, 299). The separatist forces took advantage of this weakness in the first weeks of the conflict and extended their position to the capitals of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions and occupied the strategically important port of Mariupol (Aliyev 2016, 507).

In March 2014, parts of the Ukrainian population began to organize themselves in paramilitary units in response to the expansive military operations of the pro-Russian separatists, especially in eastern Ukraine. In response to the spontaneous self-mobilization of the population, then President Oleksandre Turchynov issued a decree that gave additional political legitimacy to the establishment of militias to support the Ukrainian army. Thus, the Territorial Defence Battalions were created, which were subordinated to the Ministry of Defence and the Special

Police Battalions, which were subordinated to the Ministry of the Interior. Initially, however, the volunteer battalions were hardly or not at all financed by the state and had to equip themselves through private donations (Hunter 2018, 90).

It was precisely these developments that led to the formation of the Azov Battalion. During Euromaidan, the former leadership of the PU/SNA, including Andrei Biletsky, had still been imprisoned and unable to participate in the protests (Likhachev 2015, 263). However, this changed with the formation of the post-Euromaidan government. In the post-Euromaidan period, a populist amnesty law was passed to release “political prisoners”, which led to the release of the future leadership of the Azov Battalion (Umland 2019, 111). Immediately after his release, Andriy Biletsky went to Kharkiv in the north-east of Ukraine, where demonstrations by pro-Russian activists against the new government in Kiev were already taking place. Bloody clashes between militant separatists and the Patriots of Ukraine (PU) had already erupted in the first weeks (Shekhovtsov 2019, 155). In April 2014, when the situation in eastern Ukraine escalated and Crimea was already annexed by Russian troops, negotiations began between Interior Minister Avakov, his advisors, and the released activists Biletsky, Mosiychuk (one of the Vasylykiv terrorists) and Dmytro Korchynsky (leader of the radical right-wing party Bratstvo) (Umland 2019, 116f.).

On May 18, 2014, after four weeks of negotiations between the leaders of the PU/SNA and the Ukrainian Ministry of the Interior in the city of Berdyansk on Sea Azov, the “Special Police Unit Azov” was founded, which became widely known as Azov Battalion and would soon make international headlines. Lieutenant of the battalion became the chairman of the SNA, Volodymyr Špara, while Biletsky himself took on the role of the “spiritual” and political leader (ibid., 156). The newly recruited volunteers, which did not only consist of far-right activists, were trained within days and weeks and took part in the military offensive around the city of Mariupol only a short time after the battalion had been formed and were significantly involved in liberating it from pro-Russian separatists (Aliyev 2016, 508). The Ukrainian army was not able to carry out the military offensive on its own, which is why the military role of Azov in the initial phase of the conflict, according to many experts, was indeed an important one (see Aliyev 2016; Kähkö 2018; Saressalo and Huhtinen 2018; Umland 2019).

After a relatively short time, however, the Ukrainian army took over again (Kähkö 2018, 147f.). The far right’s role in the conflict is therefore to a large extent exaggerated – a myth deliberately spread both by Russia as a disinformation strategy and by the Ukrainian far right itself. Russia used the myth of a fascist coup during Euromaidan to destabilize the situation in eastern Ukraine. When the volunteer battalions were formed, Russian propaganda outlets

responded with the narrative that a fascist mob had armed itself to commit genocide against the Russian population in eastern Ukraine, thus contributing significantly to the escalation of the conflict (Umland 2019, 116f.). The Ukrainian far right, on the other hand, staged themselves as the “true defenders of Ukraine” and tried to make political capital that way.

Whether myth or not, these narratives prevailed and a certain mainstreaming of the far right, its symbols, slogans, and positions became observable in Ukraine, which would have been very unlikely to happen before Euromaidan and the conflict in eastern Ukraine. In this context, however, Andreas Umland emphasizes an important point that is often lost in the debate about the "rise" of the Ukrainian far right. The popularity and relevance of the far right during the events of 2013 and 2014 would most likely not have happened without Russia's foreign policy of expansion and its aggressive disinformation strategy aimed at destabilizing Ukraine (Umland 2019, 107):

„As in the case of the sudden surge of the Ukrainian political party Pravyi sektor (Right Sector), somewhat earlier during the Euromaidan, the emergence of initially irregular or semi-regular volunteer battalions, including those set up by ultra-nationalist activists, would not have occurred without the increasingly destructive Russian interference in Ukrainian internal affairs throughout 2014. The rising social demand for militant patriotism provided previously marginal far right activists with new political space.“ (Umland 2019, 108)

The participation of far-right volunteers in the defense of Ukraine against pro-Russian separatists with Russian support thus strengthened their position in society and led to individuals and groups who had previously tried to implement their political program on the fringes of Ukrainian society in extreme right-wing and neo-Nazi subcultures now finding themselves at the center of public discourse and being declared national heroes (Likhachev 2016, 15). However, it quickly became apparent that the various far-right organizations were not able to transform their popularity as military actors into political success – just as they had not been able to after Euromaidan (Shekhovtsov 2019, 162). Many of the volunteer battalions were disbanded, some resisted and came into open conflict with the Ukrainian authorities, and some did try to participate in elections, but only with very moderate success. The Azov Battalion was in some ways an exception.

1.4. The Consolidation of Azov into a Broad Ultranationalist Movement

Already in the fall of 2014, just a few months after the battalion was established, it was integrated into the regular structures of the Ukrainian National Guard and upgraded to a regiment

and thus officially subordinated to the Ministry of the Interior. The integration allowed for greater control of the battalion by the state although Azov nevertheless remained relatively autonomous even within the structures of the National Guard. In the Minsk Protocols (Minsk 1 Agreement) of September 5, 2014, which regulated the limited ceasefire between Ukraine and Russia, the 10th point of the agreement stipulated, among other things, the dissolution of all illegal armed groups. The integration of the semi-official militias into the National Guard can thus be seen as a reaction to this. Through integration, the Ukrainian authorities were able to resolve the accusations while continuing to use the militias' fighting power (Käihkö 2018, 158f.). After a short time, the regiment was expanded by a tank company and an artillery division and received new equipment for its troops (ibid., 160f.). Despite Azov's integration into the regular structures of the Ukrainian National Guard, the regiment operates with a high degree of autonomy. Azov claims to be largely self-financing; although it receives heavy weapons from the Ukrainian state, it is responsible for building and maintaining basic infrastructure, organizes troop training autonomously and has a recruitment program that is independent of the regular structures of the National Guard (Bukkvoll 2019, 305). The regiment exists to this day – and continues to grow.

Since its foundation, the Azov Battalion has been the subject of international controversy. The reason for this is Azov's connections to far-right milieus inside and outside of Ukraine and the right-wing extremist symbolism used by the battalion, which underlines its political orientation. Since its foundation, the battalion has attracted foreign fighters from all over the world to fight alongside its members against Russia-backed separatists in eastern Ukraine. Although the foreign fighters' motives for participation in the conflict varied, many came from far-right camps and joined the Azov Battalion precisely because they sympathized with its ideological orientation (see Karagiannis 2016). Azov's former logo was composed of the already mentioned Wolfsangel symbol and the Black Sun. Both symbols are used by neo-Nazis all over the world to express their ideology. The Black Sun goes back to Heinrich Himmler himself, who had it chiseled into the floor of the so-called *Obergruppenführer* Hall of the SS in Wewelsburg Castle (John-Stucke n.d.). In response to criticism, Azov had to choose a new logo in which the sun is no longer visible – but the Wolfsangel is.

There are two main controversial issues when it comes to Azov. One is about how to describe Azov's relationship with the Ukrainian state, and the other is about the regiment's relationship with the rest of the movement. While some experts point out that the regiment is subordinate to the National Guard and does not carry out political activities (Shekhovtsov 2020), others contradict this diagnosis (Kuzmenko 2020). The relationship between the Azov Regiment and the

movement is certainly complicated and cannot be answered clearly, but the overlaps in personnel, joint political actions, and Azov's self-representation suggest that it is nevertheless a closely networked political entity. There is also no question that Azov was characterized by political activism in its early days and that it made no secret of it. During organizational development, however, there has been an increasing division of labor, so that a major part of political activities is carried out by other movement organizations rather than the military arm.

Thus, shortly after the battalion was established, *Civil Corps Azov* (CC) was created to support the military and also Ukrainian civil society (Umland 2019, 123). The CC's activities ranged from fundraising to weapons training for the local population, to organizing sports events to promote a healthy lifestyle among young people, to street cleanups, to organizing remembrance marches and patriotic history education in schools. Many more examples could be given because Azov's activities were also reconstructed during frame analysis, but more on this later.

In 2016, the next step in the movement's organizational development followed: In autumn that year, the *National Corps* party was founded by Andrei Biletsky, who from then on also acted as its leader (Ibid.). Azov has expanded its international contacts since its inception. This was institutionalized with the formation of the party and the creation of the Intermarium Support Group, whose goal is to promote transnational networking and raise awareness for Azov's geopolitical project. The International Secretary of the National Corps and head of the Intermarium Support Group (ISG), Olena Semenyaka, travels throughout Europe to give lectures to far-right audiences, to present Azov's political program and to expand the movement's network (Balzer 2021). Azov had thus been in contact with the transnationally oriented far right since its founding and tried to gain influence on them.

The founding of the National Corps and the ISG was followed by that of the *National Militia*, a militant street militia that caused international outrage with its martial appearance. Officially, the militia assists the Ukrainian authorities, but since its establishment it has repeatedly clashed with the police and engaged in open street battles with it (Colborne 2019c). Human rights organizations have documented many cases of vigilante justice by the militia, primarily involving physical violence against political opponents and minorities (Miller 2018c). In a report on far-right violence in Ukraine, published by Marker in 2020, the National Corps and the militia were ranked first among the far-right organizations from which political violence emanates in Ukraine, and the regiment itself was ranked third (Marker 2020). The fact that U.S. Congress members have repeatedly advocated for placing Azov on the list of foreign terrorist organizations proves that the movement is not a small fringe group, but that there is international concern

about the influence Azov has on militant and right-wing terrorist actors internationally (Colborne 2019d).

And Azov has expanded since its emergence as a battalion. The regiment, party, and militia form Azov's organizational core and are surrounded by a variety of initiatives and organizations. Azov has built infrastructure throughout the country: Martial arts centers prepare members for combat, Youth Corps (YC) Azov organizes patriotic military summer camps for children, and meta-political events are held at Cossack House on a regular basis. The movement, as will be shown in the presentation of the results, covers the entire far-right action repertoire and seeks to expand its political sphere of influence. Azov has further brought some of its members into state positions and the movement's veterans' organization is substantially involved in the Ukrainian Ministry of Veterans (Bellingcat 2019). Azov further explicitly advocates the strategy of entryism, i.e. wants to infiltrate state institutions from within and build a state within the state – but more about this in the presentation of the results.

This thesis is primarily concerned with Azov's relationship with its international network. So, what can we take away from Azov's development into a movement as presented here? Azov has always been internationally oriented and has recruited foreign fighters from all over the world into its ranks since the very beginning of the conflict in Eastern Ukraine (Rekawek 2020). The movement communicates professionally to the outside world and has several international distribution channels through which Azov's political agenda is communicated to a wide audience. The movement is closely networked with militant right-wing extremist actors across Europe and beyond, visiting them in their respective countries and inviting them to Ukraine. Azov has made a certain name for itself within the international network of the far right since its inception and actively campaigns against Russia's influence on the European and US far right. In communication with its international network, Azov tries to spread its political agenda and find fellow supporters. What narratives Azov communicates in this context and what strategies are used to convey them to the international far-right network is the subject of this thesis. The study of Azov's international communication content can provide information about the movement's worldview and about its political strategies. This thesis also provides an insight into the conflictual nature of the transnationally networked far right and shows how geopolitical issues represent existential cleavages within the far right, over which a hegemonic struggle is taking place. So far, however, there has been relatively little talk of concepts such as far right or right-wing extremism. To conceptualize the far right as a social movement in the making and to situate Azov within it, it is therefore first necessary to clarify what is meant by these terms. The next chapter is therefore devoted to this necessary terminological clarification.

2. The Ideological and Organizational Spectrum of Far-Right Politics

There are few research fields in which the terms used are as contested as they are in far-right research, even though every social science introduction begins with this assertion. An essential dimension of this conceptual dispute, apart from the usual disagreements, is the fact that the far right is a highly politicized subject area in which the boundaries between politics and science are constantly being renegotiated. This goes so far that it is questionable whether the term "far right" even reflects the complex reality of the political phenomenon to be described. Whether terms such as right-wing radicalism, right-wing extremism, radical right-wing populism, fascism and neo-Nazism, extreme right and so on should be used and what phenomena they encompass have been the subject of scholarly debate since the field of research came into existence (Salzborn 2020, 9f.). This circumstance is further accompanied by the question of whether far-right politics can be studied neutrally, i.e. apolitically, or whether this is not possible at all. On this issue, the research field is divided, with some accusing others of having a political bias in their research, while others accuse those who embrace neutrality for implicitly and covertly incorporating their political stance into their research – or that they consciously or unconsciously reproduce dominant social discourses and thus also the problems associated with society's handling of the far right (Virchow 2016, 13–20).

To deal with this challenge, broad terminological debates are put aside and, by means of conceptual simplicity, the presumably most paradigmatic approaches in the field of far-right research are applied in this thesis. At the risk of being eternally seen as a conformist within critically engaged far-right research, this thesis simply does not provide space for elaborate terminological debates. This chapter therefore first addresses the ideological dimension of far-right politics, i.e. the question of which worldview unites far-right actors across borders and what divides them. This is followed by a discussion of how far-right actors organize themselves to become politically effective. Since this thesis is centrally concerned with the concept of social movement, it is necessary to distinguish it from other types of organizations. Taken as a whole, this chapter should provide a stable terminological basis from which social movement research and the application of its approaches to the field of far-right research can be explored in more detail.

2.1. Far-Right Worldviews and Ideologies

With differentiation comes the danger of getting lost in detail and thus blurring the common framework that the various manifestations of far-right politics have in common. A very general determination has the same effect. A discussion that accounts for both the commonalities and

differences remains in this tension. To speak of far-right politics therefore does not mean to negate the heterogeneity of the phenomenon, but rather to point out the commonalities in addition to a differentiated analysis of its variations (Castelli Gattinara and Pirro 2019, 450). Those commonalities and differences are discussed in this thesis mainly based on the conceptual and empirical work of Cas Mudde (2007, 2019), who is considered one of the leading scholars in the field of far-right research and is cited by many scholars in questions of terminological classification. Many indicators suggest describing Azov not only as far-right, but more precisely as a neo-fascist movement. In order to prove terminological clarity in this respect as well, Roger Griffin's (2013, 2016, 2018) definition of fascism is further discussed in this chapter. Determinations regarding the ideological spectrum of the far right are followed by a subsection devoted to the organizational diversity of far-right actors. In this subsection, a distinction is made between political parties, social movement organizations, and subcultures as three main types of far-right organizations in further reference to Cas Mudde.

2.1.1. Core Elements of Far-Right World Views

In his paradigmatic work *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*, Cas Mudde (2007) offers a working definition of the far right, which is still used in numerous academic publications in the field of research. Referring to Michael Freeden's (1996) influential work on political ideologies, Mudde states that every ideology has core and peripheral concepts. In the case of the far right, Mudde thus identifies the concept of the *nation* as the core concept from which the other ideological features are derived (Mudde 2007, 16f.). A minimal definition of the far-right party family must therefore focus on the concept of the nation and examine how it is articulated relating to other ideological components. If one additionally turns this perspective around and looks from the perspective of the nation to the political actors who relate to it, *nationalism* becomes the essential object of analysis to explain the ideological foundation of far-right worldviews. Nationalism can be understood "... as a political doctrine that strives for the congruence of the cultural and the political unit, i.e. the nation and the state" which further means that "... the core goal of the nationalist is to achieve a monocultural state" (Ibid., 16).

The question of what distinguishes a monocultural nation from other political communities leads to another core element of far-right ideologies, which is described in academic literature as *nativism*. The far right's understanding of the relationship between state and nation is ultimately assuming that national territories are closely linked to an indigenous population group that is characterized by a certain degree of homogeneity and that this population group, due to its indigeneity, has the right to a privileged access to the state and its territory. Nativism can

thus be understood as “... an ideology which holds that states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group (‘the nation’) and that nonnative elements (persons and ideas) are fundamentally threatening to the homogeneous nation-state” (Mudde 2007, 19). The foundation of this “nativeness” may vary depending on the individual empirical case, and proponents may refer to ethnic, cultural, racial, or in some cases religious categories to legitimize the exclusivity of the in-group. The far right’s worldview is thus not only composed of nationalism, but also fills this nationalist ideology with nativist notions of society that are based on the constructed dichotomy between those who belong to the national community and those who potentially threaten it. While there are liberal manifestations of nationalism, the combination of nativism and nationalism usually has a strong anti-liberal stance, which makes it unlikely for it to be articulated within liberal discourse (Ibid., 20).

Besides nativism, Cas Mudde further includes *authoritarianism* as another core element of far-right worldviews in his working definition. Authoritarianism is understood broadly in this context and refers not only to a form of government but also to an attitude towards the hierarchical structuring of society (Ibid., 22). As Mudde notes, Theodor W. Adorno and his colleagues accurately state in their research on the authoritarian personality that authoritarianism as an attitude should be understood as “a general disposition to glorify, to be subservient to and remain uncritical toward authoritative figures of the in-group and to take an attitude of punishing out group figures in the name of some moral authority” (Adorno et al. 1969, 228). Taking up this definition, Cas Mudde summarizes authoritarianism “... as the belief in a strictly ordered society, in which infringements of authority are to be punished severely” (Mudde 2007, 23). Authoritarianism is therefore associated with thinking in rigid hierarchies, a belief in law and order and a conviction that deviant behavior must be punished. Authoritarianism naturalizes social hierarchies and affirms them. Authoritarianism, as articulated by far-right actors, tends to translate into anti-democratic and anti-pluralist attitudes, as democratic and pluralist principles are in a sense antithetical to the desired rigid hierarchies that far-right actors demand. As the deliberative negotiation of what should or should not be considered a norm, or the coexistence of different norms and lifestyles, contradicts the authoritarian notion of society, extreme-right actors traditionally aim to overcome liberal societies and oppose them with the notion of a natural order (Holzer 1993, 43ff.). Overall, however, the far right’s relationship to democracy is too ambivalent to be simply saying that all far-right actors reject democracy and want to abolish it. In fact, far-right actors differ fundamentally in how they relate to democratic principles – but more on this later.

Along with nativism and authoritarianism, both of which are articulated as part of nationalist worldviews, *populism* constitutes the last core characteristic of far-right politics, according to Cas Mudde (2007, 23). The term populism is somewhat problematic because it is so controversial, and a variety of different definitions circulate in scholarly discourse that can differ fundamentally from each another. It is therefore important to look closely at what Mudde means by populism and why he sees it as a core characteristic of the far-right's worldview. Mudde does not understand populism as a political style, but rather "... as a thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite', and which argues that politics should be an expression of the '*volonté générale*' (general will) of the people" (Mudde 2007, 23). As a rule, far-right actors see themselves as representatives of the true will of the people, which can only ever exist as an assertion and never as reality – since it assumes a homogeneity of will that does not exist. The notion of a unified popular will is also usually accompanied by rejection of individualism, which is at odds with the fantasy of a homogeneous community (Holzer 1993, 43f.).

Much more could be said about far-right worldviews at this point. For the purpose of this paper, however, this framework definition is sufficient for now. Far-right worldviews affirmatively revolve around the concept of the nation and attach nativist, authoritarian, and populist elements to it. Many other consequences follow from this constellation of ideological elements. There is no automatism stipulating that far-right worldviews are racist or national chauvinist, but historically they often occur in combination – nativist ideology implies a collectivism and an essentialization of identity that quickly takes the form of an ideology of human inequality. The destructive potential of far-right worldviews is addressed frequently in this thesis, so it is not necessary to go into this matter in more detail here. With this working definition of the far right, as a political family operating based on a shared worldview, further differentiations can now be made. The next important distinction concerns how far-right actors relate to liberal democracies and their normative foundations.

2.1.2. Extreme and Radical Right-Wing Politics

When assessing far-right actors, it is particularly relevant for policymakers, authorities, and scholars to evaluate their relationship to democratic institutions. As already explained, the core characteristics of far-right worldviews already contain some elements that contradict the foundations of liberal societies. In practice, however, far-right actors usually differ relatively strongly in how they relate to the political institutions in which they try to become politically

effective. To make a basic distinction in this regard, far-right research distinguishes between extreme and radical right-wing politics (Froio et al. 2020, 5).

While extreme-right organizations fundamentally reject democratic societies and their institutions and are unwilling to make concessions to them, radical right-wing organizations fundamentally reject elements of liberal societies, but not all democratic principles (Mudde 2007, 138–157). Extreme right-wing actors see themselves as a revolutionary force working to build a new social order based on essentialist (i.e. ethnic, religious, racist, monocultural) principles. Instead, radical right-wing parties often advocate, for example, popular sovereignty or majority rule and want to realize their interests through these, but do not aim to abolish the entire liberal rule of law (Froio et al. 2020, 5). The distinction between extreme right and radical right-wing politics is, however, a typological one. In reality, the boundaries between extreme right-wing and radical right-wing politics are often blurred (Mudde 2007, 24ff.). Some right-wing extremist actors tend to use radical right-wing rhetoric in public because they have learned that they have greater mobilization potential through it. In addition, extreme right-wing actors often soften their rhetoric in order not to come into conflict with the law and try to avoid the danger of being prosecuted (Griffin 2013, 273f.). The analytical distinction between extreme right-wing and radical right-wing politics is therefore useful but must be examined and discussed in the concrete empirical case.

Far-right politics cannot, however, be understood solely from an analytical perspective. In addition to analytical distinctions, it is necessary to understand the far-right family in its various historical manifestations. The history of the far right, especially in Europe, is marked by the age of historical Fascism, which continues to inspire and shape far-right organizations around the world (Griffin 2018, 91–111). When it comes to fascism and its imitators, the question of the relationship to democracy, human rights and violence arises in a different way, since the history of historical Fascism is a history of systematic persecution and mass murder of its opponents, which in the case of the National Socialist regime ended in industrial mass extermination at the highest level of technology. Without a basic understanding of the features of fascism, it is difficult to understand contemporary manifestations of far-right politics, especially on its extreme fringes.

Azov's network consists largely of actors and organizations that refer affirmatively to the legacy of fascism and in some cases even emulate it ideologically and organizationally. In the eyes of the author, Azov can likewise be described as a neo-fascist movement. Why this is the case is explained based on the empirical material at a later stage. However, there is certainly a tendency in public discourse to label disagreeable political opponents as fascist too loosely. In

public discourse, the term has become synonymous with totalitarianism, intolerance, and everything else that is considered bad. Even when it comes to the far right itself, organizations are often characterized far too quickly as fascist, although strictly speaking this does not apply to them. However, this inflationary and indeterminate use of the term fascism entails dangers for both academic and political discourse. Labeling every disagreeable political opponent as fascist ultimately leads to the relativization and trivialization of historical Fascism and its contemporary manifestations. If all owls are grey, or all right-wing populist parties in Europe are labeled fascist, the term loses its meaning. In order to precisely differentiate far right in its heterogeneity in terms of terminology, the following chapter will therefore discuss the terms fascism, neo-fascism and neo-Nazism.

2.1.3. Fascism, Neo-Fascism and Neo-Nazism

This thesis will draw on what is probably the most paradigmatic contemporary definition of fascism, which goes back to fascism researcher Roger Griffin and has had a decisive influence on the field of political research. In his standard work *The Nature of Fascism* (1991), Roger Griffin offers a definition of fascism that can still be adhered to today and to which he himself still refers in current works (see Griffin 2018). According to this definition, fascism can be defined as “... a genus of political ideology whose mythic core in its various permutations is a palingenetic form of populist ultranationalism” (Griffin 2018, 46). What this means will be explained further in this chapter. However, the concept of fascism, apart from its definitional meaning, has a history and cannot be detached from it. Thus, when speaking of fascism, the term first makes historical reference to Europe at the beginning of the 20th century and describes:

“... a revolutionary form of antiliberal nationalism that in its fanatical pursuit of national rebirth in the 1930s and 1940s, particularly in Germany, played a decisive role in causing the Spanish Civil War and World War II in Europe, and the resulting loss of many millions of military and civilian lives through war, persecution, forced labor, and genocide.” (Griffin 2013, 270)

In the English language literature on fascism, it has become conventional that historical “Fascism” is written with a capital “F”, while generic forms of fascism are marked as “fascism” (Griffin 2018, 4). Manifestations of fascist ideology or organizations after the Second World War are subsequently labelled as “neofascist” (Griffin 2013, 270). German fascism is called “National Socialism” to emphasize its singularity. Post-war manifestations based on historical National Socialism are therefore defined as “neo-Nazism”. Organizations that explicitly refer to National Socialism, want to restore the Nazi regime or make it their model for their vision

of society are thus labelled as neo-Nazi organizations. Furthermore, in this work an extended concept of fascism is generally used, one that is not limited to the historical forms of Fascism but:

“...denotes the regimes, mass movements, paramilitary elites, or activist vanguards bent on realizing this project, as well as the violence, policies, measures, rituals, propaganda, publicism (which in the case of contemporary neofascism includes a vast number of websites), attitudes, behaviors, and mind-sets associated with the ruthless implementation of an ideology of total ethnic or racial rebirth, whether within a particular country, in Europe, or in the West as a whole.” (Griffin 2013, 270)

Fascists see themselves as engaged in a history-transforming struggle to reverse ethnocultural decay through the rebirth of the mythical nation (*Palingenesis*). In this quest for the rebirth of the mythical nation, fascists are not reactionary in the narrow sense because they do not seek the re-establishment of a pre-modern order. On the contrary, fascists are convinced that the world can only be saved by establishing a new social order. Fascist ideologies are therefore to be understood as revolutionary ideologies that, in their rejection of modernity, do not want to go back behind it, but want to create a society in which the mythical nation is reborn within the framework of a new civilization. Consequently, fascists reject liberal state institutions, want to change the entire sociopolitical and demographic composition of society and usually pursue the vision of creating a “new mankind” (Griffin 2016, 110). The nativism inherent in fascist ideologies is usually expressed in the idea that the organic composition of the community is negated and threatened by modern society and therefore needs to be saved. The notion of creating a homogeneous organic community is in contradiction with the composition of modern, heterogeneous, and multicultural societies. In the attempt to implement this supposed utopia, the violence that is immanent in fascist ideologies becomes apparent (Holzer 1993, 63–68). All those who are either not part of the imagined ethnic collective or are marked as political opponents and thus enemies of the people are in danger of becoming victims of violence in the fascist attempt to establish their delusional vision of an organic community:

“... [E]specially in the initial phase of regime building, this positive utopian goal typically manifests itself destructively in systemic violence and hostile propaganda directed at the alleged carriers of degeneracy, such as trade unions, socialists, communists, liberal humanists, ethnic minorities, especially Jews and gypsies, homosexuals, decadent artists, the incurably insane, immigrants and their descendants, and foreign religions.” (Griffin 2013, 271)

In summary, the far right can be understood as a political family that, despite its common ideological core, can take very different forms. They all refer affirmatively to the concept of the nation in combination with nativism, authoritarianism, and populism. The political spectrum of far-right politics can be analytically divided into extreme right-wing and radical right-wing politics. While extreme right-wing actors fundamentally reject democracy, this is not automatically the case for radical right-wing actors. Fascist ideologies are the most common within the extreme right in Europe, and historical Fascism remains a central reference point for many extreme right-wing actors around the world. Fascism in its generic form can be understood as revolutionary ultranationalism aiming at the rebirth of a mythical nation through the establishment of a new social order. Azov's transnational network is composed of both radical and extreme right-wing actors. Some of these international actors can additionally be classified as neo-fascist and neo-Nazi, as they refer affirmatively to historical fascism and National Socialism (like the German party *Der III. Weg*). If Azov's international framing, as well as the research literature, is considered for the assessment, the movement itself should most likely be classified as a neo-fascist. In addition to their ideological orientation, far-right actors further differ in the way they organize themselves. Since this thesis deals specifically with the concept of social movements, which are not formal organizations in the true sense of the term, it is necessary to distinguish them from the specific types of far-right political organizations. The next chapter, therefore, will give an overview of three main types of far-right organizations: political parties, social movement organizations and subcultures.

2.2. Organizational Diversity Within Far-Right Politics

Far-right politics is not limited to traditional party politics. Far-right actors organize themselves in a variety of different structures through which they attempt to become politically effective. In order to distinguish between three basic forms of organization within far right politics, this thesis refers to Cas Mudde's (2019) distinction between political parties, social movement organizations, and far right subcultures. As the next chapter will demonstrate, social movements are in some ways above these types of organizations. In order to make a basic distinction between these three types, Cas Mudde states in his recent book *The Far Right Today* that "... political parties run for elections, social movement organizations do not, and while parties and social movement organizations are reasonably well-organized groups, subcultures are not." (Mudde 2019, 39). These three types of organizations can thus be distinguished from each other in terms of their goals and organizational structure.

For this thesis, it is important to point out that far-right actors show a strong heterogeneity not only in terms of worldviews, but also in terms of organization. For a long time, most of the research on the far right dealt with political parties and paid little attention to other types of organizations. In recent years, scholars have increasingly explored unconventional forms of far-right politics outside traditional political arenas, because looking beyond the borders of parliaments and governments can provide valuable insight into the state of contemporary manifestations of far-right politics (see Caiani and della Porta 2018). Examining the different far-right political organizations individually and in their interplay with others can help to understand the complex reality in which collective action takes place outside conventional spaces of politics.

For the purpose of this thesis, it is not necessary to go into detail about the characteristics of political parties. When it comes to social movement organizations, some explanatory remarks should be made. Social movement organizations are far more heterogeneous than political parties are. The term social movement organization is an umbrella term and encompasses a variety of different organizations that can vary greatly in their structures and objectives. What they have in common is that they operate on the basis of a far-right worldview and perform a function within the network of the organized far right (Mudde 2019, 41). The exact definition of “social movement” will be addressed in the following chapter. At this point, it is important to note that social movements are organized in networks and involve individuals and organizations. Social movement organizations are simply organizations that are part of a network that, in combination with other elements, can be classified as a social movement. The functions that organizations fulfill within these movements can vary and include tasks such as: “... inducing participants to offer their services; defining organizational aims; managing and coordinating contributions; collecting resources from their environment; selecting, training and replacing members” (Della Porta and Diani 2006, 137) and so forth.

When referring to far right movement organizations, media organizations such as newspapers, websites and, increasingly, social media pages, political organizations such as associations, *Kameradschaften* (militant fraternities), student fraternities, martial arts centers, think tanks, music labels and many other types of organizations that have a relatively high degree of institutionalization are included in the definition. Some of these organizations, such as bands, already extend into the subcultural realm. Others almost take the form of political parties, but differ from them, for example, in that they do not run for election (Klose and Richwin 2016; Schedler 2016, 296f.). Azov’s international network consists of a variety of social movement organizations, all of which differ from one another in their organizational structure and scope of activity. Azov itself is also composed of a variety of social movement organizations and has

a political party. To understand national and transnational movements, it is therefore important to understand of which actors and organizations they are composed and how they relate to each other.

Subcultures are on the borderline of what can be widely considered an organization. They differ from political parties and social movement organizations in that they have little to no organizational structure, but only a common cultural frame of reference. Common lifestyles, symbols and cultural references connect subcultural actors rather than institutional affiliation. Subcultures are informal in nature which distinguishes them from other types of organizations. Subcultures are further seen as apolitical phenomena, at the center of which is the pursuit of a certain "lifestyle" by their followers. Of course, this does not mean that political subcultures do not exist. It just means that subcultures are not primarily political, but the political character is usually added as an attribute of a lifestyle. Interestingly, subcultures have particularly strong transnational networks, which can provide an important infrastructure for far-right projects. Subcultures are also a space of recruitment for far-right organizations and introduce young people to the lifeworld of far-right extremism, sometimes almost unnoticed (Jaschke 2016, 122f.).

Why is it important to address these types of organizations? Because social movements do not correspond to any of these types and yet they have much to do with each of them. Political parties, organizations and subcultures can be part of social movements, interact with them and participate in their collective action. The far right's international network is primarily characterized by these three types of organization, which are based on a common worldview but pursue very different activities and goals. A social movement can only emerge through the interaction of these organizations if it wants to bring about social change. Azov itself is composed of these three types of organizations, and yet it is more than just these. What characterizes a social movement and why the application of the concept of social movement to the field of far-right politics is beneficial and necessary will be explained in the following chapter.

3. Social Movement Approaches and the Study of Far-Right Politics

Far right studies have traditionally focused on political parties and party politics. In recent years, and due to developments within society and the far right itself, the field of research has been expanded by a variety of new research approaches which attempt to describe and explain the broad spectrum of contemporary far-right politics outside traditional political arenas (Minkenberg 2019, 264; Rydgren 2018, 32f.). However, it is important to emphasize that there have always been innovative approaches in the field of far-right research that have gone beyond

the confines of conventional party research (Schedler 2016, 285ff.). In the meantime, unconventional politics has arrived at the center of society, and so have approaches that explore it. Therefore, research on the far right follows a social dynamic that emanates from the far right itself: Far-right politics has become increasingly diversified in recent years, and various far-right actors are trying to expand their influence in different spheres of life and use a wide range of technologies, forms of action and types of organization to achieve this (Castelli Gattinara and Pirro 2019, 447–450). The study of far-right politics using social movement research approaches should be understood within this more general development. Although the scholarly debate about whether the far right should be characterized as a social movement is not new (see Schedler 2017), its study using approaches from movement research has gained momentum in recent years (for an overview, see Caiani and della Porta 2018).

This thesis should be understood as part of this development. It aims to expand the field of research through a case study. The insights gained from this study are intended to provide information not only about the case under investigation, but also about general developments within the internationalized European far right. Following Petra Vejvodová (2011, 223-226), it is argued that the European far right is characterized in its history by the continuing and precarious attempt to materialize as a transnational movement, but at the same time was unable to turn this attempt into reality because of interfering lines of conflict within its own ranks. This thesis underlines and illustrates this diagnosis by examining geopolitical cleavages that go with the question of whether far-right actors in Europe and beyond identify with Russia's geopolitics or rebel against it in solidarity with far-right actors in Central and Eastern Europe and above all the Azov movement in Ukraine.

The frame analysis conducted in this thesis examines how the Azov movement attempts to influence the geopolitical discourse of the internationalized far right to win over far-right actors across borders for its own political agenda. Azov's study reveals something that is true for the far right in general: the far right's ideological orientation is not predetermined but is shaped by a multiplicity of political actors who attempt to generalize their interests and perspectives through participation in discursive processes within their international networks. The struggle for global hegemony, in this sense, takes place not only between the far right and its political opponents, but is also being waged within the far right's own ranks. Because social movement research approaches can best explain these processual and discursive dynamics within those transnational network-like structures, they form the theoretical and methodological center of this thesis.

In this chapter, it will therefore be clarified what is meant by a social movement in the first place, the extent to which contemporary far-right political phenomena are characterized by movement dynamics, and how social movement research approaches can best be used to analyze and explain them. It is argued that the internationalized far right should not be understood as a consolidated social movement in the narrow sense, but that the international network of the far right is characterized by movement dynamics that can best be studied through social movement research approaches. It is additionally argued that in the age of globalization and digital transformation, far-right organizations and individuals have grown closer together than ever before, largely refer to a common frame of reference, and can best be understood as part of a relatively contingent globalized anti-globalization movement which is increasingly gaining momentum. Azov is part of this transnational and movement-like phenomenon and tries to gain influence on it by means of targeted framing strategies. Which framing strategies are used in this attempt to influence the international network and which contents are conveyed in the process is the subject and interest of this study.

3.1. The Concept of Social Movement

The study of social movements not only provides information about political phenomena outside conventional arenas of politics, but also about the state of our societies. This is explained by the fact that today's social dynamics can hardly be understood without looking at social movements, how they organize themselves and how they influence political and social processes. Political actors are increasingly resorting to unconventional means of politics to spread their political agendas and to get their voices heard (Della Porta and Diani 2006, 1–5). This tendency also applies to the far right, which has increasingly appeared in recent years in the shape of social movements (see Castelli Gattinara and Pirro 2019). Besides right-wing terrorist attacks like the Christchurch mosque shootings in 2019, it is, above all, far-right movements or movement-like phenomena that have received international attention for some time. Demonstration movements such as PEGIDA in Germany (see Schmidt 2017) and the English Defence League (EDL) in the United Kingdom (see Busher 2016), pan-European movements such as the Identitarian Movement (see Zúquete 2018) and pan-Scandinavian ones like the Nordic Resistance Movement (see Potter 2021), and hybrid online phenomena such as the US-based Alt-Right movement (see Hermansson et. al. 2020) and many more have received a lot of media coverage in recent years and are discussed within and outside academia. Although social movements have long been perceived as “mutations” and “irritations” of conventional

politics, today they have become an increasingly integral part of the social fabric of Western societies and are further increasingly perceived as such:

“... social movements, protest actions, and, more generally, political organizations unaligned with major political parties or trade unions have become a permanent component of Western democracies. It is no longer possible to describe protest politics, grassroots participation, and symbolic challenges as ‘unconventional’. Instead, references to a ‘movement society’ seem increasingly plausible.” (Della Porta and Diani 2006, 1f.)

But what do movement researchers mean when they speak of social movements, and in what way do they differ from more conventional political organizations such as parties, associations, and formal interest groups? To speak of social movements systematically, presupposes a determination of their central features and characteristics. At the same time, there is unsurprisingly no consensus in social sciences about the “nature” of social movements. This thesis is primarily based on the work of Donatella della Porta and Mario Diani (Della Porta and Diani 2006; Diani 1992), both of whom have had a significant impact on the field of social movement research and continue to shape it today. In his article *The Concept of Social Movements* (1992), Mario Diani identifies essential core characteristics of social movements that can be considered relatively uncontroversial within the field of research, despite the many disagreements that characterize it. Thus, when social movements are broken down to their basic characteristics, they can be understood as social dynamics that take place within dense informal networks that are held together by loose collective identities. Social movements are further involved in political or cultural conflicts and try to create (or prevent) social change through collective action that takes place over a longer period of time.

Social movement networks vary from very loose and dispersed to dense and clustered ones which are already on the verge of formal organizational structures such as terrorist organizations. In general, networks are social movement processes in which both individual and organized actors are involved in the exchange of resources to achieve a common goal without losing their autonomy (Ibid., 7ff.). Within social movements, the coordination of initiatives, strategies and political orientations therefore takes place in a permanent discursive process of negotiation and discussion between relatively autonomous actors, and this distinguishes them from other political structures with a more formal degree of organizational structures and decision-making processes. For this reason, social movements are networks and not organizations, because no individual actor or organization within the movement can claim to represent the movement as a whole. However, this does not change the fact that individual actors and organizations can be particularly influential within a social movement and informally take the lead (Della Porta and

Diani 2006, 21). Social movements differ greatly from each other, among other things also in their degree of informal hierarchization. It is difficult to say at what point a movement should no longer be described as such but rather as an organization of a different type. Especially in the field of far-right politics, where authoritarianism and claims to leadership are not the exception but the rule, the boundaries between social movements and the organizations through which they are constituted can become blurred (see Minkenberg 2019).

In addition to their network-like structure, social movements are characterized by the fact that these networks are held together by *collective identities*. It is not yet valid to speak of social movements when some individuals repeatedly participate in protests on the same issue together. Social movements are more than just the sum of individual protest events that happen to involve the same people (Diani 1992, 8f.). Social movements are closely linked to processes of constituting and developing collective identities that go beyond individual events and bind the actors involved to a collective frame of reference. Collective identities should further not be understood as static objects, but are rather as "... the process by which social actors recognize themselves – and are recognized by other actors – as part of broader groupings, and develop emotional attachments to them" (Della Porta and Diani 2006, 91). The basis of this common frame of reference can vary greatly from movement to movement, ranging from social characteristics (sex, race, gender) to shared values, orientations, attitudes, worldviews, lifestyles and so on (Ibid., 91f.). In the case of the far right, it seems plausible to see the core characteristics of their worldview as the common ground on which collective action becomes possible (Schedler 2017, 294). This does not mean, however, that the common nationalist worldview shaped by nativism, populism and authoritarianism is sufficient to form a social movement. The core characteristics of far-right worldviews provide only the foundation on which more complex far-right identities in their specific socio-cultural setting can emerge.

Since social movements are not organizations, membership criteria are informal, unstable, and contingent and depend on the mutual recognition of the actors participating in them. The production of collective identities involves not only the mutual recognition of the actors involved, but also includes processes in which experiences and events of everyday life are linked and brought together into more comprehensive narratives that organize the movement's collective frame of reference which gives meaning to its actions. Only through this common collective frame of reference can individual actors perceive themselves in their political action as part of a common collective practice aimed at realizing the demands that should lead to social change. Based on these assumptions, it is not contradictory to speak of global social movements. Actors who are spread all over the world and have never met in person can still act in a

global social conflict on the basis of a common collective identity and try to change this conflict in their favor (Della Porta and Diani 2006, 22). This is as true for the far right as it is for all other political actors. However, if a global far-right movement is assumed, it must have a common frame of reference that is capable of transcending the respective national narratives of the actors involved. Before answering or at least discussing this question, however, it is necessary to explain to what extent far-right politics as a whole, i.e., both on a national and transnational level, is increasingly characterized by movement dynamics and what this ongoing development means for the field of far-right research.

3.2. Social Movement Dynamics Within the Far Right

Examining far-right politics through social movement research approaches can provide new insights into contemporary far-right phenomena. By applying these research approaches, the analysis of individual far-right organizations can be expanded by analyzing their mutual interaction within a network. From the perspective of movement research, studying the interactions of far-right actors with each other does not mean assuming an organizing structure that is superordinate to them. On the contrary, analyzing far-right politics with the help of movement research allows to examine interaction dynamics in a network of relatively like-minded people without negating the contingent nature of their relationships (Castelli Gattinara and Pirro 2019, 450–454). Understanding the far right as a social movement thus means to assume that relatively autonomous actors engage in shared collective action based on a common worldview with the aim to create social change.

And indeed, movement-like cooperation in the field of far-right politics can increasingly be observed at both national and transnational levels. In many places around the world, organizations and individuals associated with the far right are joining together to act collectively for or against certain social causes (see Caiani, Della Porta, and Wagemann 2012; Caiani and della Porta 2018). Far-right actors mobilize within their networks against migration, alleged Islamization, take to the streets against governments and speak out against alleged international conspiracies of secret elites. Whether these phenomena should be characterized as social movements or rather as relatively spontaneous gatherings related to specific events cannot be determined a priori but must be discussed on the basis of concrete empirical cases (Castelli Gattinara and Pirro 2019, 451f.). The question of whether these phenomena should be classified as social movements, however, is of secondary importance when it comes to examining them with social movement research approaches. As Jan Schedler points out, examining far-right phenomena

through social movement approaches is less about defining the far right as a social movement than it is about becoming aware of movement dynamics within far-right politics:

“Whether, in light of this, one speaks of a heterogeneous movement, or rather a family of coexisting movements that, regardless of their specific, concrete goals, make similar basic demands and can, in part, draw on a common group of followers ... is less significant than acknowledging the fact that the extreme right of the present operates in a strongly movement-like manner.” (Schedler 2017, 294)¹

Thus, speaking of the far right as a social movement does not mean negating the heterogeneity of the actors involved. When talking about the far right as a social movement, it should rather be understood as a: “... loosely organized, multipolar system of action that encompasses numerous subsystems, each with its own organizational conditions and political goals” (Bergmann and Erb 1994, 81)². At the same time, however, there is a common reference point that relates this multitude of different actors to each other. What they have in common is that they „... share fundamental beliefs with regard to central political issues, goals, and patterns of interpretation that structure the movement’s common context of action” (Schedler 2017, 294)³. Phenomena that fit this description can be observed in many different national contexts and invite investigation using social movement research approaches, as they can broaden the view and thus capture dynamics within the far right that are potentially overlooked in classical party and electoral research:

„The specific modalities of far-right mobilisation across Europe highlight the value of reducing the admittedly artificial space between social movement paradigms and models of party competition. Looking at nativist politics from a social movement vantage point means accounting for the purposive, collective, and dynamic factors of participation in collective action“ (Castelli Gattinara and Pirro 2019, 454f.)

This thesis not only assumes that various contemporary phenomena in the field of far-right politics are shaped by movement dynamics, but that the transnationally oriented far right is characterized by the precarious attempt to constitute itself as a global social movement. However, this perspective adds some complicating factors to the discussion. In the far right’s history, there have been repeated attempts to transcend national borders and establish enduring transnational cooperation (Caiani 2018, 564–571). One condition for making transnational

¹ Note: Translated from German into English by the author of this thesis.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

cooperation worthwhile is the creation of a collective far-right identity that can intellectually connect actors across borders (Grumke 2011, 323f.). There is a certain tension between this necessity of creating a transnational frame of reference and the fetishization of the national, which is deeply rooted in the worldview of many far-right actors. Historically, the far right has been characterized by hostility toward other nations – national chauvinism being the name for it (Bar-On 2018, 48). Lasting transnational cooperation is therefore not the logical consequence of the far right's self-image, but rather an intellectual challenge to it.

At the same time, the far right's history of ideas has been shaped by a number of authors who have attempted to create an intellectual framework capable of linking ethnonationalist ideologies across borders. It is hardly surprising that these authors have been rediscovered in recent years and are increasingly received within far-right discourse. Proto-fascist authors of the interwar period, such as those of the so-called German Conservative Revolution, today enjoy popularity in the various ethnonationalist camps throughout Europe and beyond (see for an early overview Pfahl-Traugher 1998). Before and during the Nazi period, it was different ideologies of pan-nationalism that contained transnational elements in some of their manifestations. By extending the ethnic collective from the Germans in the narrow sense to the *Germanischen Völker* (Germanic peoples), a multitude of European nations were integrated into the identity concept of pan-Germanism that could have enabled transnational cooperation on an ideological level but failed, among other things, because of the imperialist character of Nazism (Adams 2001, 73). However, other ethnic groups, such as the Slavs, who today are often seen as part of the so-called "white race", were excluded from this identity concept and devalued as *Untermenschen* (sub-humans) (Jaworska 2011, 451). After World War II, ideas such as Euro-fascism and other pan-European (pan-Slavism, pan-Scandinavianism etc.) conceptions of identity followed or were rediscovered and experience a revival today (see the Identitarian Movement or Nordic Resistance Movement) (Griffin 2013, 274). Perhaps the most powerful notions of transnational belonging are white supremacist ideologies based on the concept of the white race (Grumke 2011, 325). It is therefore not surprising that in the field of international neo-Nazism, which is based on the concept of the white race, one can most readily speak of continuing transnational contacts which, however, take place to a large extent mainly in the subcultural realm and have so far been unable to establish sustainable transnational cooperation (Griffin 2013, 274). As will be shown in the presentation of Azov's narratives, the Ukrainian movement makes itself part of these traditions.

This thesis further assumes, following Thomas Grumke, that the far right has globalized in recent decades and can best be described on a global level as a constituting *globalized anti-*

globalist movement (Grumke 2011). What far-right actors have in common is the belief in a global conspiracy of so-called globalist elites (Globalists) who pull the strings in the background and pursue a secret plan to enslave humanity. Multiculturalism, mass migration, and cultural Marxist strategies are deliberately employed in this narrative by anti-Semiticly coded elites to establish a totalitarian world order. This narrative of a global threat potentially enables transnational cooperation because it suggests that all far-right organizations are struggling with the same problems and have common overpowering enemies (Ibid., 324-329). Thomas Grumke summarizes this process, which has already been taking place for some time, as follows:

“Today, all right-wing extremists in Western industrialized countries are facing almost identical challenges. The enemy is not organized nationally but globally. Accordingly, more and more right-wing extremists are looking to a transnational network to fight against the seemingly overwhelming (Jewish) conspiracy. In the course of this development, networking has become tighter, contacts abroad have intensified, and communication channels have improved, altogether making for a permanent exchange of information and lively event tourism.” (Grumke 2011, 330)

Conceptually, this thesis assumes that, in the 21st century, we are dealing with a loose global network of far-right actors mobilizing for social change based on a relatively contingent shared globalized identity. Social change in this case can be understood as an attempt to re-nationalize and re-ethnicize the world to provide ethnic nations with their rightful *Lebensraum* (habitat) in which they are not forced to mix with others (Ibid., 329ff.). Of course, this description is very general, and there are complicating factors at both the ideological and the organizational level. However, this differentiation cannot be made in this thesis because it would exceed its scope.

In any case, the example of Azov reveals some of the complicating factors that make it clear that we are dealing with the constitutional process of a global social movement and not with its consolidation. After all, the transnational network is not held together by a harmonious ideology that unites across borders, but it is essentially characterized by conflicting interests. In the case of this thesis, these are primarily geopolitical conflicts that can potentially divide this global network and stand in the way of continuing transnational cooperation. To reach a conclusion in this chapter, however, it is important to note that far-right politics in the 21st century is undoubtedly characterized by movement dynamics that find expression at the national but also at the transnational level. Social movement research approaches can help explain these dynamics which have been understudied to date. The extent to which these approaches can achieve this and which dimensions of far-right mobilization they address will be discussed in the next chapter.

3.3. Studying Far-Right Politics with Social Movement Approaches

Social movements are complex, multidimensional phenomena characterized by the participation of a variety of individuals and organizations in them. In their attempt to achieve social change through collective action, social movements interact with their environment, which at the same time forms the social conditions for their political action. To understand this multitude of complex social dynamics, a variety of research approaches, methods and theories has emerged over the years. They highlight different aspects of social movements and attempt to explain them (Della Porta and Diani 2006, 5).

These approaches have also been increasingly successfully applied to the research of far-right politics in recent years, shedding light on areas that had previously received little attention (Castelli Gattinara and Pirro 2019, 454ff.). In this chapter, the most relevant approaches will be presented in an overview and their value for investigating contemporary phenomena in the field of far-right politics will be explained. As Manuela Caiani and her colleagues (Caiani, Della Porta, and Wagemann 2012, 9f.) note, in the field of far-right research, a broad distinction can be made between approaches that address the social conditions of far-right mobilization (political and discursive opportunity structures), those that focus on the organization of the movements themselves (internal structure and resources), those who study the behavior of social movements (action repertoire), and finally, those that deal with how collective identities emerge in the context of social movements and what form and content they take (collective identities and framing).

Approaches that place *political opportunity structures* (POS) at the center of analysis deal with the framework conditions that favor the emergence and mobilization potential of social movements. The study of political opportunity structures thus focuses on interaction dynamics between social movements and their institutionalized (e.g. political system) and non-institutionalized (e.g. cultural factors) environments. In addressing these factors, POS approaches deal with the question of under which institutional and non-institutional settings collective action is favored and under which it is not (Della Porta and Diani 2006, 196).

Approaches that address political opportunity structures have already been profitably applied to the field of far-right research and have enabled a more differentiated and empirically founded understanding of the conditions that drive far-right mobilization. We know from empirical studies which have examined POS that factors such as social and economic crises, political instability, allies of the far-right in positions of power, an authoritarian past in the national context, the prevalence of far-right youth subcultures and hooliganism, and the prevalence of

xenophobic attitudes within the population can help foster far-right mobilization. This should be seen against the background that before the application of these approaches, very general crisis theories were predominant in academic discourse, which could only explain the socio-political conditions that promote far-right mobilization to a very limited extent. The analysis of POS through social movement research approaches therefore allows for a much more detailed and complex analysis of the conditions that contribute to the rise of the far right, without losing sight of broad developments within the social structure as a whole (Caiani and della Porta 2018, 473).

Similar to political opportunity structures, other studies in the field are dedicated to *discursive opportunity structures* (DOS) and address how far-right organizations can respond to and use discursive events to spread their messages and increase their mobilization potential. In recent years, much has been written about the so-called “refugee crisis” and how it has been used as a discursive opportunity by far-right actors to push their narratives, such as the conspiracy theory of the “Great Exchange” into the mainstream (Schedler 2017, 291). The Covid-19 pandemic can also be seen as a DOS for far-right actors and is accordingly exploited by them throughout Europe and beyond to agitate against the political establishment and an alleged “global conspiracy” behind it (see Janin and Devereil 2020). As Jan Schedler (2017, 291) emphasizes, approaches that deal with POS/DOS have a high explanatory potential, but can only contribute to explaining the success of social movements to a limited extent because internal movement structures are not taken into account. POS/DOS approaches are not able explain why certain groups or individuals become active at certain points in time and why others, although the same framework conditions exist, do not.

Resource mobilization approaches follow on this and focus on social movements and their ability to mobilize and use resources they need to engage in collective action successfully. Resources in this context can include a variety of things, ranging from material and financial goods to factors such as time resources of individual activists to carry out specific activities (Della Porta and Diani 2006, 15f.). Furthermore, resource mobilization approaches are not limited to the analysis of existing or non-existing resources, but also address how these are strategically coordinated and applied within movements. Just because a movement has the necessary resources it needs for mobilization does not mean that it is able to use them to achieve the successes it has set out to achieve:

„[T]he simple availability of resources is not sufficient; coordination and strategic effort is typically required in order to convert available pools of individually held resources into collective resources and to utilize those resources in collective action. When movement activists do

attempt to create collective action (fielding protests, creating social movement organizations, and the like) through historical time and across geographical locations their successes are consistently related to the greater presence of available resources in their broader environments.“ (Edwards and McCarthy 2004, 116)

Thus, while POS/DOS approaches can provide insights into the societal conditions that favor far-right mobilization, resource mobilization approaches can provide information about internal processes and structures within far-right movements. In this context, in addition to the analysis of funding issues (far-right businesses, donations), division of labor (social movement organizations) and mobilization pools (for example subcultures), the question of the internet and its capabilities for mobilizing and coordinating resources is becoming increasingly relevant in the field of far-right research (Castelli Gattinara and Pirro 2019, 449). A large part of far-right networking now takes place via the internet (see Caiani and Kröll 2015), and has become indispensable in the political activism of far-right actors, whose most prominent exponents should increasingly be characterized as internet phenomena rather than non-virtual ones (e.g. Alt-Right Movement), or at least usually take on a hybrid form in which social media and web presence are of particular importance (see Fielitz and Thurston 2019). In addition to POS/DOS, resource mobilization approaches are thus becoming a relevant tool in explaining far-right political phenomena and, accordingly, are increasingly being applied in far-right research.

For a long time, much of the study of the far right's action repertoire was limited to two types of political practice. Much of the research examined far-right parties as electoral actors within conventional political arenas. When far-right actors outside parliaments and elections have been the subject of scholarly study, they have usually been reduced to their violent behavior. In some ways, this has given the impression that far-right actors either take the parliamentary route or, at the extreme fringes, seek to implement their political agenda only through violence (Caiani, Della Porta, and Wagemann 2012, 12). This impression, however, also has to do with the far right itself, which, since the 1990s, has greatly diversified its political activities and is now involved in a variety of political activities in addition to electoral politics and spontaneous violence (Schedler 2017, 306). The increasing integration of movement research approaches has broken down this dichotomy within far-right research, and far-right actors are being studied in their diverse *repertoire of actions* (Caiani, Della Porta, and Wagemann 2012, 12). In their research, Manuela Caiani and her colleagues distinguish between five forms of action by far-right actors. Far-right actors engage mainly in conventional action (e.g. lobbying, electoral campaigns), demonstrative action (e.g. festivals, street demonstrations, public meetings), expressive action (actions intended to strengthen the bond within the group), confrontational action

(e.g. blockades, occupations, illegal but non-violent demonstrations) and violent action (symbolic and verbal acts as well as physical acts) (Ibid., 79f.). Which forms of action far-right organizations/movements resort to depends strongly on the social conditions (POS) and their internal structures, which is why it is often beneficial to combine these approaches.

Finally, approaches dealing with *collective identities* are being applied increasingly in the field of far-right research. Collective identities in this context can be understood as "... the process by which social actors recognize themselves – and are recognized by other actors – as part of broader groupings, and develop emotional attachments to them" (Della Porta and Diani 2006, 91). Collective identity approaches address the question of the common ground on which individuals engage in collective action. At this point, collective identity approaches will not be discussed in depth, as they are very closely related to the framing approach, which will be discussed in more detail now. In the context of this work, the tendency that should be emphasized is that far-right identity concepts are increasingly being supplemented in their national-specific content by transnational and global identity concepts (Castelli Gattinara and Pirro 2019, 452f.). These changes in far-right identity concepts, and how they affect individuals who engage in collective action, can be explored through social movement research approaches and again highlight the relevance of these to the field of far-right research.

4. Frame Analysis and Frame Theory

In the 1980s, social movement researchers began to conceptualize a dimension of social movements that had previously received relatively little attention. It was, above all, the pioneering work of David Snow and Robert Benford (Snow et al. 1986; Snow and Benford 1988), as well as William A. Gamson (1992) that expanded the field of research with the framing approach. Researchers who applied the framing approach addressed the question of how systems of meaning and, in the broadest sense, "world interpretations" that enable and guide collective action are produced within social movements. Against static concepts of ideology, which usually saw social movements as merely passive carriers of pre-existing ideas, norms and values, these researchers developed a new approach to social movements that understood social movements as actively engaged actors in the process of meaning production (Kern 2008, 141). In the meantime, frame theories and methods of frame analysis have become an integral part not only of social movement research, but of social sciences in general (Benford and Snow 2000, 612). In the field of far-right research, however, this development has been slow to arrive,

and frame analytic approaches have so far been relatively rarely applied, as Manuela Caiani and Donatella della Porta (2018, 483) note.

Mainly, the concept of framing applied in social movement research goes back to Erving Goffman's work *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of the Experience* (1974). Frames are understood by Goffman as "schemes of interpretation" that enable individuals to locate, identify and name phenomena in their everyday experience. Frames help to classify events and phenomena within a horizon of meaning. They support us in processing experiences and guide our everyday actions. In addition, frames do not simply exist, but are actively generated by social actors in framing processes (Schade 2018). In the case of social movements, one further differentiation is usually made when it comes to the concept of framing. Social movements not only produce frames, but so-called "collective action frames" (CAF). These differ from framings in the general sense in that they not only help to mentally interpret and sort perceptions in everyday life but are oriented towards political action. So when we talk about framing processes and their end product in the form of collective action frames, we are talking about processes that are shaped by actively engaging actors (Benford und Snow 2000, 613f.):

"It is active in the sense that something is being done, and processual in the sense of a dynamic, evolving process. It entails agency in the sense that what is evolving is the work of social movement organizations or movement activists. And it is contentious in the sense that it involves the generation of interpretive frames that not only differ from existing ones but that may also challenge them. The resultant products of this framing activity are referred to as 'collective action frames'." (Benford and Snow 2000, 614)

By participating in the process of constructing social reality, movements create frames of reference that are ultimately intended to have a mobilizing effect on their target audiences (Benford and Snow 2000, 614). Collective action frames and their dissemination are therefore vital components in the mobilization process of social movements and, from the perspective of movement research, can contribute significantly to explaining why social movements succeed or fail in their attempts to mobilize. When it comes to the relationship between ideology and framing, frames can be understood as the symbolic construction of reality, which in their totality shape the worldview to which a social group refers (Caiani and della Porta 2018, 483).

For this thesis, another aspect of frame theory is highly relevant, namely that collective frames of action are produced in the framework of discursive processes within social movements. Social movements involve a variety of different, relatively autonomous actors who participate in the process of meaning production in interaction with each other and the outside world. For the perspective of social movement research, this is of particular importance, since

not only the communicated end products (framing) but also the processes of their production (framing process) become the object of investigation. Due to the high level of conflict within the far right and its heterogeneity, framing processes are particularly contentious and often lead to coexisting and sometimes contradictory narratives that hinder rather than promote collective action (Caiani, Della Porta, and Wagemann 2012, 104f.). As Benford and Snow (2000) note in their evaluation of framing literature, collective action frames generally have three core characteristics that are necessary for successful mobilization. Since the framing approach in this thesis not only functions as a theoretical basis, but also forms the center of the methodological procedure, the author's differentiations are therefore systematically addressed to deductively incorporate the individual elements into the operationalization of the frame analysis at a later stage.

4.1. Core Functions of Collective Action Frames

Collective action frames are produced in discursive processes by social movements and are intended to mobilize for political action. As Benford and Snow note, CAFs generally perform three core functions when broken down to their basic elements. In order to communicate as free of contradictions as possible, all three functions should be fulfilled and refer to each other in such a way that they form a relatively consistent unit (Kern 2008, 142). When these three core framing tasks (CFT) are fulfilled, social movements create the ideal discursive preconditions to successfully mobilize for collective action. Of course, this does not mean that other factors cannot have at least an equal impact on the potential mobilization success, but this does not change the fact that collective action frames are the decisive factor that social movements themselves have in their hands when it comes to their communication. In addition to the mobilization factor, the production of CAFs also aims at internal decision-making and consensus-building within social movements, which is necessary for political action over a longer period of time. In general, consensus and action mobilization are interlinked, as common collective action tends to require a shared understanding of certain issues.

The first core task of collective action frames is usually referred to in framing literature as *Diagnostic Framing*. If one assumes that a central characteristic of social movements is that they position themselves within a social conflict and want to bring about social change, it is necessary for social movements to determine what is wrong with the status quo in the first place. Therefore, social movements must first define and discursively construct problems that explain why parts of reality should be changed. Diagnostic framing thus describes one core function of CAFs, which serves to critique the status quo. For example, in their diagnostic

framing, social movements point to what they see as existing injustices in relation to a particular condition or group, and often name someone or something responsible for it. However, it is by no means the case that there is automatically consensus on questions of this kind, and, in particular, questions of blame are often discussed controversially within social movements. Diagnostic framings and CAFs in general can thus best be characterized as communicated (temporary) end products of discursive processes in which current problem diagnoses of a movement are articulated. They can be seen as discursive expressions of a complex process of negotiation and interaction that takes place within social movements and involves a variety of individual and collective actors (Benford and Snow 2000, 615f.).

While diagnostic framings refer to the present and emphasize grievances, *prognostic framings* outline a vision of the future and indicate how it can be achieved. To act against a certain status quo, it is necessary for social movements to formulate counterproposals that guide collective action and thus give political action a direction. Social movements thus offer alternatives to a previously diagnosed condition or at least formulate strategies for how to overcome it. These alternatives can vary greatly in scope and range from calling for individual policy measures to envisioning the establishment of an entirely new social order. Through these counterproposals, social movements respond to the question of what to do and present themselves as credible engines of social change (Kern 2008, 144). But that social movements agree on certain problem diagnoses does not mean that they agree on how to overcome the problem. Just like diagnostic framings, prognostic ones are also created in the context of complex discursive processes that are usually contested (Benford and Snow 2000, 617).

To achieve social change, it is not enough to reach a common consensus on a particular issue, because collective action is ultimately necessary to achieve the desired change. Social movements respond to this issue with *motivational framings*. Movements must be able to plausibly explain in their framing why it makes sense to engage in collective action to bring about the desired social change (Benford and Snow 2000, 617). If people feel that political action is pointless, they will either not even begin or at least not participate over a longer period of time. Social movements must respond to this challenge with their motivational framing, which mediates between the diagnosed problems and the movement's visions. In order to achieve collective action, individual actors and movement organizations thus need to be encouraged to participate (Kern 2008, 145). All three of these CFTs refer both to members of the social movement itself and to sympathizers who are not yet part of the collective.

In summary, it can be said that social movements articulate schemes of interpretation within the context of collective action frames that are geared towards social change. According to

Benford and Snow (2000), collective action frames must generally fulfill three core framing tasks to successfully guide collective action. First, it is necessary to problematize social reality or aspects of it. In the context of these diagnostic framings, individuals, groups, or institutions are often named and held responsible for the diagnosed problem. By diagnosing social problems, social movements ultimately legitimize their own existence, since without grievances there would be no reason for their political action. The diagnosis is followed by a counterproposal, or at least a counterstrategy, which in the long run aims at generating social change. Framings of this kind are called prognostic framings and they form the second core task of collective action frames. To mediate between the criticism of existing social conditions and their solutions and strategies, it is further necessary to offer motives and reasons for social practice and thus for the involvement of individuals in collective action. Those frames are called motivational framings and form the third and last core framing task. The articulation of consistent CAFs is usually necessary to successfully mobilize individuals and groups for collective and goal-oriented practice. Frame analysis, however, goes deeper and asks not only about the collective action frames of social movements, but what characteristics they possess and how they are strategically linked with each other.

4.3. Variable Properties of Collective Action Frames

Successful mobilization by social movements at the discursive level depends not only on the existence of collective action frames and whether they fulfill their core functions. In addition to those core functions of CAFs, Benford and Snow, drawing on empirical research on social movements, explain that a number of variables are important in understanding the success or failure of collective actors' framing strategies. For the application of frame analysis, the factors now discussed are essential because they provide the tools to deconstruct the communication of social movements and to understand their framing strategies.

Firstly, CAFs of social movements differ in how many social, cultural and political problems they identify and bring together into a meta-narrative (Benford and Snow 2000, 618). The wider the *range of identified problems*, the larger the social group potentially addressed and mobilized by the framing. Thus, as Gerhards and Ruck (1992, 580) note, the mobilization potential of CAFs is closely linked to the range of problems articulated by the social movement. The extent to which identified problems are integrated into the framing of a movement, however, also involves dangers that the movement must deal with. Framing is only successful if social movements manage to connect the identified problems in a consistent logic and transfer them into a meta-narrative. The more problems are addressed, the more difficult it is to maintain the internal

coherence of the framing and make it convincing. If this meta-narrative which brings the individual frames together does not exist, the framing is so broad that no one feels personally addressed by it (Benford and Snow 2000, 618). From the perspective of frame analysis, this means that it is not only relevant to identify the individual framings, but also to examine how they are linked and translated into one or more meta-narratives.

Another important variable of CAFs is how much they differ in their *inclusivity* and *exclusivity*. This spectrum refers less to the audience addressed than to the nature of the framings themselves. The question of inclusivity and exclusivity refers to the extent to which framings are created so that it is possible to integrate content into them at a later stage. Frames can either be relatively closed, inflexible and static in nature, or have a high degree of openness and flexibility (Ibid., 618). This is important because social movements must use their framings to respond to social realities and political discourses that are permanently affected by change. If the framing is relatively open and flexible, current developments can be addressed ideally. At the same time, framings with these characteristics run the risk that core messages are lost, which can lead to social movements losing their signature or unique selling point.

The *scope of interpretation* of collective action frames is similar. Collective action frames move between addressing specific groups with a limited number of interrelated issues and those that act as a kind of master algorithm that shape the movement and give it orientation. The latter are often described in the literature as master frames and must be so broad in their interpretative capacity that a variety of social movement organizations can easily integrate them into their own framing. Social movements are largely made up of social movement organizations, each with their own framing. While primary framings of movement organizations shape the character of the organization and its orientation and are favorable for mobilizing its target groups, this does not necessarily mean that these framings are also useful to other movement organizations of the same social movement. Master frames differ from these framings in that they are almost universally applicable to movement organizations of a particular social movement because of their generality and openness (Benford and Snow 2000, 618). In the case of Azov, for example, the question is whether the movement can offer its very heterogeneous international network master frames that can be adopted by the various organizations and actors despite their diversity. As will be shown, Azov deals with this challenge in a special way. The movement does not so much create new master frames as it takes existing ones that are dominant within the far right, appropriates them and transforms them in its favor. More on this will be discussed in the empirical part of this thesis.

The *resonance capability* of collective action frames forms the last variable property of collective action frames and is to be understood as a variable domain rather than as a single variable (Ibid., 619-622). The resonance factor is particularly relevant in explaining the effectiveness or mobilization potential of collective action frames, because looking at it can explain why some framings are successful in mobilizing their target groups while others are not. In this context, the Benford and Snow distinguish between two interactive factors that can explain the resonance capacity of CAFs: the *credibility* of the framing and its *relative salience*.

The *credibility* of a framing is composed of three factors: the inner consistency, the empirical credibility and the credibility of the person articulating the collective frame of action. The *consistency* of collective action frames refers to the relationship between articulated ideas and actions of the movement. A movement can be inconsistent by becoming entangled in obvious contradictions in its norms, ideas, values, and interpretations, but it can also lose credibility by creating contradictions between what it says and what it does. *Empirical credibility* refers to the fact that collective frames of action must correspond in some way with reality. The point is not that the claims of a social movement must be true in the emphatic sense to be successful, but that social movements underline and link their world interpretations with references to real world phenomena and thus suggest the plausibility of their positions. In addition to the consistency of collective frames of action and their empirical credibility, the *credibility of the individuals and groups* who articulate them is finally of central importance for explaining the success of framings. The credibility of a person can be based on their status (authority) or their knowledge and experience. Social movements therefore often refer to experts or try to win them over in order to give their framings credibility and underpin them with the authority of the source (Benford and Snow 2000, 621). In Azov's case, it was therefore crucial to look at the extent to which and whether the movement tries to formulate its framing in coordination with its political activities, so that a certain consistency between words and deeds can be observed. In addition, references to empirical examples or actors with a certain credibility were documented in the frame analysis of this thesis. More on this can be found in the methodological chapter.

As already mentioned, the mobilization potential of CAFs is influenced not only by the credibility factors but also by the salience of the movement's framings. As with credibility, a distinction can be made between three dimensions concerning the salience of a framing: the centrality of framing for the audience addressed, the correspondence of the frame with everyday experiences, and the ability of the frames to link to already existing cultural narratives.

Centrality means that the norms, ideas, and values conveyed in the CAFs should correspond to those that are of central importance to the target group, so that the mobilization potential of these groups can be fully utilized. The concept of centrality assumes that people organize ideas and values hierarchically, preferring some over others. To mobilize target groups, it is therefore not enough to address just any values or topics, but precisely those that are particularly important to these target groups. Achieving centrality while mobilizing as many target groups as possible can often be difficult for social movements because different groups also have different preferences regarding certain issues, values, and norms, and bringing these together can be challenging. This is also relevant for Azov, because the movement communicates with a relatively heterogeneous network that is shaped by its respective national contexts, its differentiated worldview, and so on. How the movement tries to deal with this challenge, however, will be discussed in the empirical part of this thesis and is of no concern at this point.

In addition to centrality, another aspect that can explain the success of a CAF is whether it can tie in with the *personal everyday experiences* of the target groups. Frames can be too abstract so that the people addressed cannot identify with the content conveyed. One of the secrets of successful mobilization is that it is potentially more successful when the groups to be mobilized feel that only small steps are necessary to become involved in collective practice. This factor is closely related to that of *narrative fidelity*. Social movements do not always have to reinvent everything but can draw on what already exists and make it work for them. Social movements can thus tie in with existing cultural narratives and try to mobilize larger groups with them. These cultural narratives can be diverse, ranging from national myths to pop cultural references to milieu-specific symbols or other objects of collective memory. If social movements manage to successfully tie in with existing narratives, we can speak of *narrative fidelity* according to Benford and Snow (2000, 622).

In summary, CAFs of social movements contain, in addition to their three core framing tasks, a variety of characteristics that can be the subject of investigation in frame analysis. They vary in how many problems or topics they address, how inclusive or exclusive and how flexible or inflexible they are, and how large their scope of interpretation is. They can problematize specific issues or become broad master frames that act as umbrellas holding the framings together. Additionally, CAFs differ in how much they resonate with the addressed audience. Various factors are relevant for this, such as their empirical credibility or the credibility of the person articulating the frames. Frames can resonate with the groups of people they address if they can grasp the central values of these groups, correspond with their everyday experiences, and successfully draw on existing cultural narratives. For the analysis of social movements and their

framings, this means that, in addition to the core tasks of collective action frames, variable characteristics of framings should be integrated into frame analysis. Thus, by integrating the variable properties of collective action frames into frame analysis, greater analytical depth can be achieved.

4.4. Framing Processes and Dynamics

Frame theory deals not only with frames, but also with the process of their production. In this context, Benford and Snow (2000, 623) identify three overlapping and interrelated processes that together describe the process leading to CAFs and determine their composition: discursive, strategic, and contested framing processes. *Discursive framing processes* are the processes in which social movements deliberately create, highlight, and accentuate frames. In these processes, events, experiences, and ideas are connected in a preferably coherent and logical way:

„What gives the resultant collective action frame its novelty is not so much the originality or newness of its ideational elements, but the manner in which they are spliced together and articulated, such that a new angle of vision, vantage point, and/or interpretation is provided.“
(Benford and Snow 2000, 623)

Discursive framing processes overlap with *strategic framing processes* that are goal-oriented and direct CAFs towards specific (strategic) purposes. These purposes can range from recruiting new members, to mobilizing existing supporters, to appeals for donations and so on. In frame theory, this is referred to as frame alignment processes, i.e., processes of strategically adapting frames to the target audience or a specific purpose. In this context, Snow et. al. (1986) identify four frame alignment processes that are of particular relevance for the study of social movements: frame bridging, frame amplification, frame extension and frame transformation.

With the strategy of *frame bridging*, contents which are not directly related to each other are linked to create a certain image (Kern 2008, 147). Social movements thus establish connections between ideas, norms, and/or empirical phenomena that are not automatically given and thus construct an issue which they can address (Snow et al. 1986, 467). *Frame amplification* is the process in which existing norms and values are idealized, exaggerated, and overemphasized. Movements can thereby increase the resonance capacity of their CAFs and thus their mobilization potential. To achieve narrative fidelity, for example, movements can draw on existing cultural values, narratives, myths, and so on, and emphasize them to enter into a culturally resonant relationship with the target audience (Kern 2008, 147). *Frame extensions* tie in with existing narratives and expand them with additional elements that were not previously associated with

them. Social movements can thus give existing narratives a new direction without fundamentally changing them. (Schade 2018, 276). *Frame transformations* are the last strategic process that social movements can resort to in order to increase the mobilization potential of their communication. In this process, social movements not only expand existing narratives, but also transform them so that a completely new narrative emerges.

An important and final dimension of framing processes is that they take place in a contested environment. Especially concerning Azov, this circumstance comes into play, as the movement tries to build a counterweight to Russian narratives within the European far right. Social movements are embedded in a social environment that is shaped by a multitude of different individual and collective actors. All these actors participate in the contentious “social construction of reality” (Berger and Luckmann 2018) and together make up the field in which social movements produce and distribute their CAFs:

“All actors within the collective action arena who engage in this reality construction work are embroiled in the politics of signification. This means that activists are not able to construct and impose on their intended targets any version of reality they would like; rather there are a variety of challenges confronting all those who engage in movement framing activities.” (Benford and Snow 2000, 625)

Framing processes are therefore not only discursive and strategic, but also *contested processes*. In this context, Benford and Snow (2000, 626f.) identify three challenges that social movements usually face in the production of their collective action frames. Framings, for example, can be explicitly produced and disseminated in the context of open conflicts with other actors. Therefore, social movements may have to respond to accusations from opponents, critical media or other participants in public discourse and offer so-called *counterframings* with which they try to invalidate the statements of the opposing party.

Social movements themselves are not free of conflict either, which is why movement organizations may produce framing content that responds to a *dispute within the movement*. Conflicts of this kind can lead to the reorientation of the movement, splitting-off of individual actors, or its dissolution. In Azov’s case, for example, it is primarily geopolitical issues that are the subject of conflict in communication with the network. Ultimately, the movement wants the far right to turn away from the Russian government and instead recognize Azov itself as the vanguard of national-revolutionary aspirations in Europe – just a little teaser for the empirical part of this thesis.

The last challenge identified by Benford and Snow in the context of contested processes is the relationship of framing to changes in the world. The authors call this the *dialectical tension between frames and events*, meaning that social movements are forced to respond to changes in their socio-historical environment if they want to remain relevant. However, it may also be that demands of social movements are fulfilled and therefore they must realign themselves. Thus, frame analysis must include contextual factors to understand why a movement's communication takes a particular form. The methodology chapter explains how these different factors were applied to Azov's communication content.

To achieve the desired social change, social movements generate collective action frames that are meant to mobilize for common collective action. These CAFs generally have three core functions: they problematize the status quo, offer counterproposals or at least counterstrategies, and call for collective action, i.e., they try to provide individuals with motives and motivations to participate in collective action. However, collective action frames are not only composed of these three core functions, but also of variable properties that are equally relevant for frame analysis. In addition to framing and its composition, the processes of which these are the end products are also taken into consideration when it comes to frame analysis. Collective action frames are produced discursively with strategic orientation in a contested environment characterized by the participation of a variety of different actors. Social movements are thus confronted with a multitude of challenges when it comes to the production of collective frames of action. Within the framework of strategic processes, these frames are aligned with the respective goals of the social movement. They are linked, highlighted, and adapted to the socio-cultural context in which they are to have their effect. In the context of these processes, existing cultural norms, values, and narratives are further appropriated, expanded upon, and in some cases even transformed. In this process, social movements must deal with internal and external conflicts, take social change into account, and keep adapting in order not to lose relevance if they want to continue to mobilize for their cause successfully. This thesis examines how Azov deals with these challenges, and what framing strategies the movement draws upon to do so. The next chapter therefore focuses on explaining how the indicators and factors from frame theory presented here were applied to Azov's international communication.

CHAPTER III: Methods and Methodology

Based on this theoretical framework, Azov's international communication with its mainly European far-right network was analyzed using qualitative frame analysis inspired by Benford and Snow's (2000) framing approach to social movements. The analysis grid was thus derived

from frame theory and applied to the case of Azov. Through the application of social movement frame analysis, it was possible to study not only Azov's manifest content of international communication, but also its strategic composition. Thus, in addition to identifying individual frames, these were additionally examined for their reciprocal linkage, combination, emphasis, and strategic orientation, and related to the sociocultural context in which they were articulated. Social movement frame analysis, which seeks to understand framing content in its broader discursive context, both in its production and dissemination, can be methodologically attributed to the field of discourse analysis (Blatter et al. 2018, 126). Methodical approaches of this type are best suited for understanding how political actors interact with, are influenced by, and simultaneously attempt to influence the discursive field in which they are embedded. Before this chapter discusses how frame analysis was methodologically applied to Azov's international communication content, however, it is first necessary to explain what information was studied in the frame analysis and how the data was collected and processed.

1. Data Selection and Data Collection

The data analyzed in this thesis stems from a variety of open sources and includes either written or spoken statements of the Azov movement's representatives. To speak of a movement's representative is in a way a contradiction because movements are characterized by their rather loose hierarchical structures. To be more precise: When speaking of Azov's representatives, statements of actors, organizations and organs have been analyzed, that form the movement's organizational nucleus. Furthermore, in the case of Azov, it is plausible to speak of "representation" because, like other far-right movements (Minkenberg 2019, 466f.), it has relatively strong vertical power structures (Nonjon 2020, 5). Whether Azov should be classified as an organization with movement-like elements or as a movement with strong hierarchies can and must not be answered unambiguously within the scope of this thesis.

Since its emergence, Azov has used a variety of formats to communicate with its international audience. Within the framework of this thesis, it was possible to extract a large part of the internationally oriented content disseminated by the movement over time. Thus, within frame analysis, data was analyzed which was compiled from Azov's online radio station (A-Radio), its digital frontline magazine (The Black Sun), various of the movement's social media channels (Facebook, Twitter, Telegram, YouTube, Tumblr), and its blogs and websites. In addition, content from sources not directly published by the movement itself was included, e.g. interviews given by International Secretary Olena Semenyaka in other far-right publications. Since

Azov not only disseminates its content online, but its representative Semenyaka travels across Europe to participate in far-right events and conferences and gives speeches there, these were further taken into account. Most of Semenyaka's speeches can be accessed publicly online in video format and have been transcribed and integrated into frame analysis for this thesis.

After their collection, the movement's social media postings and articles were further systematically merged and integrated into the qualitative analysis software MAXQDA. Audiovisual data had to be transcribed first and was then also fed into the analysis software treated as equal text files. The data collected covers the period from late 2014 to early 2020. With the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, data collection was terminated, as this appeared to be a turning point that provided a good opportunity to conclude. Ultimately, most of the relevant English-language content from Azov's distribution channels and some additional content from external sources was examined as part of frame analysis. It is quite possible that in the course of time homepages, blogs, and social media pages of Azov existed which could not be found during the research of this thesis, but it is unlikely that they would have significantly influenced the results of frame analysis. Overall, the statements examined represent the majority of the movement's English-language communications.

In total, the data for the frame analysis consisted of 657 tweets from the English-language Twitter channel *AzovNews* posted in the period from mid-2015 to early 2020, 84 articles from Azov's old homepage *Nackor.org*, published between the beginning of 2016 and autumn 2018, 271 postings from June 2018 to April 2020 of the Facebook page *Intermarium Support Group*, the group that, around Olena Semenyaka, promotes Azov's geopolitical agenda abroad, 11 articles from the Intermarium Support Group homepage (2019 and 2020) and posts from their Tumblr blog, many of which overlap with the Facebook page and were therefore not specifically counted. Furthermore, 174 posts of the Telegram channel of Azov's political arm *National Corps* were analyzed, ranging from April 2019 to August 2019, and 2 issues of Azov's frontline magazine *The Black Sun*, namely issue 3 (April 2015) and issue 5 (June 2015). In addition to the movement's distribution channels, interviews from other media sites were integrated, such as the one with Olena Semenyaka in the online magazine *The New Nationalism*, which is also associated with the movement. Articles by Olena Semenyaka, such as from her blog *Glaukopis*, have only been integrated partially as most are too concerned with topics that do not relate directly to Azov itself and can be understood as private opinions rather than official statements. Regarding audiovisual data, 6 conference speeches by Olena Semenyaka, one radio interview with *A-Radio* and one with Swedish Identitarians on their YouTube channel were transcribed

and integrated into the frame analysis. In total, approx. 1,200 textual statements plus approx. 6.5 hours of audiovisual material were analyzed within the scope of this case study.

Naturally, Azov's various statements differ in form and length depending on the platform on which they were published. The length of the statements ranges from programmatic articles that are several pages long to tweets that have a maximum of 280 characters. Some posts on social media contain only a link or an image with a short description, while others feature entire transcripts of speeches. Some content overlapped on the different distribution channels but was coded only once to avoid repetition. Even though it is not a quantitative analysis, double coding might have biased the result. This work cannot go into much detail about the extent to which the content of Azov's communication varied by platform. Of course, the content differs depending on which organization of the movement was analyzed on which platform. While the Twitter account AzovNews reports a lot about the movement's and especially the regiment's activities and shares a lot of military content, the Telegram channel of the National Corps party is mainly about national-political issues and such. When necessary, these differences are addressed in the presentation of the results, but usually Azov is assumed to be a movement without differentiating between its various organs. How the analysis proceeded after the data was collected and systematically processed will now be discussed further.

2. Methods of Data Analysis

After the data was collected and organized, it was integrated into the qualitative data analysis software MAXQDA. The initial coding process was guided by Benford and Snow's framing approach to social movements which has already been discussed in detail in the chapter on frame theory. Thus, the individual codes for the code book were deductively derived from frame theory and applied to the empirical material in an initial coding process. The codebook was composed of the core functions of collective action frames, as well as variable characteristics and factors of their strategic orientation. Consequently, the empirical material was coded for whether it was diagnostic (problem definition), prognostic (solution), or motivational (activating) framing. After the initial coding phase, the material was then examined for existing variables and discursive, strategic, and contested processes by relating the framing to the socio-historical context in which the statements were articulated.

Thus, under the umbrella code "strategic processes", the codes frame bridging, frame amplification, frame extension, frame transformation and strategic selection were collected. Under the umbrella code "frame resonance", the codes frame consistency, empirical credibility,

credibility of the frame articulator, frame centrality, experiential commensurability and narrative fidelity were collected. Finally, the term “contested processes” was used to refer to counterframing, frame disputes within the movement and the dialectic tension between movement and events. The explanation for the respective codes can be found in detail in the chapter on frame theory and will not be explained further here.

The coding procedure based on deductively derived codes was accompanied by a relatively open and inductive coding process. The goal of this process was to identify, as close as possible to the empirical material, the themes and positions that Azov articulates in international framing. To explain this: When Azov criticized a particular political phenomenon, it was coded as diagnostic framing. In addition, however, a sub-code was created at the same time, which referred to the political phenomenon in terms of content. This process made it possible to distinguish not only between diagnostic, prognostic and motivational framings, but also thematically within the respective codes. The advantage of this combination of deductive and inductive coding processes is that the empirical work is guided by theory on the one hand, while on the other hand the empirical material can “speak for itself”.

Following the classification of the data into the three core framing tasks (diagnostic, prognostic, motivational), the variable properties of these were analyzed in more depth. Frames were examined for their degree of frame resonance, for their strategic orientation, and for the ways in which they are placed in and refer to contested discourses. For example, when the movement critically referred to and countered existing narratives within the far right, such statement was coded as “counterframing” and as a “dispute within the movement.” If the movement connected certain topics that are in principle unrelated, this was coded as “frame bridging”, and if the movement referred to experts or individuals and institutions with some authority on certain topics, this was coded as “credibility of the frame articulator”, and so on. Examining Azov’s framing not only for its core functions, but also for its composition, strategic orientation, and context, made it possible not only to capture the movement’s communication content descriptively, but also to conduct a rule-guided and comprehensible in-depth analysis which in the end and in its totality made Azov’s communication strategy visible.

In some cases, the codes derived from frame theory reached their limits. One of Azov’s frequent procedures is for the movement to present its activities to international audiences on social media. The representation of these activities takes on a central role in the movement’s framing strategy because this way it can build credibility and show that it is also capable of action. Since these activities could not be assigned to any code, a separate “action repertoire” code was created, which was then divided into thematic subcodes like “street activism”, “civic

engagement”, “metapolitical initiatives”, “organization of events” etc. It was important to extend the deductively derived codes, since the representation of Azov’s activities, although not frames in a strict sense, are at the same time an essential part of the movement’s communication strategy. Overall, the code book was composed of the core framing tasks and their variable properties, as well as other supplementary codes that were added during the empirical evaluation.

Since the amount of data analyzed was relatively large and Azov addresses a variety of topics in its international communication, it was necessary to sort the resulting codes after the actual coding process. It seemed most appropriate to use a geographic grid that allowed the codes to be assigned to the respective geographic level to which the respective frames of the movement corresponded. Thus, the identified frames were categorized according to whether they concerned the national (Ukraine), regional (Central and Eastern Europe), European or global level. In the end, it was possible to distinguish between solutions of the movement, for example, depending on whether they referred to Ukraine or, for instance, the European Union. Furthermore, the multi-level approach made it possible to analyze the discursive linkage between the different levels. This additional classification may look complicated, but in the presentation of the empirical results it should become clear why it was useful to apply it nevertheless.

Hence, Azov’s communication was coded in terms of the core functions of collective action frames and their variables. In addition, in order to sort them, the codes were applied to a multi-level geographic model. Within the respective geographical levels, a thematic distinction was then made between the framings. At the national level, for example, it was possible to distinguish between diagnostic framings that referred either to individuals and institutions, Ukrainian society, the war in eastern Ukraine, or the nationalist camp itself. When necessary, these thematic blocks were further differentiated. Since the goal was to identify and analyze Azov’s central narratives and their strategic composition, this could be implemented in a rule-guided manner through the coding process.

Ultimately, about 2,500 codings were made as part of the frame analysis. About 1,000 of these relate to frame analysis in the narrow sense. About 1,000 more refer to the reconstruction of Azov’s action repertoire. To differentiate between the various actors and arms of the movement, these were additionally considered in coding. 500 codes thus refer to and identify the actors of the movement when named or portrayed explicitly. This approach made it possible to conduct an analysis that was as close as possible to the empirical material and at the same time considered the insights of frame theory. The presentation of the results reflects the coding pattern to a large extent and illustrates why it made sense to differentiate the framings

geographically and thematically. However, before going into the presentation of the empirical results, a few remarks on limitations and conceptual issues should be made.

3. Limitations and Conceptual Notes

One question in the conceptualization of the thesis was whether it was legitimate to assume Azov to be a collective actor. The answer to this question remains ambivalent since social movements are characterized by informal structures. This thesis examined movement organizations and actors that claim to represent Azov and for which the empirical evidence suggests that they do. This paper thus presents the framing content of those actors who form the organizational nucleus of the movement. There may well be differing opinions within the movement, but these are not expressed in official international communication. In this respect, it is assumed that it is legitimate to see the material studied as representative of Azov - at least when it comes to international communication.

Another necessary remark refers to international communication. This work has been limited to examining Azov's English-language content. It is well possible that Azov's communication in other languages, especially Ukrainian and Russian, has different themes, topics, and argumentations. To investigate this comparatively would be interesting for further empirical studies but cannot be done in this thesis. Regarding English-language communication content, its majority was analyzed in this work. It may be that individual themes or argumentations were not considered, but those that are central to Azov's argumentation and communication strategy were.

When it comes to presenting the results of frame analysis, no distinction is made between prognostic and motivational framings. This has something to do with the fact that in the frame analysis itself this distinction was hardly possible. Since Azov's international communication is less about mobilizing for specific activities and more about making the audience receptive to its own agenda, motivational framings are rarely present. Classic calls to action are probably formulated by Azov mainly in communication with Ukrainian activists and less in communication with the international network. When motivational framings come into play, they are explicitly mentioned, but otherwise they are included in the context of the chapters on prognostic framing.

In summary, the challenges in the research process were primarily conceptual. The methodological approach was guided by theory and at the same time relatively flexible in its adaptation, so that inconsistencies could be addressed without having to revise the theoretical framework

fundamentally. In the following chapters, we will speak of Azov, referring to the organizational nucleus in English-language communication with its far-right network. In the first chapter, Azov's diagnostic framing is presented at the different geographical levels. This is followed by a chapter addressing prognostic framing. In the conclusion, the identified narratives and strategies of their distribution are discussed and the research questions that guided this thesis are answered.

CHAPTER IV: Empirical Findings

Azov's framing activities cover a variety of topics ranging from theoretical and philosophical debates within the far right, to commentary on daily political events, to the implementation plan of a global national revolution. Although the issues addressed by Azov are diverse, patterns in communication could be identified that have the goal of promoting Azov and its agenda to its mainly European far-right network. Azov is pursuing a distinct political agenda in communicating with its network, aimed at contesting Russia's position within the European far right and instead making itself a potential leader of national-revolutionary aspirations in the West.

This chapter aims to reconstruct Azov's communicated content and present the most essential narratives articulated by the movement in communication with its international network. Furthermore, the identified narratives are discussed in terms of their strategic orientation. To reconstruct Azov's arguments in a structured way, the presentation of the empirical findings is composed of two chapters. The first chapter discusses Azov's diagnostic framing, i.e., framing with which social movements identify problems and define the current state of affairs. The second chapter discusses Azov's prognostic and motivational framing, i.e., framing with which social movements offer solutions to their target audience, present strategies to achieve them, and provide reasons to become active.

To differentiate these two chapters internally in terms of content, they are divided into subchapters that correspond to the geographic analysis grid that was applied to Azov's communication in frame analysis. Thus, both the chapter on diagnostic and prognostic framing include subchapters devoted to the global, European, regional, and national levels. In the case of diagnostic framing, there is also a special subchapter devoted to Azov's diagnostic framing relating to Russia, as this topic area is of particular relevance for the movement's framing strategy. Before discussing the specific framing content and strategies of Azov's international communication, however, it is necessary to make important remarks about variables in Azov's framing activities.

1. Variables in Azov's Framing Activities

As frame analytic approaches emphasize, framing content must be understood as an expression and a product of discursive processes that take place within social movements (Benford and Snow 2000, 623). For the analysis of framing activities, this means that framing content can vary and change depending on the time and place in which it is articulated. It is precisely the advantage of frame analytic approaches that they capture the worldview of political actors not as rigid ideologies, but as the articulation of and identification with interpretive frames characterized by continuity and change. In Azov's case, various variables in the framing activities could thus be identified, which will be mentioned here before going into the concrete framing content of the movement. It could be observed that Azov's framing content varies over time, relating to the distribution channels and depending on which audience is addressed. At the same time, significant continuities in the movement's framing could be identified, which are ultimately presented in the respective chapters.

Social movements do not operate in a vacuum but are affected by and respond to social change. Accordingly, movements usually adjust their framing to changing circumstances, what Benford and Snow (2000, 627) call the dialectical tension between movements and events. As the frame analysis shows, this also applies to Azov. Over the course of the movement's development, a change in Azov's rhetoric as well as in the issues the movement addresses and emphasizes could be observed. Azov's rhetorical shift is characterized by professionalization and a move toward more moderate language. It can only be speculated as to why this change has taken place, but the movement has been subject to fierce international criticism since its inception and has had to respond to it time and again. Moreover, although Azov originates largely from Ukraine's militant extreme right-wing subculture, the movement is trying to connect with far-right milieus in Europe, which are more associated with the so-called New Right and use a more moderate rhetoric. One factor that may also come into play is that, while in the early days several actors were involved in international communication, over time it has become increasingly centered around the international secretary, Olena Semenyaka. Semenyaka is not only very conscious of the words she chooses to disseminate Azov's agenda, but formulates the narratives communicated against the backdrop of the theoretical discourse of the European New Right and sees herself in this intellectual tradition. To give an example, Semenyaka would usually not use terms like "race" or "blood and soil" in international communication, but one of Azov's movement party ideologues, Eduard Yurchenko, does so in articles on Azov's homepage. Semenyaka would say the same thing in terms of content but refer to concepts such as

ethnocultural identity instead of race. Such semantic differences in framing thus exist but do not require much consideration in the presentation of the results.

In addition to the change in rhetoric, there has also been a change in the topics that are addressed, as mentioned above. This has to do with developments in the political landscape and, above all, changes in the conflict in eastern Ukraine. When the conflict in eastern Ukraine reached full momentum, much of Azov's framing content was related to warfare. As the conflict increasingly developed into a low-intensity war, political issues became more important. The same applies to the issue of foreign fighters. While Azov was still mobilizing internationally for front-line support at the beginning of the conflict, this became gradually less important with the Minsk agreements, which restricted the involvement of foreign fighters. The issue of foreign fighters is a bit more complicated than presented here, and since the Minsk agreements, there have been other political developments in Ukraine that cannot be discussed (see Potočňák and Mareš 2019). In any case, in Azov's communication, the issue kept losing relevance. Instead, Azov's geopolitical vision in the region of Central and Eastern Europe has become increasingly important in international communication. Many more examples could be given at this point, but it is most important to emphasize that the themes have changed over time and yet central narratives could be identified that form the core of Azov's communication with its international network.

Finally, a variance in framing could also be observed depending on which source or distribution channel was examined and which audience was addressed by Azov. At the same time, however, much of the movement's content is disseminated or referenced across all distribution channels. According to the nature of Twitter, the communication channel *AzovNews* publishes short and concise messages, but with a high frequency. On the websites, in contrast, there is space for longer, programmatic articles that provide more in-depth insights into Azov's self-understanding. While on social media, all potentially interested parties are addressed, the conference lectures of international secretary Olena Semenyaka are relatively explicitly addressed to a far-right audience – the same applies to interviews with far-right media and other appearances that take place within the international far-right network.

It is important to mention these differences, but also to emphasize that they have no significant impact on Azov's framing content or strategies. Much of Azov's communication is characterized by continuity in content and allows for the identification of narratives that serve the movement to spread its political agenda. The following chapters show how multilayered and complex Azov's approach to its far-right network is and with which framing strategies the movement tries to convince it. Starting from the precarious attempt of the international far right

to constitute itself as a social movement, Azov tries to influence its orientation in favor of its own geopolitical positions. However, the movement's framing goes far beyond the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. In international framing, Azov presents itself as a potential leader in a global struggle of nationalist forces against the supremacy of globalism. Azov propagates the export of national revolution to the region of Central and Eastern Europe, to Western Europe and the entire West. In this struggle of united ethnonational forces, the goal is to build an alternative world order in which the organic substance of ethnic peoples is the guiding principle of political communities.

2. From Global to Local: The Azov Movement's Diagnostic Framing

Azov's perception of reality coincides in many areas with that of other far-right organizations in Europe. The movement rejects liberalism, multiculturalism, and the entire project of modernity. This fundamental rejection of the Enlightenment and its values runs through all of Azov's communication and manifests itself at all geographical levels. The topics addressed by the movement are diverse and range from day-to-day political matters to fundamental geopolitical questions, to reflections on the philosophy of history and cultural theory. A distinguishing feature of Azov's diagnostic framing is that Russia is integrated into the critique of modernity at every possible point. The central argument the movement wants to make is that the world is currently in the age of globalism, in which the ethnic nations of the world are oppressed by globalist elites. Now, in the eyes of the movement, the Russian government is not a counterweight to the hegemony of globalism, but part of it. And it is precisely this argument that Azov tries to explain as emphatically as possible to its international audience. To convince the far-right network of Azov's diagnosis, the movement uses various framing strategies. In the following chapters, these are systematically addressed in relation to the narratives articulated by Azov. Each subsequent chapter is related to a geographical level and thematically divided into subchapters. Taken as a whole, they represent Azov's diagnostic framing in communication with its far-right network.

2.1. Global Narratives: The State of World Affairs

Azov offers its international audience a meta-narrative that explains the current state of the world by drawing on authors from the far right's history of ideas. Through the selective reception of various concepts from the far right's philosophy of history and cultural theory, Azov creates a storyline to which the movement can link its agenda. The construction of this meta-

diagnosis is strategically articulated in a way that allows Azov to derive its program causally logically from it. This strategy of appropriating, expanding, and transforming discourses, framing and narratives dominant within the far right runs throughout Azov's international communication and forms the core of Azov's framing strategy. Through this strategy, Azov can achieve several key framing goals that are relevant for mobilizing its network.

First, Azov makes itself part of the transnationally oriented far right by showing that it has internalized its concepts, speaks its language, and therefore also intellectually engages in a common struggle to save ethnocultural identities against the destructive power of globalist elites. Second, by tying in with influential far-right intellectual traditions, the movement can lend credibility to its own framing. Thus, through the reception of relevant authors, cultural resonance and narrative fidelity can potentially be generated. Third, by serving the intellectual discourse of the far right, Azov gives itself credibility and shows that it is to be taken seriously not only in military terms but also metapolitically. In this context, it is important to note that an increasing intellectualization of the European far right has taken place in recent years, which has to do, among other things, with the growing influence of the so-called New Right and their new generation (Hornuff 2019, 9ff.). It has become widely accepted within the far right that, in order to generate political change, it must engage in counter-hegemonic practices. Metapolitics aims to change people's consciousness and thus cultural hegemony by gaining influence over discourses and shaping their terms and concepts (see Bevir 2010, 878ff.).

Azov, among others, is trying to gain influence on this metapolitically oriented far-right milieu, which is why it is important for the movement to present itself as an intellectually credible actor. The appropriation of the intellectual far-right discourse thus fulfills several strategic purposes for Azov. By linking its own political program to pre-existing dominant narratives and intellectual traditions within the far right, Azov tries to create narrative fidelity and picks up the audience directly in its reality of life. Much of what the movement has to say to its international audience is therefore already familiar to them, which is why placing its agenda in this discursive space makes successful mobilization more likely.

To present this global meta-narrative in which Azov embeds its individual frames, this chapter focuses on the basic assumptions and central references that underlie the movement's worldview which is communicated to far-right actors and organizations throughout Europe. In particular, the international secretary of the movement, Olena Semenyaka, draws on a variety of historical-philosophical and cultural-theoretical concepts in her lectures to place Azov's framing within a time-diagnostic narrative that claims to theoretically capture the contemporary state of the modern world. These lectures, which are also disseminated through the movement's

various distribution channels, are not a side show to Azov's network activities, but take a central place in them. Azov has set out to influence the far right's imagination and actively offers social-theoretical interpretations of world events in order to be able to propagate its agenda accordingly.

2.1.1. Manichean Worldview and Rejection of Modernity

In international framing, Azov presents a gloomy and apocalyptic picture of a world that is on in decline. In this Manichean worldview, the movement locates itself in a final battle with overly powerful enemies that act globally and therefore make united action by nationalist forces in the West necessary. Azov's diagnosis does not stop at national borders but is embedded in a global description of a world tendency that conceives national grievances as an expression of a world that is set up wrongly. From the existential threat posed by superior and powerful enemies, the movement derives the need for immediate and radical action. From the critique of the principles that supposedly guide this world, it follows that only revolutionary politics aimed at establishing an entirely new social order can bring about true change. This apocalyptic worldview communicated by Azov to its transnational far-right network echoes the interwar period of the last century and mimics historical Fascism in its time-diagnostic core.

This mimicry of fascism is underlined by the fact that Azov's framing is full of references to fascist and proto-fascist authors of the interwar period and beyond, enriched with metaphors and analogies that compare the current world situation with the one before the outbreak of the Second World War. It is, above all, the authors of the so-called "German Conservative Revolution" who are received by international secretary Olena Semenyaka. By appropriating these theoretical traditions, Azov seeks to give its framing intellectual content and embed its agenda in historical-philosophical narratives that can potentially resonate with the movement's far-right audience. At international far-right conferences, the international secretary devotes entire lectures to the reflections of authors ranging from Ernst Jünger, Oswald Spengler, and Carl Schmitt to Friedrich Nietzsche, which ultimately serve to make Azov's agenda as plausible as possible. Drawing on these authors, Azov formulates a very specific understanding of society, modernity, historical dynamics, and the possibility of becoming effective in them, which in their totality form the broad narrative in which the individual frames are interconnected and put together into a relatively holistic picture. At the heart of this apocalyptic diagnosis lies a critique of modernity that has little new to offer in its basic structure, but is rather to be understood as an amalgamation of pre-existing ideological pieces circulating within the far right that Azov

has arranged in a way that allows its political agenda to grow out of this logic quite organically. In an interview with Swedish Identitarians, Semenyaka sums up Azov's program as follows:

“We understand that the development of the modern world has reached the dead end and we want to change it. We try to reconstruct the source of the problem, the root of this European decline, so to speak. And we want to start a revolt against it.” (Semenyaka 2019f)

Azov's meta-narrative is based on a critique of civilization that rejects liberal modernity and all elements connected to it. The disenchantment of the world through the establishment of modern societies and their fetishization of rationalism, humanism and liberalism have alienated societies from their organic nature and thus are the origin of degeneration, according to Azov's time-diagnostic framing. In the age of globalization, the forces of modernity have become global and dominate world affairs. Thus, this hegemony of liberalism, which in some places is also portrayed as a product of cultural Marxist machinations, has become total. To describe this state of the world, Azov refers primarily to cultural-theoretical metaphors that go back to Ernst Jünger, who is considered one of the most influential authors within New Right circles in Europe and beyond (Weiss 2017, 47). With reference to Jünger, the metaphor of a *planetary age* or the *Age of Titanism* is used to refer to a state of the world in which technological forces have prevailed and dominate world affairs. The movement does not reject these “Teutonic” (technological) forces in principle but wants to reunite them with divine values that have been displaced in the course of the civilization process. In this context, divine values stand for history, culture, identity and ultimately for the organic substance of the community, which are given no place in the current state of the world – a circumstance that the movement wants to change.

In order to resolve this struggle between Teutonic and divine forces, Azov propagates the concept of *Archeofuturism* in reference to the influential author of the French Nouvelle Droite, Guillaume Faye, and thereby ties in with another important intellectual source of the self-proclaimed intellectual European New Right. Azov understands Archeofuturism in several ways, but in this context, it means above all the vision of establishing a new social order in which archaic values and organic principles are brought to bear with the help of modern technology. Azov therefore presents itself to its international audience not as a reactionary force, but as a revolutionary one. This is because the movement has not set itself the goal of restoring a pre-modern order but aims to establish a new social order in which technological and organic principles are united within an ethnically homogenous community – a *Volksgemeinschaft*. More on this in the chapter on prognostic framing.

2.1.2. Society as an Organism of a Higher Type

The globalized world under the banner of Western and European civilization, however, has reached its end and is already in the process of decline, even if it is still trying, with all its might, to maintain *planetary* dominance – Azov further concludes. To support this intellectually and to link up with the theoretical discourse of the metapolitically oriented far right, Azov’s international secretary refers in her texts, lectures, and postings to Oswald Spengler’s concept of the *morphology of cultures* which goes back to his famous work “The Decline of The West” published in 1918. Based on Spengler’s reflections, the history of human civilization needs to be understood not as a linear but as a circular process. In this understanding, the civilizational development of mankind is not interpreted as steady progress towards freedom, as it is in classical liberal or Marxist conceptions of history, but rather characterized by the circular process of the birth, growth, and death of civilizations – the international secretary explains to her international far-right audience at lectures to propagate Azov’s agenda accordingly. These assumptions about the course of history are based on a very specific understanding of society, which sees society not as a deliberative association of free individuals, but as an organism of a higher type. This organicist understanding of society, ultimately based on the desired notion of a relatively homogenous community based on a common ethnocultural identity, runs through the entire framing of the movement, and forms the basis for its political agenda.

In reference to Oswald Spengler, Azov’s international secretary thus declares in her speeches at far-right conferences that the Western world is in decline. Civilizations that are in the early stages of their organic evolution are called civilizations in their *cultural phase*, Semenyaka explains to her audience. Civilizations in their cultural phase unfold their full creative potential and shape humanity with their innovative power. Civilizations in their late phase, the *civilizational phase*, however, are characterized by the fact that only the material and technical shell of the former great days remains. This thesis is illustrated by references to former empires such as the Roman Empire, which in its final phase allegedly was held together only by the semblance of its golden age, although the end had already been introduced and a new organism in the process of civilization was about to emerge. Azov’s global diagnosis follows from this notion and proclaims Western civilization as the one that has shaped our age but at the same time has arrived at its civilizational final phase. And Azov is unmistakably clear about what the causes of the demise of Western civilization are. Western civilization must hold itself accountable for its cultural entropy, as it is the “... payback for unlimited massification, globalization and cosmopolitanism” (Semenyaka 2019a), the international secretary proclaims to her like-minded audience.

The argument continues as follows: The fact that a civilization is in its final phase and about to decline can be recognized by certain historical signs. In further reference to Oswald Spengler, this is demonstrated by the phenomenon of *Caesarism*. The concept of Caesarism attempts to capture a development in times of civilizational decline in which rulers come to power who try to preserve the old system by their sheer personal power. In this final phase of civilization, the institutions of society exist only as a shell that maintains the appearance of a still functioning world and can only be stabilized through personal power. Like at the end of the Roman Empire or the interwar period after World War I, the world is currently in this intermediate phase on the verge of collapse, Azov explains in its diagnostic framing. Throughout the Western world, Caesars are coming to power, still desperately trying to hold on to the old order: Trump, Putin, Salvini, Orban, and even Angela Merkel are mentioned by Azov in this context. They all symbolize the last rebellion of an era that is on the brink of the abyss. This apocalyptic narrative ultimately culminates in a messianic climax that forms the basis for Azov's prognostic and motivational framing. In this intermediate phase – also described as *Interregnum* – a window of opportunity arises that must be seized by politically and militarily responsible actors who are willing to sacrifice themselves for the rebirth of the ethnic nation, Semenyaka proclaims in her lectures. The age of Caesarism thus potentially enables a national revolution, which in the age of globalization must take place globally.

2.1.3. Global Struggle for World Dominance

The concept of Caesarism is further differentiated by Azov in reference to Carl Schmitt to formulate a contemporary diagnosis that can be potentially appealing to the audience. In this context, Semenyaka emphasizes that the figure of the Caesar, despite his exercise of personal power, is not a priori in an antagonistic relationship to the people. On the contrary, Caesars have the potential to unite the masses under them and can therefore be understood as democratic actors under certain circumstances, Semenyaka explains. In this cultural-theoretical interpretation, however, the democratic principle is detached from liberal principles. From this populist logic, it is deduced that Caesars, by virtue of their personal power, are antagonistic to liberal principles, but this does not mean that they automatically oppose the people. In this narrative, democracy is reinterpreted as the political system of a metaphysical collective subject, which in Azov's case is ethnically determined and assumed to have a collective will. The plot twist Semenyaka introduces now, however, is that not all Caesars are the same. Caesars differ in the interests of *which* people they act to maintain their personal power, the international secretary asserts. While some stand up for their people and fight for them, others stab them in the back

and are kept in power by foreign forces. This second type of anti-populist Caesar can only implement their political program with the support of “colored people” (presumably migrants) and “foreign forces” (globalism). These anti-populist Caesars act against the interests of their ethnic populations and lead to the downfall of Western Civilization. In other words, these Caesars are puppets of a globalist agenda whose mission is to enslave the ethnic peoples and to destroy their ethnocultural identities.

With the reference to *globalism*, Azov ultimately ties in with and appropriates one of the most dominant globalized narratives of the international far right, which have already been explained in the theoretical chapter of this work. In the framing of the movement, terms such as *Global World Order* or *New World Order* are used repeatedly, which underline the fact that Azov refers to a globalized conspiracy ideology that is ultimately anti-Semitic at its core. If one follows Azov’s framing, Western civilization is currently in a transitional phase that is still characterized by the rule of globalism. In these transitional phases from one civilization to another, nationalist forces must therefore ask themselves which Caesars (populist or anti-populist) they support and which they do not. For Azov, it is clear – and the movement tries to prove this emphatically to its international audience – that Putin and his Caesarist regime is certainly one that cannot be supported by nationalists no matter where they come from because he does not act in the interest of his ethnic people, but in the interest of globalism. Proving this hidden Russian agenda to the international far-right audience takes up a large part of Azov’s framing and will therefore be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

2.2. Russia and Globalism: Russia as Agent of the Globalist World Order

Being against Russia and opposing its geopolitical aspirations is in some ways a minority position within the European far right. Large parts of the European far right and many radical right-wing populist parties are close to Putin’s Russia. These ideological and personal relations can be explained by various reasons, as Anton Shekhovtsov (2018) has meticulously elaborated in his book on Russia and the European far right. Briefly, it can be said that many within the far-right see Russia as a political beacon of hope, potentially capable of building a counterweight to Western globalism. Responding to the dominance of Russian positions within European far-right discourse, much of Azov’s framing activity is therefore devoted to discrediting these positions. Azov sees itself as a hybrid war actor in a war that is largely fought not on the battlefield but through information warfare behind the front lines. In deconstructing the Russian position, Azov follows clearly identifiable patterns of communication that become visible in the frame analysis conducted in this thesis.

As already presented in the previous chapter, Azov's social diagnosis culminates in the notion of an apocalyptic struggle between the hegemonic power of globalism and the ethnonationalist forces that resist it. Based on this diagnosis, Azov's framing strategy regarding Russia aims to portray the Russian government as an actor of globalism and not as its nemesis, to show that the Russian government acts against the interests of the Russian people, to portray Russia's foreign policy as neo-Soviet imperialism, and to convince the far-right audience that Russia cooperates with far-right organizations only out of cold self-interest and is ready to take action against them at any time, just as the Russian government has done in Russia itself. To provide empirical evidence for these claims, Azov refers to current political developments in numerous of its postings. In this approach, current political events are used to make general statements about the Russian government. In the realm of ideas, Azov further attempts to deconstruct Russian core narratives, sometimes implicitly, sometimes explicitly attacking the geopolitical and historical-philosophical concepts of influential Russian theorist Alexander Dugin. Ultimately, this dispute within the movement aims to make the European far right receptive to Azov's own political agenda. To present the narratives identified in frame analysis, the following subsections will discuss Azov's most common diagnostic framing relating to Russia.

2.2.1. Russia's Foreign Policy as Neo-Soviet Imperialism

A key demand of most far-right actors is that of the national sovereignty of ethnic nations. Much of the criticism of globalism and modernity is based on the claim that the right to national sovereignty of ethnic nations is negated by modern societies. Azov builds on this fear of losing national sovereignty and presents the Russian government as yet another force of globalism that threatens ethnic nations. A large part of this diagnostic framing relates to Russian foreign policy and attempts to substantiate this threat by discussing various issues. In pointing out the economic relations between Russia and the West and especially the European Union, the movement tries to prove that Russia is not an antagonist of the West, but only the flip side of globalist world domination.

To support this with examples, Azov points to controversial economic projects between Russia and European states, such as the Nord Stream project with Germany, to show that Russia's anti-European propaganda is only superficial and that economic interests on both sides ultimately prevail. Furthermore, Azov addresses Russia's relationship with its allied states, pointing out that these relations are not equal. On the contrary, Azov ties in with anti-communist sentiments in the far right's imagination and depicts Putin's Russia as a continuation of Soviet expansionism often referred to as neo-Soviet imperialism. In this way, the movement wants to

give the impression that whoever allies with Russia to regain national sovereignty will get exactly the opposite, because Russia's geopolitical subjectivity is characterized by an imperialist ideology that knows only subordination and not equality of nations. This strategy is also intended to convey the impression that the Kremlin is only presenting itself as traditionalist and nationalist but is pursuing interests that contradict nationalist aspirations in Russia and throughout Europe. To achieve these interests, Russia is ready to cooperate with any opposition in Europe and beyond, regardless of ideological orientation, Azov further explains to the international far-right audience.

This assertion is supported by references to empirical cases in which Russia has supported radical leftist structures in Europe simply to destabilize the democratic fabric of the respective countries – at least that is the claim of Azov. In other cases, reference is made to allies of Russia who, despite their loyalty to the Kremlin, are seen by it only as objects of economic and geopolitical interest. In this context, for example, reference is made to Belarus to prove that even if a state stands by Russia in any situation, no matter how difficult, its sovereignty is ultimately threatened because the Kremlin prefers integration into its own centrist rule over self-determination. In this context, the brutality and unconditionality of Russian foreign policy is often emphasized. Instead of acting as a soft power in the region of Central and Eastern Europe, Russia behaves like a tyrant and simply enforces its interests with economic, political and, if necessary, military means against the surrounding states without consideration of their right to national sovereignty, Azov emphasizes. In addition to the annexation of Crimea and the war in eastern Ukraine, the conflicts in Georgia and other examples in the region are used to underscore this point.

Azov's international framing builds on the far right's fear of losing national sovereignty and tries to instrumentalize it to weaken Russia's position. From all these examples and diagnoses, Azov deduces that even if Russia strives for an alternative world order, it is not one that should be desired by nationalist forces, since Russia claims sole domination and negates the interests of all others. Azov also addresses far-right actors in the West who see Russia as a beacon of hope for nationalist aspirations and criticizes them for their naivety. While they project their hopes for change onto the Kremlin, Eastern European states know much better what it is like to live in Russia's sphere of influence, it is argued. That is why Azov sees it as its duty to actively approach Western European nationalists and inform them about the true situation, the international secretary stated during an interview with Swedish Identitarians. Azov feels compelled to defend itself against Russia's disinformation policy in far-right circles in Europe and to create spaces of exchange between East and West to counteract. Overall, Azov is trying to position

itself as an innovative counterweight to Russia and to propagate the vision of an alternative world order in which nations do not have to submit themselves to a sovereign great power, but act in solidarity with each other on an equal footing – but more on this in the chapter on prognostic framing. In addition to Russia's foreign policy, however, the movement also comments on the domestic situation in Russia itself and, in addressing it, continues to try to prove that Putin is an agent of globalism who is betraying his people and therefore does not qualify as a trustworthy ally for far-right actors in the West and beyond.

2.2.2. The Russian Federation as Haven of Globalism and Multiculturalism

Far-right actors' demand for a world in which every ethnic group has a relatively homogeneous nation-state must be understood as a reaction to modern multicultural societies. Although far-right actors may differ greatly in their worldview, they have in common that they reject multiculturalism (Häusler 2016, 155ff.). To discredit Russia within the far right, Azov therefore tries to show that Russia is an agent of globalism not only as a foreign policy but also as a domestic policy actor with the aim of promoting multiculturalism. The first step in Azov's argument is to note that Russia has always been a multiethnic country. The identity of the Russian state, in this concept, has always been one that opposed the principle of monoculturalism. The entire political project of the Russian Federation is not aimed at creating an authentic ethnonational political entity, which is why far-right actors in the West cannot expect Russia to help them implement their subversion plans, it is further communicated. Azov stages itself as a "myth buster", suggesting that many far-right individuals in the West perceive Russia as a relatively homogeneous nation and need to be informed that it is not.

In the context of the previous chapter, the plan of the Russian Federation is, on the contrary, framed as that of the creation of a neo-Soviet empire that constitutes an obstacle to ethnonationalist aspirations in the region. To underscore this, historical analogies are used comparing the Russian Federation to the Soviet Union, where ethnicity and national self-consciousness were suppressed, according to Azov's framing. In some places, the framing goes beyond this comparison and claims that the situation in Russia today is worse than it was in Soviet times. Far-right actors in Western Europe can potentially be addressed by this framing in their anti-communist sentiments, but for nationalist actors in Central and Eastern Europe this analogy links directly to traumatic experiences in their collective national consciousness and underlines the threat scenario Azov wants to communicate. As for multiculturalism in Russia, Azov invests quite a bit in its framing activity to prove that the Russian government promotes it primarily because of economic interests. But the insinuation that Putin is an agent of multiculturalism

goes beyond the identification of economic interests and, in part, takes on a rather absurd perspective. For example, Olena Semenyaka, the international secretary of the movement's political arm, claimed in an interview that in legal disputes between ethnic Russians and migrants, Russian authorities usually side with the migrants. To illustrate the argument, an excerpt from the transcript of the interview can provide information:

“Objectively, the space of Central and Eastern Europe is the region where ethno-cultural values are objectively preserved, and they are preserved better than in Russia. Also, quite objectively, because Russia, the Russian Federation is a multicultural state ... They have not only Russian part, but also Eurasian parts. There are also quite big migration tendencies to the Russian part of the Russian Federation from non-Russian parts of this state and also from neighboring Eurasian countries like Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan. And this migration is also promoted by the authorities. They say that they need this labor force. They welcome it. Also, very active tendencies, immigration tendencies from the Caucasus as compared to Soviet Union, modern Russian federation lost control over Caucasus. And there are many stories of the clashes between Russians and non-Russians, non-Russian population. And all instances of such clashes are usually solved, solved in favor of a non-Russian member of this conflict.” (Semenyaka 2019f)

Russia is thus framed as a promoter of mass migration, whereby ethnic Russians are increasingly replaced by cheap labor migrants. It is therefore not only the case that the Russian Federation is a multiethnic entity, but that Putin even supports this fact and wants to expand it, Azov further claims. The Russian government is concerned with advancing the expansion of its neo-Soviet empire through labor migration, not with providing a safe homeland for ethnic Russians, the argument goes. Many other examples of this framing strategy could be cited, as the movement's various distribution channels comment on everyday political events and repeatedly address Russia's relationship to migration. For example, when Russia signed the UN migration pact, Azov used this discursive opportunity to strengthen its argument that Russia is an agent of multiculturalism. In the framing of the movement, such examples are also used to emphasize the difference between Azov and the Russian government: while Putin signed the pact, Ukrainian nationalists protested against it in the streets, Azov proudly proclaimed.

In summary, Azov's diagnostic framing seeks to make one specific point about Russia and attempts to substantiate it on several levels. So far, this thesis has shown how Azov tries to prove that Russia is an agent of globalism – based on Russia's foreign policy and the Russian government's relationship to multiculturalism and migration. The next subchapter shows how Azov frames the Russian government's relationship with the nationalist opposition in Russia to

show that Putin is willing to take repressive action against any nationalist aspirations at home to implement his vision of a neo-Soviet empire.

2.2.3. The Kremlin and its Fight Against the Russian Nation

In the far right's understanding of the ideal state, it is not citizenship but descent that determines membership to the nation (Holzer 1993, 34–38). This distinction explains to a large extent the far right's rejection of the liberal state, in which abstract law makes no distinction, at least not formally, between its citizens. To instrumentalize this resentment against Russia, Azov, in its communication with its far-right network, emphasizes the distinction between Russia as a federation and Russia as an ethnic nation. This distinction is further used to construct an opposition between the Russian government and the Russian people, in which the former asserts their globalist interests against the interests of the latter.

This combination of ethnic nativism and populism is used in the movement's framing to show far-right target groups that if they want to show solidarity with nationalist forces in Russia, it is those forces that are working against Putin and not for him. In this context, Azov also insists that it is not anti-Russian – as it is often portrayed in the media – but, on the contrary, feels connected to the Russian population and supports them in their struggle for a Russia in which their ethnocultural identity is preserved. So, when propaganda organs of the Russian government claim that Azov members are anti-Russian fascists, Azov replies that they are not anti-Russian but simply anti-Putin, and they are not fascist in a problematic sense because they speak out against national chauvinism and for the coexistence of ethnic nations. The imperialist and chauvinist character of fascism, Azov argues, is part of Russia's state ideology and not Azov's. This counterframing strategy thus leads Azov to frame the Russian government as the true anti-Russian actor and to stage itself in opposition as the force standing up for ethnic Russians.

To further extend this discrediting strategy, Azov addresses the nationalist opposition in Russia in its international framing. The central narrative in this context is that it is becoming increasingly difficult for true nationalists in Russia to act as opposition because Putin's regime is cracking down on them with extreme repression. To prove this empirically, reference is made, for example, to the anti-extremist legislation in Russia, which is used against "nationalists" to silence them. The situation in Russia has become so repressive that Russian nationalists are now coming to Ukraine to fight with Azov against Putin's neo-Soviet imperialism side by side, the movement claims. And indeed, this is true in certain parts. During Euromaidan and the outbreak of war in eastern Ukraine, some Russian citizens did actually travel to Ukraine to fight

as foreign fighters on Azov's side against Russian troops. However, what Azov calls "nationalists" in its framing were mainly extreme right-wing actors from Russia's neo-Nazi subcultures, who indeed thought they had a better chance of triggering a nationalist revolution in Ukraine than in Russia itself and had to escape prosecution by the authorities (Colborne 2020b). The movement's framing, however, ignores the fact that there are other nationalist forces in Russia that are still politically active without being persecuted and that Russian nationalists and right-wing extremists have also fought against Ukraine alongside Russia forces.

In front of the international audience, Azov stages itself as an ally of the "Russian brothers" who bravely fight against Russian totalitarianism side by side with Ukrainians. In an interview with Azov's radio station, the movement's international secretary formulates the Russian state's repression against nationalists as follows, referring to the alleged scandal that in Russia one cannot even deny the Holocaust and therefore freedom of expression is restricted – a framing well known from the German and Austrian extreme right (see Schedler 2017):

“... It's impossible to say anything not only about Ukraine, but about some issues that can be labeled as historical revisionism, as a kind of Holocaust denial or whatever. Everything that can be at least flagellated to these topics is punished by law. And it's very easy to interpret even the most innocent words of some bloggers, journalists as such that they violate Russian legislation as right-wing extremism and something that will lead those people directly to jail.” (Semenyaka 2016)

On Azov's social media channels, this narrative is repeatedly underpinned by empirical examples. Ukraine is presented as the place that offers the greatest prospects for a nationalist revolution in the region, even for Russian nationalists. The Russian government, on the other hand, is framed as the enemy of all nationalists. Putin, that's the narrative, is not concerned with the welfare of his people, but with the enforcement of the Russian government's globalist interests. All empirical examples are used by the movement as ultimate proof that nationalists are suppressed in Russia and Russian and Ukrainian nationalists are united in spirit against globalism – even if Russian disinformation campaigns try to hide this fact to keep the far-right sympathizers in the West in the dark about the truth. Russia is thus presented as a globalist actor pursuing a multiculturalist agenda that goes against the interests of ethnic Russians and can only be enforced by repressing nationalist forces in the country. The final key narrative Azov employs in its diagnostic framing to discredit Russia in front of its far-right network is to present Russia not only as a multiculturalist and anti-nationalist actor, but as an agent of Islamization.

2.2.4. The Largest Mosque in Europe and Putin's Islamization agenda

For some years now, the conspiracy of a creeping Islamization of the Occident has become one of the central narratives within the European far right. In the imagination of many far-right individuals, a struggle against Islamist invaders is taking place currently – invaders which must be fought off by nationalists. Often, multiculturalist elites are identified as the driving force behind this development, deliberately promoting Islamization to destroy the ethnic substance of European societies and to be able to fully implement their globalist agenda (Häusler 2016, 163–169). Azov ties into this narrative and includes the Russian government as an actor that is part of this globalist plan to destroy ethno-cultural identities. For many far-right actors in Europe, Russia is the very hope that can provide a strong counterweight against these diagnosed Islamization tendencies, and Azov tries to undermine this very notion. In addition to the rhetorical construction of the Russian government as a multi-ethnic actor that actively supports migration and takes repressive action against nationalists, Azov frames it as a driving force behind the Islamization of Europe. Russia is identified in this framing as a haven of Islamization where Islamist cultures can flourish. The Russian government is framed as a political actor that does nothing to combat jihadist terrorism in Europe and beyond. To make this bold thesis as plausible as possible, Azov employs various framing strategies to convince the international far-right audience that this claimed agenda of the Russian government is indeed true.

First, the movement repeatably notes in its framing that Russia has the largest Muslim population in Europe. This is already taken as the first indicator that Russia is being infiltrated by Muslims and that the Russian government is not capable of preventing the Islamization of its own territory. The question Azovs derives from this and poses to the audience is how Russia is supposed to be the driving force in the national reconquest of Europe if the Russian government is unable to stop the ongoing Islamization in its own country. Because many far-right actors in Western Europe are not informed about these facts and have a romanticized image of Russia, Azov has made it its mission to inform about these circumstances and to straighten the image – so the framing logic. Following this diagnosis, Azov goes one step further and states in international framing that Russia is not only unable to stop Islamization in its own country, but actively promotes it. To prove this, Azov points to several examples to show that Russia's Islamization agenda is being implemented today already.

For example, Azov repeatedly points out that the largest mosque in Europe was built in Moscow in 2015 and that Vladimir Putin and the president of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdoğan opened it together – a symbol of Putin's Islamization agenda. In other attempts to substantiate Azov's Islamization thesis, Russia's relationship with Chechnya is highlighted. Under Ramzan

Kadyrov, Chechnya became a hotbed of Islamism, exporting jihadist terrorism to all crisis regions of the world. Instead of acting against the Head of the Chechen Republic, Putin keeps Kadyrov as a lapdog and lets him continue to push his aggressive Islamization policy undisturbed, Azov further argues. This alliance between "Putin and the Islamists" is also used by Azov to frame Russia's military intervention in Ukraine. While in Ukraine nationalists from all over the world, even from Russia itself, fight alongside Azov, on the Russian side Putin-backed Islamists from Chechnya fight with neo-Soviet imperialists and left-wing radicals to undermine the country's national sovereignty and to advance Russia's globalist agenda – according to the story told by Azov. In a post by the Intermarium support group (Olena Semenyaka), this narrative is stated as follows:

“... Putin made his biggest friend Chechen president Ramzan Kadyrov who, quite probably, may be the next Russian president. Purely statist might is the only thing that matters to Putin and, unfortunately, many Russians blinded by Russian ‘gas dollars’. Besides, historically, Russia has one of the biggest, if not the biggest, Muslim minority in Europa, and the biggest in Europe mosque was opened precisely in Moscow. The opening ceremony was attended by Turkish president Erdogan.” (Semenyaka 2019b)

In this staging, therefore, a battle is currently taking place on the front lines in Ukraine between the forces that defend the ethno-cultural identity of the European continent and Islamist hordes that are supported and promoted by Russia. From a frame analytic perspective, this can be understood as frame transformation. Since, in the imagination of many far-right actors in Europe, Russia is seen as the force that can counter Islamization, Azov turns this logic around and makes Russia the virtual actor of Islamization. Far-right actors should be convinced that Ukrainian nationalists like Azov are fighting on the front lines in Ukraine against globalist Russia, defending the European continent from Islamization. For example, an article on Azov's homepage (titled “Russia becomes a hotbed of Islamic terrorism”) explains that Russia's approach to Islamism poses a security risk to the entire region:

“Supporters and members of the ISIS freely move from Russia or the former Soviet Union. They use the territory of Ukraine as a transit. There is no visa barrier between the Russian Federation and the countries of Central Asia, where terrorists actively recruit new militants ... The biggest ‘gray zones’ are located in the territory of the so-called ‘national republics’ of Donbas controlled by the separatists that border with the Rostov region of the Russian Federation.” (Zheleznov 2016)

Summarizing this chapter, it can be said that in its international communication with the European far right, Azov tries to discredit Russia at different levels with various framing

strategies. The aim of this discrediting strategy is to undermine Russia's position within large parts of the European far right. The thematic blocks presented in this chapter do not constitute all of Azov's narratives in relation to Russia, but they do represent the most important ones. Azov tries to frame the Russian government's foreign policy as neo-Soviet imperialism, in which only self-interest, expansionism and centrism prevail. Azov's aim is to convey to the international far-right audience that Russia is not interested in the aspirations of nationalist forces in Europe and only cooperates with them because it serves Russian interests.

Looking at the Russian government's domestic policy, Azov tries to expose it as multiculturalist. Russia is presented as a multi-ethnic state in which the interests of the Russian government, rather than the interests of ethnic Russians, dominate. In the Russian government's treatment of the nationalist opposition in its own country, Azov further attempts to show that nationalist aspirations are brutally suppressed in Russia, leading to Russian nationalists fighting against the Russian government with Azov. Finally, Russia is presented as an agent of Islamization in Europe, against which Azov joins forces with nationalists from all over the world on the Ukrainian front. With this framing, Azov tries to create the impression that the conflict between Russia and Ukraine is about much more than just a conflict between two political entities. In the movement's narrative, a struggle is currently taking place in Ukraine between the forces that want to preserve the ethno-cultural identity of the European continent and those whose goal is to destroy it. While Russia is framed not as a counterforce to globalism but as part of this worldwide globalist conspiracy, Azov is presented as the protector and vanguard of nationalist aspirations in Europe. In Azov's eyes, however, Europe is not only threatened by Russia, but also by the political elites within the European Union itself. The next chapter is therefore devoted to Azov's diagnostic framing at the European level and presents the most central narratives identified in frame analysis.

2.3. European Union and the West: The Self-Destruction of the European Union

Much of Azov's framing relates to Europe and the European Union. The central message in this context is that the European Union is a degenerated political entity, deeply in crisis and dominated by corrupt globalist elites. In addition to framing that refers to the EU, the region of Central and Eastern Europe occupies an important place in the movement's communication. It is not always entirely clear which states are meant by this geographical concept and which are not, but it usually refers to the states that were formerly part of the Soviet Union's sphere of influence. Azov's diagnostic framing, however, does not only refer to political opponents, but is also devoted to the nationalist camp in Europe itself. Thus, an important element in the

movement's framing is a critique of the nationalist culture of the European Right, as this culture, in Azov's eyes, hinders transnational cooperation. Azov blames not only the globalist elites for the decay and degeneration of society, but also the various nationalist camps in Europe, because many still adhere to national-chauvinist ideologies. Against this "old nationalism" Azov propagates a new national culture that aims to unite the nationalistic organizations transnationally to fight together against the common enemy, globalism. The first two chapters present Azov's critique of the European Union. In the third chapter, Azov's diagnostic framing relating to the region of Central and Eastern Europe is discussed. Finally, in the fourth chapter, Azov's critique of the European far right itself is presented before discussing diagnostic framing at the national level.

2.3.1. The European Union as Degenerate Political Entity *Sui Generis*

Azov's diagnostic framing at the European Union level differs little from that of other far-right organizations. Replacing the European Union, Azov propagates the vision of a Europe of sovereign nations. In this context, Azov clearly identifies itself as part of European civilization but opposes the European Union. In other words, the movement is not about abolishing any form of transnationality, but about building a new pan-European entity in which globalism does not rule, but the right of self-determination of ethnic peoples does. In the far right's history, there has been a variety of pan-European concepts dealing with the question of what a united Europe of nations could look like (Griffin 2018, 111–114). Azov selectively draws on these traditions, appropriating them and tying them to its vision, the center of which is in Central and Eastern Europe. The picture Azov paints of the European Union is that of a community shaken by permanent crisis and on the verge of collapse. The reason for this profound crisis is seen in the European Union and its core values and ideas. The framing of the demise of the West because of its own degenerate values is thus continued by Azov at the European level. To illustrate this diagnosis with a paradigmatic example, an excerpt from one of Azov's articles can be quoted here, in which the movement explains why the creation of a new geopolitical bloc in the region of Central and Eastern Europe is necessary:

"The crisis within the European Union goes forward at a steady gait as the EU's basic ideas always been a destructive time-bomb. Military aggression of Russia against Ukraine, the struggle between the Syrian coalition and ISIL and, finally, 'the refugee issue' have become catalyst for this phenomenon. Excessive bureaucracy, ignoring the interests of Central and Eastern Europe as part of the EU, weakness in the face of such challenges as the global economic crisis, uncontrolled mass migration, international terrorism, political and economic expansion of

Russia, depopulation and population ageing – these are the main features of the EU crisis as a geopolitical unit.” (Nackor 2016a)

If one wonders now what Azov means by the “basic ideas” of the European Union, which have always been a “destructive time-bomb”, will find answers in other articles, speeches, and interviews of the movement. First, Azov sees the European Union at its foundation as hostile to ethnocultural identities of European nations. The Europeanism of the EU’s neoliberal elites sacrifices ethnocultural identities favoring an ideology of abstract values such as progress and humanism, the diagnosis continues. The subject of Azov’s criticism of the European Union is also its geopolitical impotence, the lack of reproduction of European societies, bureaucracy, terrorism, mass migration, inefficiency, and so on. The European Union’s debordering ideology, which neglects ethnic identities and idolizes the “abstract human”, will therefore lead to the demise of traditional cultures if nothing is done about it, the narrative continues.

One issue that Azov repeatedly addresses in this context is that of political correctness. As in the case of Russia, Azov postulates that a restriction of freedom of expression is taking place in the European Union. European societies are hostile to all those who are not willing to spread the hegemonic cultural Marxist ideology of multiculturalism, Azov explains, echoing a diagnosis that is widespread within the European far right (Häusler 2016, 157ff.). This narrative diagnoses a growing climate of censorship in which a small globalist minority dictates to the rest of the population what to think and say – in this, as in the other cases, it is not innovative framing but the repetition of dominant far-right narratives. Framing of this kind, however, serves Azov much more to embed its political agenda in a culturally resonant narrative than to offer innovative diagnoses to the far-right network and this goal is certainly achieved with it.

The very idea of a cultural-civilizational project aimed at building a multiculturalist society is in direct contradiction to how Azov envisions the organization of society and is radically rejected accordingly. Ultimately, the movement raises the far right’s old critique of modernity and modern statehood to the supranational level and repeats it there. In this critique, the individual states of the European Union and their political elites are targeted according to the occasion and criticized for the same reasons: because they pursue globalist policies that run counter to ethnocultural interests. Thus, Azov expresses solidarity with nationalist organizations in various countries when they are affected by repression, or comments on political decisions of national governments when, according to the movement, they advance a multiculturalist or cultural-Marxist agenda. In addition to critiquing the European Union as such and decisions that affect countries within the European Union, much of Azov’s diagnostic framing also relates to

the EU's foreign policy. Therefore, the next subchapter focuses on this topic area before discussing Azov's diagnostic framing relating to the region of Central and Eastern Europe.

2.3.2. Economic Interests as Driving Force behind EU Foreign Policy

In its diagnostic framing, Azov comments not only on the domestic political situation of the European Union and its member states, but also on their foreign policy, especially regarding Russia and the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. Two main narratives are articulated by Azov in this context, which refer to each other. First, Azov criticizes the European Union for remaining inactive in the face of Russian aggression in Ukraine specifically and in its behavior generally. In addition, Azov claims that the European Union is only interested in the realization of its economic interests and that this is the only driving force that determines its foreign policy. Statements by political actors of the European Union and its member states are presented as empty words not followed by deeds.

A major reason given for this, which goes back to Azov's general criticism of modernity, is that Western societies have become alienated from their divine values and follow only material interests. The European Union is seen as part of an overall development that is closely linked to modernity and has led to a situation where only money counts, and not history, ancestry, identity, culture and so on. When the European Union is mentioned in Azov's international framing, one often gets the impression that it mainly refers to Western European states. This does not mean that Azov does not formulate a critique of the political elites in Central and Eastern Europe as well, but that this is usually formulated separately from the general critique of the EU – European integration is in some ways presented as a process that started in the West and has integrated the Eastern European states into a system that does not correspond to their nature. In a posting by the Intermarium Support Group regarding Latvia's sovereignty, this alleged hidden agenda of the "Brussels globalists" in alliance with Russia is formulated as follows:

“Notice how pro-Kremlin forces ... have joined leftists ... in a united attempt to undermine Latvian sovereignty and control over its borders. This is very symptomatic. Both Russia and neo-marxist ideology (politically expressed through so called ‘liberal parties’, Brussels bureaucracy and NGOs) are interested in destroying nation states, taking away our control over country and our future” (ISG 2018b)

To support the assertion of the dominance of economic interests as driving force behind the European Union's foreign policy with examples, Azov repeatedly refers to the EU's business

relations with Russia in its postings. Azov criticizes, for example, the Nord Stream project of Germany and Russia. With the narrative that the most powerful player in the European Union, Germany, is not willing to enter in an open conflict with Russia because this would harm the country's economic interests, the movement supports its thesis. Germany is concerned about gas supplies and not about the states in Eastern Europe being able to preserve their national sovereignty in the face of Russia's expansionist policies, Azov concludes. The movement further rejects diplomatic formats in the conflict between Russia and Ukraine that were initiated or supported by the European Union. In this context, Azov tells its Central and Eastern European audience that it is useless to hope for support from the EU or NATO, but that it is time to improve the region's military strength and to work together to fend off Russian aggression. On the Intermarium Support Group Facebook page, Semenyaka's diagnosis reads as follows:

"The West can be hardly called even a diplomatic ally of Ukraine, as the EU continues trading with Russia in spite of the economic sanctions, and only the Intermarium countries supported new sanctions against Russia after the attack on the Ukrainian military ships in the Sea of Azov. As opposed to Intermarium countries, Germany supports the Russian project of Nord Stream-2 gas pipeline which will bypass the territory of Ukraine. Peace Minsk agreements, pushed forward by the EU, are extremely harmful to the Ukrainian statehood." (Semenyaka 2019g)

In the chapter on the war in eastern Ukraine, we will go into more detail about the criticism of the Minsk agreements and geopolitical alliances such as NATO. At this point, it is particularly important that Western European foreign policy is framed as hostile to the interests of the countries in Eastern Europe. In addition to the actors of the European Union itself, Russian economic lobbies are blamed for influencing the policymaking process in Brussels. The West in general, and the European Union in particular, are framed as accomplices to Russian expansionism, or as betrayers of the Ukrainian and Eastern European people. Regarding Ukraine, Azov states that the European Union is only interested in Ukraine when it comes to expensive infrastructure projects or cheap labor. The EU is thus presented as an enemy that wants to enforce globalist economic interests and is willing to destroy the ethnocultural identity of the European nations for this purpose.

2.3.3. Eastern Europe caught between Russia and the West

Even though Azov's communication refers to the whole of Europe, the movement's political agenda is primarily focused on Central and Eastern Europe, which is why issues concerning the region dominate the framing alongside those related to Ukraine. The main objective that the movement has given itself is to find allies for the transformation of the region within the

framework of alternative regional integration, and to motivate like-minded people to promote and popularize this so-called Intermarium project in their respective countries.

To plausibly explain why the creation of a new geopolitical bloc in CEE is necessary, Azov uses diagnostic framing to address and problematize the state of the region. The central narrative articulated in this context is that there is a historical continuity in the region in which the respective countries are restricted in their independence and sovereignty and are subject to foreign domination. With this framing, Azov ties in with the common historical experience of the different national camps in the region and their respective national-historical narratives (see Götz et al., 2017). By highlighting commonalities, the movement seeks to overcome national conflicts between far-right organizations in the region and instead enable transnational solidarity and cooperation between them. Russia functions as the negative principle in this unifying framing, as Russian expansionism is presented as existential threat to all countries in the region, a threat that can only be stopped by common resistance.

Another key narrative building on this is that the states of the region cannot expect support from the West in the struggle against neo-Soviet imperialism. This narrative is further enriched by reference to the history of the region, explaining to the far-right audience that the nations in CEE have never been recognized in their subjectivity, but have always had to serve only as buffer zones for geopolitical interests of the great powers of the East and the West. Even today, the West only cooperates with the states of the region to secure its interests, but at the same time it is not prepared to stand on their side against Russian aggression in case of emergency, Azov explains in its framing. The West, like Russia, is only concerned with exploiting the region economically and securing it geopolitically for its interests, and not with promoting the peoples' right to self-determination, Azov explains. In this narrative of foreign domination, regional elites are also integrated into the framing and identified as enemies of the people. They are framed by Azov as corrupt and power-obsessed elites who allow themselves to be instrumentalized by foreign powers, are part of globalism and ignore the interests of the native population only to enrich themselves.

The picture that Azov paints of the region is one that is characterized by the region's lack of independence and sovereignty and being at the mercy of foreign powers. Since the regional elites are only puppets of globalist interests and cannot be expected to defend the region against foreign powers, it is necessary for the nationalist forces in the region to do it themselves. In this context, however, Azov also emphasizes that the threat posed by globalism is so great that individual states cannot defend themselves against it on their own. For this reason, it is necessary that transnational cooperation between the nationalist forces in the region takes place based

on common values and interests, Azov states frequently in communication with its far-right network.

However, Azov is also aware that numerous national camps in the region are enemies to each other and that on this basis, transnational cooperation is very unlikely. For this reason, the movement has set out to change the nationalist culture and the self-understanding of the European far right and to lead it away from national-chauvinist tendencies towards a new nationalism based on the mutual recognition of national forces and solidary cooperation in common matters or, as international secretary Olena Semenyaka also calls it, “universalism from the right”. How this vision of a new nationalism is derived from Azov’s critique of the existing political culture within the far right will be explained in the next subsection, before discussing the movement’s diagnostic framing relating to Ukraine and the war in eastern Ukraine.

2.3.4. National Chauvinism as an Obstacle to Transnational Cooperation

The European far right’s history is characterized by the precarious attempt of some to establish enduring transnational cooperation (Grumke 2011). The prerequisite for this was that far-right actors never referred only to their national context, but often pursued an ideology that transcended national borders. At the same time, the history of the European far right has not necessarily been characterized by mutual recognition of the respective national struggles. Attempts to establish consistent transnational cooperation often failed due to the conflictual nature of the relations between the different national camps (see Vejvodová 2011). In recent years, an ideology has gained new momentum within the far right that is potentially capable of transforming it and promoting transnational cooperation among them. It is namely *ethnopluralism*, which strives for a world order in which each ethnic nation has the right to a relatively homogeneous state and multiculturalism exists not within a political community but multiple cultures exist next to each other (Priester 2016, 540ff.). Although the notion itself is old and was developed by authors such as Carl Schmitt, it was rediscovered by the so-called European New Right in the 1970s and today enjoys increasing popularity (see Weiss 2017).

As explained above, Azov sees itself as part of this transnational movement which seeks to overcome national conflicts and, accordingly, has appropriated the theoretical concepts circulating within contemporary new-right discourse in Europe and beyond. The positive content of this plea for a new nationalism will be addressed in the chapters on prognostic framing. At this point, it is important to note that Azov articulates this political agenda of a new nationalism in criticism of the existing political culture within the far right.

In this context, a central narrative that is often mentioned in international communication is the problematization of the narrow-mindedness of the traditional national camps. International secretary Olena Semenyaka, for example, addresses historical enmities between countries and their conflicting national-historical narratives. In Central and Eastern Europe in particular, neighboring nations still often take on the role of antagonist, blamed for both historical and current problems. Azov does not want to give the impression that this has not been an obstacle to transnational solidarity between nationalist forces in the past, but that these dark chapters must be put aside to fully address today's problems. In this sense, the movement criticizes national chauvinism that devalues other nations and thus asserts its superiority.

Another of Azov's criticisms of the history of nationalist movements is that of the imperialist orientation of national regimes, which have in the past denied other nations their right to self-determination. For Azov, a nationalist revolution can only take place when all nations are considered equal, and cooperation can take place not through subjugation but through mutual recognition. This framing ties directly into the diagnostic framing regarding Russia. The narrative following is that Russia, as an imperialist state, adheres to an ideology that wants to subjugate nations, not liberate them. In contrast, according to the logic of framing, Azov represents a vision in which there is equality and mutual recognition between the nations. Nationalists can thus choose to be subordinate, ultimately failing to fulfill their aspirations for national sovereignty, or to fight on Azov's side for a world in which ethnic nations rule over themselves. Ultimately, Azov externalizes the conflictual nature of the nationalist camps, pointing out that the persistence of divisions is in the interest of the enemies and that they fuel old historical conflicts or even distort historical facts so that nationalists fight among themselves instead of forming a common front against them.

Through this framing strategy, Azov manages not only to appropriate the far right's new-right discourse and to adapt it to its own political agenda, but also to stage a final battle between Russian imperialism and Azov as the vanguard of a revolution of ethnonational self-determination. The diagnostic framing of the movement at the European level thus encompasses a variety of themes that are at the same time interconnected and transformed into one meta-narrative. This meta-narrative is based on the idea that the region of Central and Eastern Europe is caught in a conflict between two sides of globalism, each of which is interested only in realizing its own interests. While Russia pursues an expansionist foreign policy based on a neo-Soviet imperialist ideology, no help can be expected from the European Union. Nothing can be expected from the elites in the countries of the region either, as they are puppets of globalism and pay no attention to the interests of their own people. It is therefore in the hands of nationalist

forces themselves to go into battle against globalism and to create a world in which each ethnic nation has its territory and state and in which the ethnocultural identity of these nations is not permanently threatened by foreign forces. But this struggle can only succeed if the nationalist camps of the different countries overcome their national chauvinisms and start to counter the hegemony of globalism through transnational cooperation – this is the essence of Azov’s narrative.

Even though Azov does not claim direct leadership, the movement sees itself as a role model and the situation in Ukraine as the most advanced, which is why, in Azov’s opinion, the national revolution will be launched there with the support of like-minded people from abroad. If Azov’s framing is to be believed, Ukraine has been in a state of permanent national revolution since the Euromaidan, driven by Azov itself. At the same time, however, there are still obstacles that need to be overcome, and Azov reports on them in detail to the international network in diagnostic framing. What exactly is articulated in the context of international communication regarding Ukraine will therefore be discussed in the next chapter.

2.4. Ukraine in the Grip of Globalist Elites

Although Azov’s international communication addresses international issues, much of the movement’s framing relates to the national context of Ukraine and, in particular, the war in eastern Ukraine. At the level of diagnostic framing, a variety of issues is addressed, relating both to general matters such as the nature of the Ukrainian state and Ukrainian society, and to specific day-to-day political issues. In addition to programmatic statements, Azov reports on the activities of the movement itself in a variety of postings and tweets on its distribution channels, presenting itself to an international audience as a militarily and politically capable force in the country. Azov’s diagnostic framing at the national level potentially diverges from the perception of some actors in its network and is intended to change their minds by means of an alternative narrative about what is going on in Ukraine. The variety of issues and events addressed can be roughly divided into four thematic areas. The following subchapters are devoted to those and summarize Azov’s central narratives articulated in the context of international communication.

Much of Azov’s diagnostic framing at the national level is a general criticism of the nature of the Ukrainian state, its institutions, representatives, and its condition. Another part of Azov’s framing refers less to the Ukrainian state than to Ukrainian society in general. Framing that refers to this area criticizes the political culture in the country and addresses cultural-political and identity-political issues. Azov’s critique of the Ukrainian state and society ultimately

culminates in the staging of a struggle between globalist and nationalist forces in the country – a framing that is addressed in the third subchapter. Finally, this chapter discusses Azov’s framing regarding the war in eastern Ukraine. The subsequent part of this thesis will then discuss Azov’s prognostic framing.

2.4.1. Ukraine as a Failed State: Corruption, Mismanagement, Wrong Elites

Azov’s relationship with the Ukrainian state and its authorities is ambivalent, which is also reflected in the movement’s international framing. Azov advocates defending the Ukrainian state against enemies, namely pro-Russian separatists, and Russia, and is ready to cooperate with Ukrainian authorities to achieve this. At the military level, the Azov Battalion subordinated itself to the command structure of the Ministry of Internal Affairs at an early stage (Bezruk and Umland 2015, 40) and is, as a regiment, still a functioning part of the Ukrainian National Guard. At the same time, Azov is also an ultranationalist movement that acts as a radical opposition to the political establishment and wants to build a new social order on Ukrainian territory. This ambivalence is also reflected in the political activities of the movement and shows that Azov is not only verbally staging itself as radical opposition but is also prepared to follow words with deeds. While the Azov regiment is part of the Ukrainian National Guard and, at least officially, subordinate to the Ministry of the Interior, the National Militia engages regularly in street battles with the police and is involved in organized political violence (Bennetts 2018).

In international communication, Azov does not try to relativize or conceal the fact that the movement is caught between two chairs but addresses this circumstance quite openly. Listening to Olena Semenyaka in her lectures, one gets the impression that the movement is also quite happy in this role: On the one hand it can demonstrate military strength through the existence of the regiment and thus stand out from other far-right movements. But at the same time, it can maintain its radical-revolutionary image. For instance, in historical analogies, Olena Semenyaka regularly compares Azov to the Freikorps of the Weimar Republic, which, in her narrative, fought against Russia in the East and at the same time against their own government. In a lecture in Finland, the international secretary summarizes Azov’s position on this dual role as follows:

“We have to withstand the hybrid Russian aggression in the east of Ukraine and at the same time, we have to be active in politics. We have to strive to power ourselves because our current government is devoid of geopolitical subjectivity. It is indeed to a great extent a puppet government, which does not solve Ukrainian problems. And these are also threats to our statehood. So, our only option for us is to strive to power ourselves.” (Semenyaka 2019e)

Regarding the Ukrainian state itself, the movement is unmistakably clear: it is portrayed as rotten, dysfunctional, and degenerate. In Azov's narrative, the situation has not really improved in quality after Euromaidan and the country is still dominated by corrupt political and economic elites who do not want to serve the interests of the Ukrainian people, but only to enrich themselves. In addition to the motive of self-enrichment, Azov's framing often portrays the country's elites as the puppets of globalist elites or as globalists themselves, thus constructing a dichotomy between the country's internal interests, which are based on the will of its ethnic population, and external interests, which are controlled by foreign powers.

Another narrative of the movement is that the Ukrainian state has always been dependent on Russia and could not act independently and is now additionally subjugated to the West. Azov thus serves a discourse of independence, describing the state both in the hands of those uninterested in genuine sovereignty and foreign powers that want to prevent it – Azov's geopolitical agenda stems from this framing, which will be discussed in detail later. A central goal of the movement is to establish geopolitical sovereignty for the region of Central and Eastern Europe to free it from Western and Eastern influences. Framing the situation in Ukraine as "captivity by foreign powers" introduces this agenda on a diagnostic level.

When it comes to the political reality in Ukraine, one of Azov's most frequently addressed topics is that of corruption. The movement uses corruption as an example to illustrate how degenerate the Ukrainian state system is and how immoral and self-interested the so-called "wrong" elites are. In a variety of postings, Azov refers to cronyism, addresses the disappearance of large amounts of money from the defense budget, and talks about the involvement of organized crime with local authorities and politicians. Azov uses these empirical examples to lend credibility to its narrative and to substantiate the claims it makes. Azov's criticism of Ukrainian political elites is thus embedded in a populist discourse in which corrupt elites are on one side and the innocent people who should be guiding decisions are on the other. On this basis, Azov presents itself as an actor capable of enforcing the will of the people. As will be shown in the chapter on prognostic framing, Azov propagates an agenda in which the "true" elites come to power, who then execute the will of the ethnic people by representation. In addition to describing the current political elites as corrupt, Azov also regularly refers to them as colonizers and counterrevolutionaries, suggesting that their goal is to destroy the country. In an interview with Azov's radio station, Semenyaka formulates this diagnosis as follows:

"... the big political groups in the Verkhovna Rada they are lobbyist who try to create to make Ukraine a new colony of both the West and the Kremlin and try to make a counter-revolution.

With regard to Maidan, we wanted to overcome this, our post-colonial past, so to speak, with regard to Soviet Union and 90s, which ... turned us also in the Colony of colonial West. And now instead of helping us, they want to destroy this impulse and even to [inaudible] worse condition than it was before. So, of course, we have to resist.” (Semenyaka 2016)

Azov’s international framing is not limited to pointing out (and constructing) social problems but includes naming actors who are held responsible for the diagnosed grievances. Just to name the most frequently mentioned: Azov talks about elites, neoliberal multiculturalists, fake-news-producing media, communists, leftists, liberals, Islamists, homosexuals, and so on. To explain why things are going wrong in the country, anti-Semitic narratives are further articulated, even if they are not common in Azov’s international framing. In criticizing the fact that Ukrainian farmland is being made available for sale to foreigners, Azov’s representatives speak, for example, of “George Soros and the Rothschilds” wanting to appropriate Ukrainian land – a classic anti-Semitic conspiracy theory. On Azov’s distribution channels, this statement is then disseminated, thus reproducing the anti-Semitic conspiracy theory of Jewish forces that want to enslave and exploit Ukraine.

Overall, Azov’s diagnostic framing is very similar to other far-right organizations and movements in Europe in terms of the enemy images that are articulated. A special place in the movement’s diagnostic framing is occupied by Ukrainian presidents, all of whom are rejected and maligned by the movement. Viktor Yanukovych is criticized for his relations with Russia, for the corruption that prevailed under him, for the repression of nationalists and generally for his economic and cultural policies. In this context, an interesting example can be used to show how Azov engages in frame bridging, i.e., combining various unrelated topics in such a way that a unified logic emerges from them.

In its international communication, Azov portrays Yanukovych as a puppet of the Russian government. In a speech by Olena Semenyaka – and this narrative is repeated on social media – the international secretary talks about the Pride Parade that took place in Kiev. Now, one could get the impression that Ukraine is a liberal country, as events of this kind can take place – an impression Azov wants to prevent in any case. Azov therefore explains that the Pride Parade was approved and held by Victor Yanukovych, who thereby empowered the Ukrainian LGBT community. Thus, by empowering the LGBT community, Yanukovych is advancing a globalist cultural Marxist agenda that comes not from Ukraine but from Russia, the narrative concludes. Azov and other nationalists, it is further explained, took to the streets against the parade and, had Yanukovych’s police not stood in the way, would have ended the parade and restored “order” on Ukrainian streets. So, while the political elites carry a cultural Marxist

agenda into the country, one originating from Russia, nationalists like Azov oppose these developments and stand up for true traditional values that are deeply rooted in the Ukrainian people, the international audience is told.

Overall, Azov's diagnostic framing of the Ukrainian state consists of nativist and populist elements. The Ukrainian state is portrayed as dysfunctional, and state representatives, politicians and multiculturalist civil society are blamed as corrupt enemies of the people. Through numerous references to contemporary political events, the movement underpins its framing and attempts to lend its narratives empirical credibility. Azov's criticism of Ukrainian society, however, goes deeper and attacks the foundations of liberal statehood. How this criticism is articulated in Azov's international communication and which corresponding narratives are conveyed to the far-right network will be discussed in the next chapter.

2.4.2. The Degeneration of Ukrainian Society and its Values

Since much is elaborated on Azov's vision of society in the chapter on prognostic framing at the national level, this chapter only deals very fundamentally with Azov's rejection of liberal society and the values it encompasses. Its relationship to liberal democracy makes Azov an extreme right-wing movement, at least if international framing is to be believed. Azov's diagnostic framing at the national level attacks the foundations of liberal statehood and presents the overcoming of the liberal state as a central political goal. The movement rejects national belonging based on citizenship and instead advocates a community based on the principle of ethnic descent. For Azov, Ukrainians are only those who are rooted in the Ukrainian ethnic nation – whatever that means. In addition to populist arguments, the movement further advocates an ethnic nativism that is incompatible with the principles of liberal democracies. In a 2016 article published on Azov's website, National Corps party ideologue Eduard Yurchenko summarizes Azov's position on citizenship paradigmatically:

“Communists and liberals are united either by denial of the nation as a phenomenon or by understanding it as a certain set of individuals with passports of a certain type. The events in the East of our country demonstrated the price of this approach when the owners of Ukrainian passports were burning our flags, killing our men and raping our women, whose only fault was that they were Ukrainians living in the Ukrainian land. We may recall the rich experience of Western countries where, for example, the owners of French passports celebrate holidays by mass burning of cars belonging to ordinary French.” (Yurchenko 2016)

Later in the article, Yurchenko makes it unmistakably clear what Azov's counterproposal to the liberal concept of citizenship is. The Azov representative declares that: "It is clear that the backbone of the Ukrainian nation is the Ukrainian people by blood" and thus places Azov in an ideological tradition of the far right that interprets the world in terms of "race", "blood", and "soil". International secretary Semenyaka formulates the same concepts with a toned-down, more moderate vocabulary that fits better into the discourse of the European New Right. Rather than using terms such as race, blood, or ancestry, terms such as ethno-cultural identity are used to ultimately say the same thing. But even the international secretary speaks, if only on rare occasions, of "blood and soil" or "race" to describe Azov's self-understanding.

Azov's diagnostic framing at the national level thus criticizes not only the current state of the Ukrainian state and its political establishment, but the very foundation of liberal statehood. The movement rejects political entities that detach the principle of citizenship from the principle of descent and sees this as one of the causes of multiculturalism, which Azov categorically rejects. In this context, Azov talks about the totalitarian culture of political correctness and claims that any proposal of a society based on homogeneity will be rejected and sanctioned by the globalist elites that want to promote Europeanization, by which they only mean globalism. In a lecture, Olena Semenyaka formulates this diagnosis as follows:

"That's how this area is perceived by Ukrainian reformists who reduce Europeanism to the neo-liberal concept of multiculturalism: the 'openness' of the borders and the denial of the very opposition between the 'own' and 'alien', or simply 'another,' that is, the category of cultural otherness. Under the 'European integration' they mean the rejection of not only Soviet heritage, but also Eastern European ethno-cultural realism which says that the differences between ethnic groups and cultures are objective and self-sufficient and must not be sacrificed on the altar of the abstract values of progress and humanism. The very idea of an 'own' cultural-civilization project, therefore, for them is 'politically incorrect'." (Semenyaka 2019a)

The narrative Azov produces on the national level ultimately boils down to the staging of a struggle between the forces in the country that represent globalism and those that are prepared to go into battle against it. In the movement's Manichean worldview, which is communicated to the international audience, a struggle is currently taking place in Ukraine that is about much more than only the country's sovereignty. Ukraine is being staged as the place where a historic struggle has broken out, one that will decide the future of the entire continent. Caught between the domination of Western and Eastern powers controlled by globalist elites, it is the task of Ukrainian nationalists and their allies to unleash the ethno-national revolution and to work on the foundation of a new civilizational type in which not abstract values such as humanism and

progress, but the metaphysical substance of the ethnocultural community determines the political system.

The war in the east of Ukraine is seen by the movement as an engine of revolution that will produce warriors who will fight for change in the country. On the issues of diplomatic solutions or ending the conflict, Azov has a clear position: the movement is not ready to make any concessions to Russia and the pro-Russian separatists and strongly criticizes the Ukrainian government when it tries to reach a solution to the conflict that is not synonymous with the military defeat of the enemy. How this is articulated in the specific case of international framing will now be discussed in the next chapter.

2.4.4. No Surrender and No Concessions in the War with Russia and the Separatists

Especially the far right's radical fringes are known for their excessive militarism. The radical far right's history is characterized by paramilitary associations, militant public appearances, and the use of political violence (Klare and Sturm 2016, 193ff.). Few far-right organizations nowadays, however, can claim to have an official and professional regiment and to be involved in open military conflict. For this reason, from a strategic perspective, it is hardly surprising that Azov precisely emphasizes this circumstance when communicating with its international far-right network, thereby lending itself strength and credibility. In the movement's international framing, much of it revolves around the war in eastern Ukraine, political processes associated with it, and the Azov Battalion/Regiment itself.

Just as Azov's relationship to the Ukrainian state is ambivalent, so is the movement's relationship to the war in eastern Ukraine. On the one hand, Azov wants to end the war in the east and restore Ukraine's territorial sovereignty and end Russian/pro-Russian aggression. On the other hand, Azov has so far rejected any diplomatic attempt to end the conflict and, as a movement, benefits from the continuation of it. In the movement's international framing, this is openly addressed and explained to the far-right audience. In one of Semenyaka's programmatic postings on the Intermarium Support Group page on Facebook, this is formulated as follows:

“Just like for the German war generation of the former century, the ongoing struggle of Ukrainian patriots for the restoration of the territorial integrity in their country is not only another national liberation war in the Ukrainian history. It is also a chance to make a revolutionary breakthrough which will not only prevent the re-emergence of conditions posing threat to Ukrainian state's very existence ... The deterioration in the East of Ukraine heralded by the Maidan revolution, in fact, awakened and reinforced the Ukrainian national spirit and the Ukrainian true elite's will to resistance and creation” (Semenyaka 2019b)

Azov's diagnostic framing thus concludes that the war in the East should be seen as an opportunity rather than a problem. Framings of this kind can be found at many other places in the movement's communication and can be considered paradigmatic. Regarding Ernst Jünger and other popular authors within the European New Right, Azov romanticizes warfare, which is staged as the spiritual and metaphysical experience of soldiering. The aestheticization of war and the longing for a state of emergency are notions that are closely linked to the imagination of the far right and can potentially have a mobilizing effect on militant individuals. Azov takes advantage of this circumstance and stages itself on social media through the aesthetic representation of a soldier's lifestyle, which goes together with the fetishization of weapons, brotherhood, and combat – but more on this in the chapter on prognostic framing. Thus, if one attempts to answer the question of how the problem definition in Azov's framing relates to the war in eastern Ukraine, one quickly finds that it is the preemptive termination of the war, rather than its existence, that is seen as the problem.

Azov refuses to make any concessions to the separatists and criticizes the Ukrainian government for acting too moderately. The movement has so far opposed all diplomatic formats, publicly mobilized against them, and is only favoring solutions in which Ukraine's territorial sovereignty is fully restored. In Azov's international communication, this position is expressed, for example, in the movement's mobilization against the referenda in Donbas and Luhansk, its advocacy of cutting off the electricity supply to Crimea, its agitation against social benefits for the population in the areas controlled by pro-Russian separatists, and much more.

Azov has further spoken out against both Minsk Protocols, against the Steinmeier Formula and against the Normandy Format and at the same time used these occasions to promote its own political agenda. This counter-mobilization is accompanied by active social media work in which Azov's narratives are communicated to its network. In postings, the movement reports on protests, marches, and demonstrations, presenting itself as a force for action in the country, ready to rebel against the political establishment. On Ukraine's Independence Day, for example, which is celebrated annually by all the country's nationalist forces in a demonstration march, Civil Corps Azov comments on this ceremony on its homepage as follows:

“Today we say ‘No’ to defeatism and surrender!

The war for Ukraine should end in our victory!

We say ‘No’ to the corrupt government!

It's high time to restore order in this country!

Capitulation is a choice of the government, but not ours!” (CC Azov 2016)

On social media, Azov stages itself as radical opposition and voice of the nationalist camp in Ukraine on both political and military issues. Azov's postings are full of demands reacting to political decisions of the Ukrainian government. In this context, the movement mobilizes against the demilitarization of the conflict, and speaks out against the withdrawal of troops from eastern Ukraine. Azov considers diplomatic negotiations with Russia pointless and instead calls for the military restoration of Ukraine's territorial sovereignty. One narrative that has been repeatedly articulated in relation to demilitarization is a threatening gesture toward the Ukrainian government, should it not implement the nationalists' demands. Sooner or later, the framing goes, the nationalists who are now fighting on the front lines will come to Kiev and will restore order there as well:

"Instead of 'the ruthless destruction of the enemy', we got Minsk agreements, which actually mean the capitulation. Separatists dictate their terms to the Ukrainian authorities, and law enforcement officers of Kiev and other Ukrainian cities allow them to carry out pro-social activities. But we should not forget that every war, even undeclared, has its end. Moreover, those who are now fighting for Ukrainian independence in the East will certainly induce order in Kiev" (Nackor 2016b)

Many more examples of Azov's diagnostic framing relating to the war in eastern Ukraine could be given at this point. The movement takes positions on many political and military events and uses them to spread its political agenda. In the commentary on these events, however, the same narratives are communicated to the international audience repeatedly. Azov's position on war itself is characterized by militarism and the fetishization of warfare. The movement frames the war in eastern Ukraine as an opportunity to continue the national revolution at home.

Overall, Azov's diagnostic framing is characterized by nativist, populist, and nationalist narratives that can potentially resonate with the international far right's self-understanding. In its diagnostic framing, the movement conveys a social diagnosis characterized by the staging of a final struggle between globalists and nationalist forces. The age of globalism and its actors are seen as the main challenge for nationalist actors worldwide. For Azov, however, it is important to explain to the international far-right network that the Russian government is as much a part of globalism as the West is. Azov further criticizes the far right itself for its outdated self-image, which the movement sees as an obstacle to transnational cooperation. Since the problems are global, the solution to them must also be a global one, it is explained. As will be shown in the following chapter, Azov sees transnational solidarity among nationalist forces as one of the most credible ways to respond to the threat of globalism. For this reason, much of Azov's

framing is devoted to solidarizing with the national struggles of allies abroad – a practice that will be discussed in detail in the chapter on prognostic framing. Azov expects that this strategy will also help the movement in its efforts in Ukraine and in its fight against Russia.

In diagnostic framing, Azov has constructed a scenario in which the movement is currently engaged in a struggle with globalist forces. On the one hand, Azov, according to the narrative, is fighting in eastern Ukraine against Russian globalism, which threatens the entire region as expansionist neo-Soviet imperialism. On the other hand, Azov is also fighting against globalist forces in Ukraine. This tension is presented as a window of opportunity to trigger a national revolution that can spread across the continent. To continue this national revolution, however, Azov is dependent on the solidarity of the European far right, the movement tells its far-right network. The European far right must therefore realize that Russia is not an ally in the struggle for the establishment of a world of ethno-cultural self-determination, but its enemy. However, in order not only to disseminate a social diagnosis, but also to provide concrete instructions for action and solutions, a large part of Azov's communication is devoted to prognostic and motivational framing. In the next chapter, the most central corresponding narratives will be discussed and analyzed for their strategic composition.

3. From Local to Global: The Azov Movement's Prognostic Framing

So far, the main narratives in Azov's diagnostic framing have been presented and the different framing strategies used in international communication have been analyzed. This chapter will examine the solutions that Azov offers to its international far-right network and the strategies it uses to make them as plausible as possible. It will show that Azov pursues a global agenda that is at the same time linked to specific concepts at different geographical levels. Under the concept of global conservative revolution, referred to in international framing as *Reconquista*, Azov offers its far-right network a political vision that ties in with the cultural traditions and self-image of those addressed and at the same time aligns them with Azov's very own interests. The global conservative revolution pursued by Azov is to begin in Central and Eastern Europe and particularly in Ukraine, then spread across the European continent, and culminate in the establishment of an *Alternative Global World Order*. Azov's proposed solution is an extreme right-wing political vision that aims to overcome liberal modernity and instead build a world in which the organic nature of ethnic communities is fully expressed. At the national level, the *permanent national revolution* should be continued, which in Azov's eyes began with Euromaidan and continues to this day. At the regional level, Azov advocates a model of

alternative regional integration, which is brought closer to the international audience with the concept of *Intermarium* or Adriatic-Baltic-Black Sea Union. Following Azov's prognostic framing, the reconquest of the entire European continent is to take place starting from Central and Eastern Europe and result in the establishment of a Europe of ethnic nations, also called *Paneuropa*. In the global struggle for global dominance, Azov has declared war on the hegemony of globalism and made it its mission to lead the international far right into war against it. At the same time, Azov has set out to overcome the conflictual nature within the transnational far right and to establish a new political culture of mutual recognition, which is seen as a prerequisite for a successful rebellion of national forces against the dominance of globalism. Azov demands this recognition for itself and seeks solidarity in its struggle with Russia. Finally, it will be shown that Azov's framing strategy, also at the level of prognostic framing, aims at strengthening its position within the international far right and at the same time tries to discredit the Russian position. The following subchapters examine how Azov's framing strategy is implemented in detail with reference to the respective geographical level.

3.1. Building the Ethnic Nation: Continuation of National Revolution on Ukrainian Soil

In international framing, Azov presents the fact that Ukraine has been shaken by crisis as an opportunity to form a nationalist counterforce in the country. According to the movement, a nationalist revolution began in Ukraine during Euromaidan, and it must be continued by nationalist forces to liberate the country from globalist elites. Azov uses prognostic framing at the national level to inform its international audience about the situation in Ukraine and to present itself as a capable nationalist force. In numerous postings, Azov reports on its activities and shows how actively it is involved in reshaping the country. By depicting its actions, the movement can lend itself credibility and convey to the international audience that it is a serious political actor with the potential to organize a nationalist revolution in Ukraine and beyond. Azov's central narratives (articulated in prognostic framing at the national level) are the building of a strong nationalist movement in Ukraine, the establishment of a political and military counterforce to the current political elites, the goal of using meta-political initiatives to influence the collective consciousness of Ukrainians, and the strategy of entryism to infiltrate state institutions and thus take over the state from within.

When it comes to international framing, the vision of society pursued by Azov at the national level can best be classified as neo-fascist. It is not Azov's goal to gain political power in Ukraine to implement its political agenda in the current institutional settings. The only reason why Azov

wants to come to power is to destroy the social fabric of Ukrainian society and establish a new social order in its place. Azov sees itself as a revolutionary force dedicated to the rebirth of the nation, and it makes no secret of it. As Azov repeatedly emphasizes, revolutions do not take place in only a day, but they are long-lasting processes that require constant engagement of national-revolutionary actors willing to take responsibility. Azov thus presents the national revolution in Ukraine as a long-term project in which the movement plays a leading role.

Azov frames the national uprising in Ukraine as an existential struggle for the survival of the Ukrainian nation, which must take place immediately. From Azov's perspective, the state should not represent an abstract political system, but the organic nature of the ethnic community. In interviews and speeches, Olena Semenyaka explicitly speaks of the "rebirth of the nation" and the mission to protect the "organic life forms" of the ethnic community. The realization of this vision, and Azov is very explicit about this, must be achieved by destructive, nihilistic, and revolutionary means. An excerpt from her speech at a far-right conference in Estonia in 2019 exemplifies Azov's revolutionary and neo-fascist worldview:

"Active nihilism is healthy. It is a sign of the growth of the spirit's strength. It means that old ideals are no longer valid, but it is also a creative process. Destruction is only one side of it. It heads towards new values. It's like the transvaluation of all values by a superman who destroys all discredited orders, and strives for something new, for something which will be worthy of following, developing, believing in. And that's why the first phase of the transvaluation of all values is naturally nihilistic, revolutionary, destructive. But it's not, again, an ends in itself. It is just a phase. And that is why it is a *Conservative Revolution*⁴, not a kind of conservative philosophy or a reactionary philosophy. It is revolution ... it doesn't make any sense to preserve some existing order. We have to break from this historical reality, we have to be radical. At the same time, ... keep in mind those healthy traditional principles, which should not be restored, but reactualized now" (Semenyaka 2019d)

What exactly this new social order should look like is only briefly explained by Azov in international framing. The movement refers to the concept of *Natiocracy* by Mykola Sziborskyj, one of the theorists of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), but does little in international framing to address what this should mean in implementation. Nevertheless, it can be said about Azov's vision of a new social order that a change of elites is to take place, bringing to power elites that emerge from the nationalist movement itself. The state is to be run by national elites who represent the true interests of the ethnically homogenous people.

⁴ Note: Emphasis in original

The emphasis on great military-political leaders with reference to Azov's leader Andriy Biletsky suggests that Azov sees itself as the future head of the Ukrainian state and as the incarnation of the people's will.

At the level of prognostic framing, Azov advocates not only the restoration of Ukrainian territorial sovereignty, but also an end to corruption and the elimination of harmful and degenerate ways of life and values that are altogether associated with multiculturalism, liberalism, egalitarianism, and individualism. Conversely, this means that Azov strives for an authoritarian vision of a social order that seeks only the freedom of the ethnic collective, but not that of the individual. Since ethnic collectives exist only in the abstract, they cannot make decisions and require political actors who claim to represent them, and this is where Azov's national elitism comes in. Thus, bringing together these different elements, Azov's vision includes nativist, populist, and authoritarian characteristics that culminate in the idea of overcoming the liberal state and replacing it with a new social order in which the rebirth of the nation can take place. Relating this to the literature, it should be clear at this point that Azov is pursuing a neo-fascist agenda, if the international framing of the movement is to be believed.

Because impactful prognostic framing involves not only an abstract vision but also strategies to achieve it, Azov also offers its international audience instructions for action. At the national level, this means that Azov presents its repertoire of actions to the transnational far-right network in order to act as a role model and to generate credibility for its project at the same time. By presenting its own political actions, Azov shows the audience that the movement does not just make big speeches but actively works on realizing its vision. And Azov can indeed point to some achievements, since it has developed into a large movement that is active in various cultural and political fields. How Azov communicates its implementation plan to the far-right network in international framing and with which strategies the movement ties its own agenda to it, will be the subject of the following subchapters.

3.1.1. Creation of a United National Movement

Azov criticizes the fact that the far right is to a large extent divided not only when it comes to transnational cooperation, but also when it comes to Ukraine. To build a counterweight against the influence of foreign powers and globalist elites at home, it is necessary to build a broad nationalist movement, Azov explains in international framing. The movement thus advocates the unification of the Ukrainian far right as a condition for advancing national revolution and presents itself as the force that can lead this reconciliation process. By overcoming the old nationalist culture and establishing inter-group solidarity, the nationalist camp should move

in a common direction and build a counterforce against the supremacy of globalism, it is stated in Azov's plan.

From this newly generated nationalist movement, a political elite is to emerge, one that will place itself at the top of the state and realize the interests of the ethnic people, the movement further explains. In international framing, Azov tells its far-right network that this could have happened during and after Euromaidan, but that the nationalist camp in Ukraine failed, and therefore it was now up to Azov to build the nationalist movement. So, Azov advocates for overcoming conflicts, but at the same time it criticizes other nationalist organizations in its country in order to present itself as the ideal alternative in front of the international audience. Because nationalist forces such as Svoboda or Right Sector were unable to seize power after Euromaidan, Azov must now take the fate of the national question into its own hands, Azov's prognostic framing argues.

The impression Azov wants to convey to the international audience is that the movement is not only talking about these plans but is working very successfully on their implementation. In a 2019 post by the Intermarium Support Group, this strategy becomes quite visible, perfectly demonstrating how the movement tries to give itself credibility to promote its political agenda:

“This drawback⁵ is currently being corrected by the National Corps/Azov Movement as the fastest developing nationalist movement in Ukraine: it has a parliamentary wing, the National Corps party which is represented in every region of Ukraine and counts in its ranks over 10.000 activists, a paramilitary structure, National Militia, often described by the globalist media as the modern ‘SA’, over 30 social and cultural projects as independent NGOs which allow National Corps to practice entryism in all social fields, and, last but not least, the military wing unseen since the times of WW2: the Azov Regiment of the National Guard of Ukraine (subordinate to the Ministry of Internal Affairs), the only volunteer battalion that was expanded to the level of the regiment and the most combat-ready unit of the entire Ukrainian armed forces. A special attention is paid to the educational programs: military ones, aimed at the modernization of the Ukrainian army, political ones preparing the future political leaders and metapolitical structures closely cooperating with the international department; the clash between the liberal and nationalist flank will continue on a larger scale as we are striving for power and are ready to implement different scenarios.” (Semenyaka 2019c)

Azov advocates overcoming the old nationalist culture in Ukraine and the modernization of the nationalist movement. Traditional approaches to political practice are outdated and need to

⁵ Note: The failure of Ukrainian nationalists after Euromaidan

be replaced by new strategies, Azov states in prognostic framing. Thus, in addition to modernizing nationalist ideology, Azov further argues for the establishment of cross-organizational structures, the use of digital technologies, and a shift from electoral politics to meta-political campaigning. Referring to the concept of *Archeofuturism*, which was already mentioned in the chapter on diagnostic framing, traditional values are to be brought to bear using modern technology. Azov propagates this as the revitalization of the old with means of the new. Employing this strategy, Azov can present itself as a modern and innovative force and prove that the movement really wants to do something different from traditional nationalist organizations.

Appropriating the strategy of meta-political intervention prevalent within the European new right, Azov uses it to advance its agenda and applies it to the far right itself. Countless postings, articles, and statements report on the movement's various activities, supporting Azov's narrative that they are already actively and successfully implementing the nationalist revolution in Ukraine. Much of this activity aims at capturing the pre-political space and raising awareness both in the national camp and among the Ukrainian population in general. By presenting these activities, Azov can offer itself as an inspiration to other far-right organizations abroad and strengthen its image as an effective and powerful movement. By demonstrating these activities, Azov not only talks about solutions but shows how to implement them. The following chapter therefore focuses on Azov's political practice relating to metapolitics and its representation in international framing in the broadest sense. It will be shown that Azov's solutions for overcoming the current state of affairs include historical-political interventions, the organization of meta-political events and the promotion of a healthy lifestyle to prepare young people mentally and physically – for national revolution.

3.1.2. Winning the Hearts and Minds of the People

In prognostic framing, Azov argues against conventional electoral politics and instead promotes unconventional forms of political practice. Although the movement participates in Ukrainian parliamentary elections with its National Corps party, it proclaims that parliamentarism is losing its relevance. Given the National Corps' electoral failures (Colborne 2019b), the question is whether the movement is making a virtue out of necessity with this diagnosis, but this is a question beyond the scope of this thesis. In Azov's framing, parliamentarism is further described as a spectacle that takes place only to distract from the fact that in the background the strings are pulled by oligarchs and other elites.

The answer that Azov advocates as a counter to conventional politics is metapolitics. It is important to know that the demand for metapolitics comes primarily from the European New

Right and is based on the reflections of the Marxist theorist Antonio Gramsci. Metapolitics encompasses the notion that, to carry out a revolution, the hearts and minds of the population must be reached (Bevir 2010, 878ff.). Metapolitics thus aims to influence discourse employing cultural-political interventions and to shape the terms and concepts with which reality is perceived. Metapolitical actors are concerned with influencing the consciousness of the population in the pre-political sphere. In this understanding, the battle for cultural hegemony is fought primarily in people's minds and not in parliamentary institutions, Azov explains.

For this reason, Azov is working to build metapolitical structures and educational initiatives throughout the country to influence Ukrainian society. In international framing, Azov promotes the concept of metapolitics and points to its activities to show what the movement has already achieved. A central goal mentioned by Azov in this context is that the aim of any nationalist movement must be to educate its own nationalist milieu and to create a new intellectual elite which will fight for national revolution. For Azov, the ability to defend the nation means both weapons training and theoretical education, which is why the movement's activities cover both. Olena Semenyaka, who is not only international secretary but also significantly involved in Azov's metapolitical initiatives, summarizes this strategy in a speech:

“We have a metapolitical wing represented first of all by the Plomin or Flame Club – literary club. I would say this is the Ukrainian example of the implementation of the new-Marxist, neo-Gramscian strategy of gaining political hegemony by means of cultural activities and giving the population proper political education. It's located in the Cossack House, our youth center, which is modeled after the right-wing squad of Casa Pound Italia our friends and partners. Many of you know about them, I'm sure. Also, we, of course, organize political education courses for the members of Ukrainian nationalist movement.” (Semenyaka 2019a)

On social media, Azov reports on the various metapolitical activities and presents to its international network how committed the movement is to advancing the national revolution. Since the establishment of Azov's Civil Corps, reports can be found on social media that allow for a reconstruction of Azov's activities in the field of metapolitical initiatives. Tweets show photos of Azov members giving national history lessons to schoolchildren, accompanied by captions emphasizing the need for patriotic education of the youth to build a defensible country. In other postings, Azov presents the physical activities the movement offers to train Ukrainian society. Azov declares that it wants to shape not only the minds but also the bodies of the new nationalist generation and therefore promotes a healthy lifestyle. These activities often have a military character and range from self-defense courses for the local population to martial arts training and the teaching of knife fighting techniques to direct training with firearms.

Ultimately, the movement wants to raise not only educated, but self-sacrificing patriots who can defend themselves and are committed to their nation and willing to submit to a greater cause. The representation of these activities on social media goes together with national-patriotic narratives that reinforce their political nature. Through this strategy of self-representation, Azov tries to be a role model for the international far-right network and shows that, to build a strong nationalist counterforce, it is necessary to promote a nationalist lifestyle that reaches across all spheres of life. Azov's goal is to build a counterculture capable of socializing a new generation of brave nationalists who, when the time is right, will take over the state apparatus.

In Azov's prognostic framing, the representation of meta-political activities takes on a major role and is presented as a key strategy to strengthen the national movement. Azov is concerned with developing a new lifestyle that accommodates the national movement and produces patriots who are ready to continue the revolt against globalism. In international framing, the movement is trying to impress its international network with these activities and to lend itself credibility. At the same time, Azov's repertoire of actions is not limited to metapolitical practices, but also includes more classic forms of action of the extreme right. Through street politics, Azov tries to inscribe itself into the Ukrainian public and does not shy away from political violence. The next subchapter examines this area of action in more detail and explains the position that street politics and vigilantism occupy in Azov's prognostic framing.

3.1.3. Ensuring Law and Order on Ukraine's Streets

Many of Azov's activities take place on the street. The appropriation of the public sphere is part of the movement's counter-hegemonic practice. By appearing in public space, Azov mobilizes its members, strengthens and shapes the group's identity, and generates attention for itself and its political agenda. Social movements take their concerns to the streets to make them known to the public, and Azov is no different in this regard. On the various distribution channels, the movement further represents its activities and makes them part of its prognostic framing. Azov therefore presents the fight in the streets as a solution and at the same time stages itself as a force that is already successfully implementing this strategy. Azov's martial appearance in public is characterized by militarism and uniformity and deliberately staged this way on social media as well. The presentation of combat readiness in Azov's case applies not only to the military arm, the Azov Regiment, but also to its street militia, the National Militia, which has made it its mission to enforce law and order on Ukrainian streets.

The narrative that is mostly implicitly conveyed to the international audience is that the degeneration of Ukrainian society will not be fought by Azov in the future but is already being

fought now by Ukrainian patriots in the streets. Azov naturally uses the representation and staging of the militia on social media to present itself to the international far-right audience as a credible and committed force that can bring about political change. Azov publicly proclaims that it will not shy away from using violence to achieve its goals, and in its framing plays with analogies that compare the National Militia to the paramilitary arm of National Socialists, the SA (*Sturmabteilung*) – even though Azov cleverly attributes this comparison to the international media. The official activities are presented on social media, e.g, street patrols with the police, setting up street patrols to counter drunk driving, fighting the illegal sale of alcohol and tobacco, cleaning the streets, acting against animal cruelty etc. The National Militia’s unofficial activities can be read in the reports of human rights organizations, and it can be assumed that large parts of the movement’s far-right network also know about them.

Azov’s militia has, for example, repeatedly engaged in street battles with the police, surveillance videos show uniformed members of the militia storming into gambling halls, beating up patrons and vandalizing entire premises. Human rights organizations have documented violent attacks by the militia and other suborganizations of the Azov movement on LGBT communities, ethnic minorities, and political opponents for years (see Cohen 2018; Marker 2020; RFE 2020). For example, in 2018, uniformed members of the militia were involved in the illegal demolition of Roma camps in Kiev, streaming their actions live on social media (Miller 2018b). The latest findings of the *Far-Right Confrontation and Violence Report* Marker (2020) attribute most of the attacks committed by the far right in Ukraine in 2020 to Azov’s political arm, the National Corps (including the National Militia), and the third most to Azov as a military entity (veterans) – activities that are naturally not mentioned in the movement’s official communication, but certainly reach many in its network anyway. Far-right street politics usually aims not only to make actors heard, but to spread fear. In Azov’s case, this is no different.

The key narrative spread by Azov is that the movement has taken the fate of the Ukrainian nation into its own hands because the Ukrainian authorities are unable to do so. Since no one is capable of maintaining law and order on Ukrainian streets, the National Militia takes care of it, just as the Azov Battalion did during the outbreak of conflict in eastern Ukraine, the narrative continues. Through this narrative and the representation of the movement’s militant activities, it is suggested to the international audience that Azov is self-reliant and not a lapdog of the Ukrainian government. This framing strategy invalidates a narrative that has circulated within the far right, namely that Azov is a Jewish-funded militia, a group of mercenaries fighting for globalism. The strategy of narrative-embedded representation of activities also serves to allow Azov to credibly demonstrate to the far-right network that the movement is ambitiously

working towards national revolution in Ukraine and is not only talking about it but is ready to take to the streets. As the movement seeks to generate solidarity within the European far right, it is necessary for Azov to prove itself and convince the network that the movement's political ambitions are promising. In addition to presenting meta-political activities and street politics, Azov tries to prove this by saying that the movement has set out to take over the Ukrainian state from within and has already infiltrated key government institutions. At the same time, Azov presents itself as a radical opposition to the political establishment. The next subchapter addresses this tension between entryism and radical opposition politics in Azov's framing.

3.1.4. Transforming the State between Entryism and Radical Opposition Politics

Azov wants to continue the national revolution, which according to the movement began with Euromaidan and articulates in international framing strategies how this plan will be implemented. Azov aims to change the political culture in the country and, through meta-political initiatives, to create a new type of Ukrainian patriot ready to carry out the national revolution. In addition, Azov has a militant appearance in public space and actively challenges the Ukrainian state's monopoly on the use of force. The national revolution, according to the movement's conception, will not only take place in the minds of the people, but also in the streets. Azov sees itself appointed to ensure law and order on Ukrainian streets and to counter the degeneration of Ukrainian society with a patriotic counterforce. Given the ideology of the movement, it is no wonder that Azov's activities result in political violence against opponents and minorities. In addition to these already discussed political strategies and their representation of implementation in international communication, Azov speaks to the international audience about two further strategies to help promote the national revolution.

First, Azov propagates the Trotskyist strategy of entryism. By entryism, the movement means the targeted infiltration of state institutions and the gradual construction of a state within the state. By emphasizing this strategy, Azov can counter and refute criticism that the movement cooperates with state authorities. Should the accusation be made that Azov is pursuing reformist policies, the movement can claim, by referring to the strategy of entryism, that it is only subverting the state and, in fact, pursuing a revolutionary program. In framing, Azov emphasizes that cooperation with the Ukrainian state is only temporary and attached to conditions. This claim does not seem to be entirely fabricated, as Azov, including the movement's leader Andriy Biletsky, threaten the Ukrainian authorities on a regular basis – should they make certain political decisions that Azov opposes. Azov shares statements of this kind with its international audience through its distribution channels, thus underlining that it cooperates with state

institutions out of strategic interest. For example, a posting by the Intermarium Support Group includes an excerpt from a speech by Azov's leader explaining what will happen if the Ukrainian government continues to push for demilitarization:

“[T]he leader of the Azov Movement Andreiy Biletsky gave the authorities 10 days to stop the demilitarization on a legal level, otherwise, civil saboteur actions will happen all over Ukraine. Civilian resistance by the veterans already takes place in the frontline cities. Igor Mykhailenko, the second commander of the Azov Regiment, sent an appeal to the rally which was broadcast next to the stage. Onwards to the victory!” (ISG 2019a)

Publicly opposing and rebelling against certain measures of the Ukrainian government is the second strategy Azov pursues. Azov reports on its distribution channels about numerous campaigns, in which it expresses discontent about certain political decisions of the government. Azov's repertoire of actions in this regard is broad, ranging from organizing demonstrations and rallies, to civil disobedience and road blockades, to providing support to civil society to show that, unlike the political establishment, Azov is there for the Ukrainian people. These activities can be seen as part of Azov's prognostic framing, as in their totality they are intended to advance the movement's agenda. In this respect, Azov differs little from other far-right movements in Europe. By presenting its activities, Azov can showcase its mobilization potential in Ukraine and demonstrate that it is actively working for change.

Azov's political action takes place in the field of tension between these two practices, which potentially can contradict each other, but do not automatically have to. In any case, Azov clearly communicates to its international audience that this dual strategy is not a contradiction. Azov presents the infiltration of state institutions as a way to consolidate as a movement, gain access to resources, and expand. In international framing, Azov boasts that initiatives of the movement are financed by state institutions and that the building of the national-revolutionary opposition can be successfully advanced as a result. It is also no coincidence that Azov relates the Regiment to the strategy of entryism in framing, suggesting to the far-right audience that the movement has a military apparatus unlike any other far-right organization in Europe has had since World War II. In a speech in Estonia in 2019, international secretary Olena Semenyaka formulated Azov's political program as follows:

“I meant a kind of ideals which we have to keep in our minds because you also discuss all these dangerous matters, how we can enter into the system. Again, the strategy of a Trotskyist entryism, which then was adopted by New Left by Marxist branch and while we practice this entryism we always have to keep in mind what we are fighting for ... In our case, referring to the Azov movement, we also have structures which already entered state and received state support. Not

speaking about the Azov Regiment, which is the official structure of the National Guard of Ukraine, which had its own tank company, intelligence, snipers and so on and so forth. We also have a youth corps ... and it is comprised of a system youth camps which teach children patriotic education, paramilitary education as well. And it is supported by the state. Ukrainian parents are not afraid to give their children to this camp. Another structure is the veteran brotherhood. It is the veterans [unintelligible] of the conflict in the east, and there is already a newly created ministry of veterans in Ukraine and members of this structure will enter this ministry. It is also official state structure. So, in some fields, there is a revolutionary opposition, of course, with the government and we strive to power ourselves. In other fields we already practice this entry-ism.” (Semenyaka 2019h)

Through this communication strategy, Azov’s prognostic framing always ends up with Azov itself. The logic of the narrative communicated by Azov is that the answer and the solutions to the problems diagnosed are to be found in Azov itself because the movement is the most promising contemporary far-right project in Europe. For this reason, far-right organizations in Europe must show solidarity with Azov and work with the movement to advance its national-revolutionary aspirations that will impact the entire continent. However, the central project in Azov’s prognostic framing, and thus the entire political agenda, is not located in Ukraine, but in the region of Central and Eastern Europe. To build a counterweight to Russian expansionism and at the same time counter the influence of the West, Azov propagates the construction of a new geopolitical bloc in the region of Central and Eastern Europe called Intermarium or Adriatic-Baltic-Black Sea Union. The following chapter is devoted to Azov’s prognostic framing at the regional level and discusses how the movement attempts, in international communication, to find allies for its vision of alternative regional integration.

3.2. Building Intermarium: Alternative Regional Integration in Central and Eastern Europe

Azov promotes a political vision that goes beyond the borders of Ukraine. In the region of Central and Eastern Europe, the movement advocates a model of alternative regional cooperation. This model, brought closer to the far-right network under the name of Intermarium, forms the center of the movement’s prognostic framing. To advance the realization of this vision, Azov is trying to build alliances with far-right organizations in Europe and especially in the region itself and make them receptive to the movement’s geopolitical plans. In this attempt to draw attention to itself and its project of alternative regional integration, Azov has developed various narratives and framing strategies, which are the focus of this chapter.

The first subchapter explains how Azov frames the region of Central and Eastern Europe as the historical birthplace of the rebellion against globalism through historical analogies and cultural theoretical metaphors. The second subchapter discusses how Azov has appropriated and transformed the pre-existing concept of Intermarium so that the vision of a geopolitical third way is presented to the far-right audience as a starting point for national revolution in Europe. Since Azov puts a lot of emphasis not only to formulating visions, but also to convincing its audience that they actually are feasible, the movement has developed a step-by-step plan to implement the concept of alternative regional integration, which it disseminates through its various distribution channels. The third subchapter deals with this implementation plan and its presentation, before the fourth subchapter discusses Azov's ongoing attempts to build transnational cooperation and solidarity relations with other far-right organizations in the region.

3.2.1. The East as the Starting Point of National Rebirth

To explain why the creation of a new geopolitical bloc in the region of Central and Eastern Europe is necessary and promising, Azov invests a great deal in international framing to highlight the historical, political, and cultural distinctiveness of the region itself. Basically, in its communication, the movement tries to convince the international audience that due to the historically specific development of the region, it provides the ideal conditions to start a revolt against so-called globalism. To demonstrate this specificity of the Central and Eastern European region, Azov offers several narratives to its network.

One narrative primarily addressed to nationalist actors in the region itself appeals to their pragmatic self-interest and national identity. In this framing, Azov explains to its recipients that because the nations of the region have historically been dependent on foreign powers and have not been given the opportunity to assert their independence, it is now time to take destiny into their own hands. But because the region is still hostage to foreign powers and Russia poses an existential threat, it is necessary that the region's national forces begin to overcome their conflicts and join forces, Azov argues.

The development of the region is further presented by Azov as an advantage over national aspirations in other countries. In prognostic framing, the movement explains that because the nations of the region gained their independence so late, the population has preserved its ethnocultural identity better than is the case in Western Europe. Because of this, they are also more responsive to nationalist agitation, which is why national-revolutionary efforts are more likely, the logic goes. Returning to time-diagnostic framing, Azov presents Western Europe as the old and already declining part of the continent, and Central and Eastern Europe as the part still

bursting with metaphysical energy. The solution to the problems stemming from modernity itself is thus to be found in the East, according to Azov's attempt to convince the European far right to support the movement in its geopolitical plans.

To support this argument, international secretary Olena Semenyaka, in particular, refers to concepts and statements by a wide range of authors who are influential within the European far right. The main message of the narrative that the international secretary spreads in this context is that already intellectual greats like Friedrich Nietzsche, Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Ernst Jünger and others recognized in their time that in the Slavic peoples a national-spiritual energy is slumbering that will awaken one day. This day of awakening has now come, the movement explains to its audience. Therefore, Azov appeals to all nationalist forces in Europe to show solidarity, as the birth of ethnonational revolution is happening in Central and Eastern Europe, and Azov is ready to advance it, the narrative continues. In historical analogies, Semenyaka tries to underline this diagnosis, speaking of a new *Sonderweg* in Central and Eastern Europe in analogy to the *German Sonderweg* in the 19th century. As already illustrated, Azov generally likes to compare itself and the situation in which the movement finds itself with Germany in the 19th and 20th century. As will be shown in the next chapter, the movement also understands the vision of Intermarium as a vision of a geopolitical third way, modeled on post-World War I Germany. To exemplify this argumentation, a quotation from Olena Semenyaka can be given here, which she formulated in a lecture in front of a far-right audience, and which was then further disseminated on the distribution channels of the movement:

“It is important that Nietzsche looked with hope at the East, that is, the ‘young’ Eastern European peoples, the Poles in particular, who had yet to have their say in history. Actually, even the founder of German nationalism Johann Gottlieb Fichte considered the Slavonic nations ‘new,’ that is, the ones who have not (the XVIII century) manifested their national identity yet, whose national spirit has been just awakening. Today, in the twenty-first century, when both the Germans and the French are in an approximately identical cultural phase, Central and Eastern Europe becomes a true laboratory of the European revival.” (Semenyaka 2019a)

In another statement, the international secretary is even more explicit, explaining to the far-right audience why it must rely on Eastern Europe in the struggle for ethnonational liberation, thus already talking about the notion of a geopolitical third way in the region that defies both Western and Russian influence:

“The false rivalry of the West and the Russian Federation creates the unique chance for the intended ‘buffer zone’, Eastern Europe, to become the center of the restoration of the all-

European geopolitical subjectivity and superpower. After the majority of Russian nationalists fled to Ukraine due to severe ‘anti-extremist legislation’, multicultural agenda and ‘Nazi’ witch hunt in Putin’s Russia, it has become obvious that only Eastern and Central Europe, especially Ukraine, remains the space of political freedom and the springboard for ambitious geopolitical projects.” (ISG 2019b)

Azov’s plea for its “ambitious geopolitical project,” which, as mentioned above, is promoted by the movement as Intermarium, ties in with this narrative. The following chapter will therefore focus on what Azov understands by this concept, what different sources the movement has drawn on to conceptualize its version of Intermarium, and to what extent it is trying to establish a constructive dialogue between the different national narratives of the region by promoting its geopolitical vision to overcome conflicts and make transnational cooperation possible.

3.2.2. Intermarium: Establishing Geopolitical Sovereignty

Azov’s international efforts are centered around the propagation of the Intermarium concept, which is promoted by the movement as the vision of alternative regional integration. However, the concept to which Azov refers is neither new, nor was it invented by the movement itself. Azov makes no secret of this fact, but on the contrary announces that the Intermarium concept is experiencing a revival today due to geopolitical tensions in the region. The Intermarium concept historically dates to the early 20th century and revolves around the idea of forming a geopolitical bloc in Central and Eastern Europe that would guarantee the military sovereignty and independence of the states that are part of it. Throughout the history of the region, there have been various notions about what form such an Intermarium should take, and which countries should be part of it. Azov builds on those historical models, but propagates an independent version of Intermarium, consisting of both pragmatic and highly ideologized elements.

Azov uses the umbrella term Intermarium to bring models of regional and transnational cooperation throughout history to a common denominator. Essentially, Azov refers to three intellectual sources to promote its vision of Intermarium. The movement adopted the term Intermarium, which in Latin means “between the seas”, from Polish statesman Józef Piłsudski, who advocated for a federation between the Baltic and the Black Sea, which would have included Poland, the Baltic States, Belarus, and Ukraine. Furthermore, Azov refers to the Black Sea doctrine of Ukrainian politician Yurii Lypa and the Baltic-Black Sea concept of Lithuanian general Pēteris Radziņš. It would be beyond the scope of this paper to go into more detail about the differences between these various geopolitical concepts. It is important to understand, however, that although the three statesmen had different ideas about which states should be part of

this geopolitical grouping and how it should be organized, they all pursued the vision of forming a geopolitical bloc to manage regional cooperation in the face of the challenges of the modern world. As the Intermarium Support Group states in an article, Azov is not interested in implementing historical models, but in taking the concept of Intermarium and adapting it to the current situation:

“However, currently, for us makes sense not the literal reconstruction of some of the mentioned models of Intermarium brought to life by historical conditions of the interwar Europe, but rather the embodiment of the geopolitical intuition which lies in its base and remains permanent. Exactly: only joined for the purpose of defense, the Intermarium countries are able to assert their national sovereignty and identity upon the newest threats from the East and from the West. And conversely, the price of disunity, discord and ‘national heroism’ can be too high, resulting in chain wrecking of the nation-building of the countries, which, having forgotten the conclusions of the past, may naively try to ‘sit at the dinner table’ with the common enemy of the region.” (ISG n.d.)

In international framing, Azov takes advantage of the fact that these three men, from different national perspectives, have all come to the conclusion that the institutionalization of transnational cooperation is necessary in order not to drown in the tension between the West and Russia. This is important because Azov wants to give the far-right audience in the region the impression that it does not want to impose a Ukrainian concept on them but is taking the path of mutual recognition, in which the interests of the respective nations are taken into account. In the context of Azov’s diagnostic framing, Azov’s narrative is that, while Russia pursues a geopolitical project that is neo-Soviet imperialist in nature and tries to subdue all other nations, Azov pursues a vision in which the national sovereignty of states is not undermined – an approach that the movement calls universalism from the right.

So, when it comes to the more concrete purposes of Intermarium, Azov’s official position is that it is first about guaranteeing military security in the region and then about asserting common interests at the international level. The homepage of the Intermarium Support Group presents the program, as well as potential members of Intermarium, as follows:

“The union of the Central-Eastern Europe countries, which are located between the Black, Baltic and Adriatic Seas, aimed to protect the common foreign policy interests of the neighboring countries. Ukraine, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Croatia, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Belarus, Slovenia and Macedonia are the potential participants of the Intermarium. The purpose is common upholding of the national, economic, cultural, political interests on the international stage. Due to joint efforts, there will be created the conditions not

only for overcoming of stagnation of the region, but also for the innovative breakthrough and the achieving of leadership in economic, scientific, technological and military spheres.” (ISG n.d.)

However, this official statement is only one part of the truth. In other statements, it becomes clear that alternative regional integration is supposed to function as a counter-project to the so-called globalist West and its disintegrating forces. The implementation of this geopolitical project is thus ultimately about preserving and promoting the region’s ethnocultural identities and resisting the forces that undermine them. Considering that Azov sees itself as a revolutionary political force that wants to bring about the rebirth of the ethnic nation in Ukraine and beyond, it quickly becomes clear that the Intermarium project is meant to create the institutional setting from which the diagnosed problems are to be tackled. In international framing, therefore, Intermarium is presented as a “laboratory for the rebirth of Europe,” meaning that it is not limited to itself but is intended to initiate an ethnonational revolution throughout Europe.

With this framing, Azov suggests to its western far-right audiences that they could also benefit from the establishment of Intermarium. In this logic, it is not only in the interest of regional actors to establish a geopolitical third way in Central and Eastern Europe, but in the interest of all far-right actors, since sooner or later the revolution will be carried from there to the West as well. At the same time, Azov is aware that immediate implementation of the movement’s geopolitical vision is very unlikely. This circumstance is considered in international framing and is countered by a step-by-step plan that will ultimately lead to the establishment of the Intermarium – at least that’s what Azov hopes for. By presenting this plan, Azov can lend plausibility to its framing and give its audience the impression that concrete steps can be done to advance the national revolution. Action-oriented narratives of this type are designed to have a mobilizing effect on the far-right network and motivate them to align with Azov’s agenda. Thus, how Azov envisions the gradual implementation of its geopolitical vision and how this plan is presented to the international audience will be discussed in the next subchapter.

8.2.3. Step-by-step plan: Turning Intermarium into Reality

Azov emphasizes in its communication that political change takes time and cannot be implemented from one day to the next. Therefore, as discussed earlier, the movement speaks of permanent revolution at the national level. Regarding the regional level, Azov states that the immediate establishment of Intermarium could take place only if a region-wide war with Russia broke out. War would force the states of the region to cooperate with each other, as no support could be expected from the West, Azov forecasts. However, since this is unlikely and Russia is

primarily using covert hybrid warfare (disinformation campaigns and economic pressure) to destabilize the region, alternative regional integration can only be implemented gradually, the movement concludes. To lend credibility to its agenda, Azov presents its potential allies with a step-by-step plan for the implementation of its vision of a geopolitical third way. In international framing, Azov thus gives the far-right network a long-term perspective, a seemingly realistic assessment, and concrete instructions for action to implement its political program.

The first step for the gradual implementation of Intermarium aims at establishing transnational cooperation between the nationalist forces in the region that sympathize with Azov's vision of an Adriatic-Baltic-Black Sea Union. Azov thus advocates cross-border networking of nationalist organizations in the region while creating the impression that this is already taking place. It suggests to its international audiences that the first step is already being implemented and that they are part of a greater plan that is becoming reality now. This first step further involves not only transnational cooperation of nationalist organizations in the region, but also the objective of influencing the respective national societies and making them familiar with the Intermarium concept. Azov thus gives its potential allies a mission that they can implement immediately in their own countries. Nationalist actors should promote the Intermarium concept to the public and bring it to the attention of national policymakers, Azov's suggests. The movement thus not only tries to impose a concept on its far-right audiences, but makes them part of it, trying to make them feel directly involved in the realization and transferring responsibility to them.

As the second step of implementing alternative regional integration, Azov presents the process of institutionalizing transnational cooperation. Within the framework of interparliamentary cooperation along the lines of the Nordic Council⁶, the Intermarium project is to be taken to the next level. The reference to the Nordic Council is intended to consider the fact that the countries in the region are already members of geopolitical alliances. Since it would be unrealistic to ask them to leave those to join Intermarium, Azov uses the Nordic Council as a role model. By referring to existing geopolitical models of cooperation, the movement can give the impression that its plan did not emerge out of thin air, but is quite realistic and feasible. With the concept of multi-vector geopolitics, Azov argues that individual states in the region should be allowed to participate in the Intermarium project while remaining within the geopolitical and economic alliances already in place. Referring to transnational cooperation already taking place between

⁶ Note: "The Nordic Council is the official body for formal inter-parliamentary co-operation. Formed in 1952, it has 87 members from Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland." (The Nordic Council n.d.)

the states of Central and Eastern Europe, Azov tries to prove that this process has already been initiated.

At the level of discursive strategy, Azov attempts to tie in with political developments that go far beyond the movement while at the same time suggesting in framing that theoretically, there is only a small step between these developments and the establishment of its geopolitical vision. Through this appropriation strategy, the movement uses achievements that have nothing to do with Azov itself to lend credibility and plausibility to its framing. The far-right audience is thus given the impression that the historical dynamics are favoring Azov's political vision and that it makes sense to actively support it. On the homepage of the Intermarium Support Group, this message is formulated as follows:

“Today, the perspective of Józef Piłsudski prevails in the terms of the Intermarium structure. Not coincidentally, the idea of the Intermarium in the diplomatic and social space of the region began to spread widely since the inauguration of new president of Poland, the conservative Andrzej Duda. The informational revival of the idea continued with active promotion by the president of Croatia, Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović, consequently, in such a manner, the Intermarium idea expanded far beyond the narrow Baltic-Black Sea format (‘the format of two seas’) into the so-called ‘three seas format’. Exactly the Croatian leader created the Adriatic-Baltic-Black Sea Group, which includes 12 EU member states, in geopolitical terms, centered around ‘The Visegrad Four’ that becomes growingly autonomous from the tandem ‘Berlin-Brussels’ (as it sometimes turns into a trio with the addition of ‘-Moscow’).” (ISG n.d.)

The third and final step concerns the establishment of Intermarium as Azov envisions it. In this context, Azov advocates the establishment of a confederation of sovereign nations in the region of Central and Eastern Europe. This confederation aims to open a geopolitical third way that can guarantee the independence of the region's nations as an alternative to the West and Russia. Intermarium, as Azov pictures it, is to pursue a jointly coordinated foreign and defense policy and cooperate at an economic, cultural, scientific and technological level. The guiding principle of the confederation is mutual benefit, and its realization is possible because of the common ethnocultural identity and history of the region, the movement further explains in international framing. Under the terms *geopolitical third way* and *Archeofuturism*, Intermarium is further linked to European far-right traditions and the audience is assured that it is a national-revolutionary project and not a reformist one. In this context Azov, speaks of “modernization without Westernization” and the “rebirth of the nation” and of a traditionalist society that is implemented with modern technologies.

Azov is concerned with producing a counter-modernity in Central and Eastern Europe based on ethnocultural values, representing the organic substance of communities rather than another variety of globalism. All the ideas Azov rejects in diagnostic framing, such as individualism, abstract human rights, citizenship that is not linked to ancestry, and so on, are supposed to be things of the past in this new geopolitical project. At the same time, Azov presents Intermarium to its audience not only as an end in itself, but as a “platform for alternative European integration”, i.e., the starting point for a national-revolutionary movement that is to extend across the entire continent and throughout the world. In an interview with Swedish Identitarians, the movement’s international secretary Semenyaka formulates this vision as follows:

“... and speaking about our own geopolitical program, we advocate a union of Central and Eastern European countries. We call it Intermarium or Adriatic-Baltic-Black Sea Union, but not as an end goal, but as a platform for the alternative of the EU, European integration. So, we also think globally. For us, it’s not only about Ukrainian well-being, about the increase of Ukrainian economy and demography or winning war with Russia and so on and so forth. We understand that everything is connected and that’s why we know that we will be able to solve these problems once and for all if we join forces with like-minded forces of the region in Europe and beyond. And again, speaking about things connected with each other on a global scale, the only thing we can do, [...] is to shape the alternative world order.” (Semenyaka 2019f)

So far, Azov’s geopolitical vision for the region of Central and Eastern Europe has been presented as articulated by the movement in international framing. Just as at the national level, Azov attaches great importance not only to talking about plans, but also to showing the international audience that it is actively working on their implementation. At the regional level, the movement actively seeks to relate to other organizations in the region, to align their respective national-historical narratives with each other, and to practice a new culture of mutual recognition. Through transnational action and its representation on the distribution channels, Azov stages itself as a role model and shows that collaboration is possible. How exactly the movement does this and how it is strategically articulated in international framing is the subject of the next subchapter.

8.2.4. Bringing Together Nationalist Forces of the Region

Azov wants to show its far-right network that it takes part in national struggles of allied forces abroad. The movement does not only want to preach a new nationalist culture, but also to show that it actively pursues it. Accordingly, Azov engages in a variety of activities at the regional level aimed at establishing transnational solidarity and cooperation. Azov then disseminates

information on these transnational activities on its distribution channels and accompanies them with corresponding narratives. By doing so, Azov can give consistency to its framing and prove to the far-right network that it is serious about its demands. Moreover, at a discursive level, Azov tries to create a new national-historical discourse that aims to reconcile the respective national narratives of the region. This metapolitical intervention is intended to overcome old conflicts, highlight commonalities, and thereby enable transnational cooperation. Accordingly, many of Azov's postings deal with historical issues, which at the same time are related to the movement's agenda.

The main narrative in this context is that the nations of the region have been divided by foreign forces and a misguided nationalist ideology. The nations of the region have fought each other, harmed each other, and developed conflicting national-historical narratives, Azov states in its framing. Because of this division, they have never been able to recognize their common interests. At the same time, they share the suffering that has been inflicted upon them. The nations of the region have the common fate of being at the mercy of foreign powers and never having been given the opportunity to establish their national sovereignty over a longer period of time, the movement states. To overcome these conflicts and to cooperate successfully in the future, it is therefore necessary to overcome division, to emphasize what the countries have in common, and to work on a collaborative solution.

To actively work on overcoming national conflicts, Azov engages in transnational activities that are presented on the movement's distribution channels. For example, Azov organizes summer camps for nationalist youth from the Intermarium countries, who can learn together about the national myths and narratives of their respective nations and relate them to each other. regarding these youth camps, Azov states that they are intended to provide young people with tools to critically confront the Russian government's disinformation campaigns. As explained in the chapter on prognostic framing at the national level, Azov's explicit goal is to educate a new generation of Ukrainian patriots capable of advancing the national revolution. Azov continues this goal at the regional level. In this case, Azov's aim is to bring young people from the Intermarium countries into contact with each other in order to introduce them to a new nationalist culture of mutual recognition. This seemingly egalitarian approach, however, does not change the fact that Azov is pursuing a neo-fascist agenda aimed at abolishing liberal modernity and building a social order in which the rebirth of a mythical nation can take place instead. It's just that the realization of this neo-fascist agenda should take place through egalitarian cooperation between far-right organizations because this is a more promising path. Events of this kind

are promoted by Azov on social media and show the network what innovative initiatives the movement has organized. A posting by the Intermarium Support Group frames this as follows:

“For the third year in a row, Youth Corps co-organizes ‘The Descendants of the Free’ international youth camp named after Kniaz Konstanty Ostrozky, an important figure uniting Ukrainians-Ruthenians and Litvins. September 8 was the anniversary of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Kingdom of Poland, led by Konstanty Ostrozky, defeated the army of Grand Duchy of Moscow ... The purpose of the camp is to create a platform for bringing together the youth from the Intermarium countries” (ISG 2018a)

During frame analysis, many other activities undertaken by Azov at the regional level were documented. The movement frequently visits allied nationalist organizations abroad, participates in events, demonstrations, commemorations and much more. There are countless expressions of solidarity with national struggles in other countries in the region on social media, and there are many programmatic articles dealing with the past of the Intermarium countries and their common struggle for independence against foreign powers, especially Russia.

International secretary Olena Semenyaka, in particular, strives to incorporate different national references into her narratives and thus tries to make an offer as inclusive as possible to the region’s national forces. Azov’s framing thus refers not only to the history of Ukraine and the national myths surrounding it, but also refers to, for example, Polish, Estonian or Croatian history, admits mistakes on the Ukrainian side in history, and thereby tries to establish a new discourse that is supposed to transcend national-chauvinist narratives. Azov further uses historical analogies to compare the history of the countries in the region. Military and political cooperation in the past is used as an example for the future, and the international audience is given the impression that cooperation between the nationalist organizations of the Intermarium countries is already well advanced.

Especially when it comes to controversial historical figures, Azov shows solidarity with the nationalists of the respective countries. For example, a posting by the Intermarium Support Group on the Remembrance Day of the Latvian Legionnaires in the face of international criticism states: “Latvian struggle for the objective historiographic narrative in defiance of the Kremlin’s and Western globalist demonization of the heroes is a great example to follow for the rest of the region and beyond” (ISG 2020). With narratives of this kind, Azov conveys to allies that the movement stands behind the national memory of its heroes, while the rest of the world wants to erase their national historical memory. Many more examples could be given to illustrate Azov’s communication strategy at the regional level.

To conclude, however, it is important to note that Azov is trying to implement the step-by-step plan it proclaims for itself. To achieve this, the movement is working energetically to build a culture of solidarity between the nationalist forces in the Intermarium region and to set a positive example. The presentation of these activities on Azov's social media channels is one of the most important selling points to give itself credibility and its framing plausibility. Azov's prognostic framing, however, goes beyond the national framework of Ukraine and the region of Central and Eastern Europe and formulates a vision for the entire European continent. In this vision, the movement tries to bind Western European nationalists to the Intermarium project. The far-right network is told that the revolution in the West can only take place if it is first triggered in the East. With this strategy, Azov is trying to convince nationalists in the West that although they are not from the region of Central and Eastern Europe, the implementation of Azov's agenda is still necessary and worth supporting.

3.3. Building Paneuropa: A Europe of Sovereign Nations Based on Ethnic Principles

Azov's political vision goes beyond Ukraine and Central and Eastern Europe and includes the entire European continent. Western European far-right actors are an important target group in the movement's communication and therefore specifically addressed. Especially regarding the Western far right, Azov is concerned with straightening out their misguided image of Russia as bulwark of traditionalist values – at least that is how Azov sees it. The movement's framing goes beyond Russia, however, and outlines a political vision for Western Europe that, while bringing little new with it, at the same time ties in with cultural narratives and contemporary discourses of the European far right that can potentially create narrative fidelity. In other words, Azov tells the Western far right what it wants to hear to create cultural resonance to which the movement can tie its agenda.

Azov's strategy is characterized by the movement's appropriation of pre-existing concepts and narratives, enriching them with intellectual references from the European far right's history of ideas, and ultimately creating a narrative that aims to align Western audiences with Azov's vision for Central and Eastern Europe – namely the creation of alternative regional integration. Azov pursues this strategy by participating in and trying to influence contemporary far-right debates in Europe. Through publications, the organization of and participation in conferences and visits to other organizations and initiatives abroad and through a variety of postings and statements on social media, the movement engages in the process of meaning production within its far-right network, offering narratives and directions for action that are aligned with the movement's political agenda.

This chapter first discusses Azov's appropriation and positioning within pan-European far-right discourse. It will be shown how the movement makes itself part of a transnational trend within the European far right whose goal is the establishment of a Europe of sovereign ethnoculturally homogeneous nations. This chapter further demonstrates how Azov tries to gain influence on its Western European far-right network through the attempt of creating a new culture of solidarity. Although these attempts are very similar to those at the regional level, they will nevertheless be discussed in brief. It will be shown that through the dissemination of historical-political narratives and gestures of solidarity with the struggles of national movements in Europe, Azov attempts to initiate a paradigm shift within the political culture of nationalist milieus in Europe, just as it does in Central and Eastern Europe. Finally, Azov's alignment strategies are discussed in order to demonstrate how Azov discursively ties the concepts of *Paneuropa* and *Reconquista* to its political agenda and which strategies it uses to do so. Ultimately, the movement wants to counterbalance Russia's influence on the European far right, and therefore uses various discursive strategies to tie the aspirations of the latter to its project.

3.3.1. Appropriation and Transformation of Pan-Europeanism

In its prognostic framing at the European level, Azov draws on an intellectual tradition of the European far right that seeks to transcend national borders. Instead of particularized national struggles, the movement advocates transnational cooperation based on a common European ethnocultural identity. With this framing, Azov builds on a political discourse of the European far right that is currently enjoying great prominence. It is a pan-European discourse, led primarily by the so-called European New Right and its descendants such as the Identitarian Movement, which has reached other far-right political milieus in recent years (Bieber 2019). Even if ideas of this kind are anything but new, they fit well into a time of dissolution of boundaries and are applied by transnational far-right actors accordingly. In this approach, Azov, and in particular international secretary Olena Semenyaka, ties in with existing concepts and narratives, transforms them in its favor and incorporates them into their political program.

With the term *Reconquista*, which aims at the "reconquest" of Europe, Azov describes the necessary process that should ultimately culminate in a united Europe of ethnic nations, which is referred to as *Paneuropa*. In joint and mutual support, European nationalists are supposed to work together to build a counterweight to globalism, according to Azov's attempt to influence its European network. Pan-Europeanism encompasses the idea of a "Nation Europe" or a Europe of sovereign nations whose respective national societies are organized based on ethnic or

ethnocultural characteristics. Azov thus advocates Paneuropa as a Europe of sovereign ethnic nations, in which “organic forms of life” are preserved – a model that can potentially resonate with the movement’s audience.

The concept of Reconquista can best be understood as a historical analogy that far-right actors like to use to stage their struggle against alleged Islamization and multiculturalism. The term refers to the historical phase of the Christian reconquest of the Iberian Peninsula (722-1492), which, according to the narrative, fought the Muslim influence in the region (Britannica Academic 2019). Organizations such as the Spanish far-right party Vox (Ramírez 2018), radical right-wing online groups such as the banned Reconquista Germanica in Germany (Standard 2018), or the pan-European Identitarian movement (Lauer 2017) all use the term Reconquista and have given it prominence in recent years. By drawing on these concepts, Azov appropriates another influential far-right concept and tries to participate in the production of its contemporary meaning. To its audience, Azov presents Reconquista as a political, cultural, and military struggle with the goal of establishing a society that returns to its organic nature.

The movement hardly changes the meaning of the concept, but merely ties it to its agenda to communicate its political core message: The revolt against modernity and the reconquest of the European continent will come from Eastern Europe and especially Ukraine, which is why nationalist forces should support the Azov movement’s aspirations of alternative regional integration – the Intermarium. Since, as communicated in diagnostic framing, the Russian government is a multiculturalist actor of globalism, no support can be expected from it in the reconquest of the continent. This framing strategy can be illustrated by an article by Olena Semenyaka, which by the way shows how inconsistent Azov is in separating its political from its military arm:

“While the West and Russia are too busy fighting each other and dividing Ukraine into their zones of influence, we strive to restore the geopolitical sovereignty of Europe starting with the modernization of Ukrainian army and the creation of the Intermarium defense union, which demands the rearmament of Europe and the rebirth of its security system instead of the search for the dubious Russian protectorate.” (Semenyaka 2019b)

Azov, in its attempt to shape the pan-European discourse of the far right, repeatedly addresses and counters Russian right-wing narratives, which have quite the standing within European far-right discourse. In this context, it is important to note that it is mainly the geopolitical notions of the influential Russian theorist Alexander Dugin that circulate within European far-right discourse (Shekhovtsov 2018, 42–48). This paper can only deal with Dugin’s theoretical work to

a very limited extent, but a few short explanations are necessary to understand the context in which Azov operates.

Alexander Dugin's geopolitical concept is widely known under the term of *Eurasianism* or neo-Eurasianism. At the heart of it lies the assumption that the engine driving the history of human civilization is the antagonism and thus struggle between sea powers and land powers. Sea powers are characterized by their openness, expansionism, and dynamic nature, while land powers are more closed, rooted, and traditional. The age of naval supremacy, also called Atlanticism, refers to a world order led by the United States of America and its allies – ultimately the hegemony of the West. In contrast to this, Dugin propagates the counter-struggle of land powers, which is to be led by Russia (Kalinin 2018). Olena Semenyaka explicitly refers to these concepts and agrees with the contemporary diagnosis of Atlanticism. At the same time, however, she rejects Dugin's distinction between sea powers and land powers and states that the global dominance of Atlanticism has reached the most remote corners of the world. It is not tenable that Russia should be excluded from this, she further notes. At least since Russia's annexation of Crimea, everyone should understand that Russia has become a maritime power and is therefore part of the planetary dominance of Atlanticism – in other words, part of globalism, according to Azov's framing.

Thus, contrary to Alexander Dugin's concept of Eurasianism, Azov propagates a far-right vision for Europe that is not focused on Russia but has Central and Eastern Europe not as the center but as the starting point of national revolution. By discursive interventions regarding the geopolitical worldview of the European far right, Azov tries to weaken the Russian position while at the same time offering an alternative. A 2019 article by international secretary Semenyaka, titled "Intermarium as the Third Geopolitical Way on Brzezinski's Grand Chessboard. Assessment of Putin's Russia", illustrates the movement's framing strategy in this regard:

"Dugin is wrong by pretending by means of his Fourth Political Theory that the third geopolitical way is no longer possible and that all attempts to restore the European superpower, geopolitical subjectivity and the leading positions in the 'unipolar' world are 'anti-Russian' encroachments in the service of American imperialism, as he labeled the Intermarium union. Russia which sided with sea powers (the Entente and the Allies) in both world wars, has never been a proper continental state, and the very division between Atlanticism and Neo-Eurasianism, thalassocracy and tellurocracy under conditions of described by Ernst Jünger technical planetary state is extremely outdated. Intermarium, etymologically, 'the land between seas,' will help to transcend old oppositions towards newer heuristic definitions" (Semenyaka 2019b)

In its attempt to influence the European far-right discourse on geopolitical issues, Azov has appropriated contemporary influential concepts within the far right and ties them to its agenda. Through various framing strategies, Azov further attempts to weaken the Russian narrative and discredit the notion of Russia as the geopolitical hope of the European far right. In this counterframing, Azov explicitly addresses and criticizes Alexander Dugin's theories. Instead, Azov propagates a united Europe of ethnic nations that follows the geopolitical third way, which is supposed to form a protective space against Western or Russian influence. To promote this and the movement itself, Azov networks with far-right organizations across Europe, shows solidarity with their struggles, and represents these activities on its various distribution channels. The next subchapter will therefore discuss the historical-political and solidarity-related strategies with which Azov attempts to further influence the European far right's discourse.

3.3.2. Forging Alliances in International Exchange

Azov is actively networking with far-right actors across Europe and beyond and takes every opportunity to advocate for its agenda. On the one hand, the movement is trying to establish Ukraine as meeting point of the international far right and to give a material reality to the narrative that the national revolution will start from there. On the other hand, Azov has international representatives that actively travel to other European countries to meet with far-right organizations and participate in conferences and other events.

The movement's online communication can further be conceived as digital campaigning, as Azov's statements performatively articulate gestures of solidarity aimed at establishing a new political culture in Europe's nationalist camps based on mutual recognition. Visits abroad are accompanied by postings and articles on Azov's distribution channels which express solidarity and offer national-historical narratives with which the movement gives an intellectual framework to its transnational activities.

When it comes to establishing Ukraine as a center of Europe's far right, Azov stands out with various activities. The movement organizes international conferences, subcultural events such as music festivals and regularly receives visits from foreign far-right organizations. The extent to which Azov allows interested foreigners to receive paramilitary training in Ukraine is disputed. It is certain, however, that Azov receives right-wing extremist actors from all over the world and has the resources to train them in weapons (Kuzmenko 2019). It is also undisputed that Azov actively recruited foreign fighters from abroad at the beginning of the armed conflict with Russia and that direct or indirect recruitment took place in far-right milieus in Europe and

beyond. Azov has thus always sought to bring foreign far-right actors to Ukraine to engage in political and military cooperation (see MacKenzie and Kaunert 2021).

As an example of Azov's subcultural activities, the annual Asgardsrei festival can be mentioned. The festival is considered the largest National Socialist Black Metal (NSBM) festival in Europe and attracts visitors from all over the continent to Ukraine. Right-wing extremist and neo-Nazi bands from numerous European countries play at the festival, where they can address a wide audience with their violence-inciting, anti-Semitic and racist lyrics glorifying National Socialism without fear of legal prosecution. The festival is organized by well-known Russian neo-Nazi activist Alexey Levkin, who migrated from Russia to Ukraine in 2014 to fight with the Azov Battalion against Russia and pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine (Colborne 2020a). The fact that the festival takes place in Ukraine now is quite symbolic because before 2014 the festival was held in Russia. Azov naturally takes advantage of the fact that far-right individuals from all over Europe have traveled to Ukraine to participate in this NSBM festival. In the run-up to the event, the movement organizes lectures at the Plomin Literary Club, which it uses to communicate its political program to the international guests.

In addition to subcultural events, Azov also organizes international conferences, which offer a platform for intellectual exchange of transnationally oriented far-right actors. The most notable examples include the Paneuropa conferences, which took place in Kiev in 2017 and 2018, and the annual Intermarium conference, which attracted representatives of far-right and extreme-right organizations from all over Europe. During these events, participants are encouraged to discuss the future of Europe, present their positions and thoughts, and get the opportunity to network with each other – activities with which Azov can boast on social media and show what an influential player it has become within the European far right.

However, allies and other interested people also come to Ukraine to visit Azov apart from visiting conferences and major events. For instance, the German neo-Nazi party *Der III. Weg* has visited Azov frequently in recent years, taking part in marches and commemorative events (Balzer 2021). The website of the *Der III. Weg* includes reports about their visits to Ukraine in German, in which Azov is promoted. Thus, through cooperation and alliances of this kind, Azov can draw attention to itself abroad and be heard through third parties and their word of mouth. In one of these reports, for example, *Der III. Weg* assures its readers that Azov is not reformist but revolutionary, and that it is both “national” and “socialist” – two characteristics that are important in the party's milieu. The German far right is thus told that Azov is to be taken seriously as a national-revolutionary force and that it is actively working on building a national rebirth:

“The goal of the movement is much more than to change the course of daily politics. It sees itself as a movement for the ethnic-national rebirth (*“völkische Neugeburt”*) of Ukraine. Social problems such as widespread corruption, oligarchy and a decline in values are to be eliminated through a new foundation at all levels. This foundation is a national and socialist worldview. In these endeavors, the movement can count on many sympathizers and supporters who have been longing for it for a long time.” (Der III. Weg 2016)⁷

Through testimonies of this kind, Azov can potentially enhance its reputation in national camps in Europe and dispel prejudices about being, for example, an agent of a Jewish conspiracy. However, Azov leaves its promotion abroad not only to its allies. In particular, international secretary Olena Semenyaka visits far-right organizations in other European countries on a regular basis, takes part in conferences and events, and tries to convince her audiences that they should support Azov and its vision of Intermarium. There are numerous documented cases of Azov delegations participating in demonstrations of other far-right organizations abroad, or being present at commemorative events, rallies and so on.

Visits abroad by Azov’s various sub-organizations are embedded on its distribution channels and used to promote the movement online as well. During frame analysis, numerous statements could be documented which are expressions of solidarity with nationalist organizations abroad. Analogies are often used to link the struggle of the organizations visited with Azov’s own struggles in Ukraine. In framing, commonalities are elaborated, shared historical traumas are pointed out, and current common enemies are identified. The basic message behind statements of this kind is that commonalities dominate across borders and transnational collective action based on a shared fate is not only desirable but necessary. At the same time, Azov shows with this strategy that it is really trying to establish the new nationalist culture of which it speaks – a key factor when it comes to the credibility of framing and thus its mobilization potential.

To give a few examples, in communication with Spanish far-right actors, Catalonia’s attempt to secede from Spain is being compared by Azov with separatist efforts in eastern Ukraine. In front of a Croatian audience, the common experience of war is emphasized, and Serbia is called an imperialist regime like Russia. It is important to keep in mind that during the war in eastern Ukraine, Croatian foreign fighters actually fought on the Ukrainian side against Serbian veterans on the pro-Russian side. Hence, these are narratives that refer to real international conflicts in which far-right actors from different countries and camps were and are physically involved, and not just wishful thinking of an ambitious far-right organization. In the case of states of the

⁷ Note: Translated from German into English by the author of this thesis.

former Soviet Union or states under its influence, the common traumatic experience of Soviet imperialism is often emphasized by Azov. Based on the common injustices that had to be experienced and that persist to this day, a common revolt is therefore necessary, according to Azov's narrative.

In its prognostic framing at the European level, Azov directly addresses a broad spectrum of far-right organizations and individuals. In order to get into direct contact, the movement organizes events in Ukraine on the one hand and sends representatives through Europe on the other, advertising for the movement abroad. Ultimately, Azov's goal is to explain to a primarily Western European far-right crowd why Russia is not an ally but part of the problem, why a national revolution is necessary throughout Europe, why this revolution can only start in Central and Eastern Europe, and why Azov must be supported in its struggle against Russia and its own elites.

3.3.3. Alignment and Expansion: Tying Reconquista to the Intermarium project

This thesis has mentioned at several points that Azov pursues a framing strategy which has a clear objective. Azov's goal is to increase its reputation within the European far right, at the same time devaluing the Russian government and making its audience receptive to its agenda. In this chapter, the framing challenges and how Azov responds to them will be discussed in detail. The frame analysis revealed a clear framing pattern that Azov uses to convince its far-right audience. As a rule, Azov tells a great story in which there are friends and enemies, problems and solutions. However, this story is not told thoughtlessly, but in a way that makes the far-right audience already recognize it in parts. Azov specifically draws on the collective consciousness of the European far right and its terms, concepts, myths, and narratives and assembles them to create a big picture that helps to spread its agenda. Of course, Azov also does this because it sees itself as part of the far right and feeds off its history. However, this appropriation has a strategic value when it comes to the mobilization potential of collective action frames – whether consciously or unconsciously. The big picture Azov paints potentially meets its far-right audiences in their worldview and doesn't offer them too much new – it doesn't overwhelm them. As we know from the literature on framing, this is important for successful communication because of the factors of narrative fidelity or cultural resonance.

While on the one hand Azov's meta-narrative is always very general and thus relatively inclusive, individual groups of the European far-right family are also specifically addressed. Especially international secretary Semenyaka is aware of the audience she is speaking to. Before and after visits abroad, postings by the movement are devoted to topics such as the history of

the country visited, its national myths, and its nationalist forces. Azov thus shows that, despite its broad narrative, the movement is at the same time genuinely interested in the respective national forces and wants to learn from them. Through this approach, the movement can build credibility in its demand for a new nationalist culture. This covers the important factor of frame consistency.

A key challenge for Azov to increase frame resonance is certainly the issue of frame centrality. As a reminder: Frame centrality means that it is not only important to address topics, values, and ideas that the target audience can somehow identify with, but to address exactly those that are central to them (Benford and Snow 2000, 621). At this point, Azov is faced with a problem. The movement knows how to address certain themes, concepts, and narratives that will resonate with its audience. For example, Olena Semenyaka uses more radical rhetoric or disseminates more radical narratives in front of more radical audiences. In a lecture for an extreme right-wing Polish group, Semenyaka talks a lot about homophobia, proudly proclaiming that the Ukrainian population is probably the most homophobic in Europe and Russian puppets like Poroshenko brought LGBT rights to the country. Given the high centrality of homophobia in the Polish national camp's discourse (Janiszewski 2021), it can be assumed that Semenyaka knows this and therefore explicitly addresses this topic.

The real challenge with frame centrality, however, is to address topics that are important for the movement's agenda, and which are known not to be directly relevant for the target group. And this is a very fundamental problem for Azov. Explaining to the Central and Eastern European audience that Russia pursues an expansionist foreign policy and threatens their national sovereignty meets them directly in the reality of their lives. Explaining to a Western European far-right audience, which is far away from the realities of life in Central and Eastern Europe, a region whose conflicts hardly play a role in Western European national and transnational struggles, that the establishment of an Adriatic-Baltic-Black Sea Union should be their most immediate goal, can in some ways be seen as an obstacle for Azov.

Still, Azov tries to deal with this challenge and discursively links the aspirations of Western European nationalists to the necessity of establishing Intermarium. In this attempt, the core of Azov's framing strategy is fully expressed in all elements, which is why this attempt is discussed using a paradigmatic example. In a posting from the ISG, Azov reports that a delegation visited Swedish nationalists. They came to Sweden to show solidarity with the national history of the Swedish nation:

“Today, the Poltava branch of National Corps joined the commemoration in honor of Charles XII of Sweden held by Swedish patriots in Stockholm. Participants remembered the hero king at the Monument to the Swedes from the Swedes erected on the initiative of the Swedes in the midst of the field where the Battle of Poltava in 1709 unfolded.” (ISG 2018c)

With reports like these, Azov shows how serious the movement is about establishing transnational solidarity – and there are countless of them on its social media accounts. Azov’s framing, however, does not stop with this demonstration of solidarity, but, looking back at history, builds a connection between the struggle of Swedish nationalists and that of Ukrainians. The antagonist, which at that time “forced” transnational solidarity is – Russia:

“300 years ago, King of Sweden Charles XII died, the one who has not only entered an alliance with Ukrainian Hetman Ivan Mazepa to liberate Ukraine from the Russian rule but also recognized later Ukraine as an independent state and guaranteed its rights and freedoms in accordance with the Constitution of Pylyp Orlyk.” (ISG 2018c)

The commemoration is taken as an occasion to integrate an initially not directly related topic into the movement’s narrative (frame bridging). In a further step, Azov transports an event that took place 300 years ago directly into the present. Azov manages to reproach Russia’s disinformation and to emphasize that the true Ukrainian-Swedish history has yet to be rediscovered:

“The Poltava battle is one of the most interesting and at the same time one of the most unknown pages of the Ukrainian and Swedish history ... The Kremlin propaganda still tries to represent the battle of Poltava as a triumph of the Russian domination emphasizing that almost all Zaporozhian Cossacks joined Tsar Peter. The manipulation is quite cheap, but many people still buy it.” (ISG 2018c)

After the framing has been brought into the present, Azov moves directly to addressing Intermarium. From a story that was used very selectively and took place 300 years ago, Azov now explains that Sweden is the natural ally of Intermarium. So, in a joint fight against Russia, they will be victorious and repel the invaders, the postings ends:

“Sweden and Ukraine are deeply connected in history, which, as you see, is true not only with regard to the Varangian (Viking) period of Kyvian Rus. As a result, both geographically and historically, Sweden is a natural ally of the Intermarium region and Ukraine. Our next battle against the invaders will be victorious!” (ISG 2018c)

Framing strategies of this type can be found in Azov’s communication frequently. In numerous postings, Azov expresses solidarity with the struggles of nationalist organizations from

abroad and gets involved in their national-historical discourse. On social media channels, you can find photos of Azov soldiers posing in front of a Latvian monument commemorating the Battle of More in Sigulda in which the Latvian Legion fought against the Red Army in WWII. In other postings, the ISG remembers the 1956 uprising against the Soviet Union in Hungary or congratulates Estonia on 100 years of independence. Overall, Azov always refers to history to highlight supposed commonalities, implicitly arguing that nationalist organizations from Spain to Hungary to the Baltics to Ukraine share a common fate. Through this strategy, Azov attempts to establish frame centrality even for those who are not actually affected in their life reality by Azov's conflict with Russia.

Azov's emphasis of the need for a new nationalist culture in Europe may be genuinely serious, but at the same time it serves a material purpose – that is self-interest. Azov wants to generate sympathy for itself and its political vision in far-right milieus in Europe and resorts to complex framing strategies to achieve this. So far, Azov's main diagnostic and prognostic framings have been discussed at different levels and in relation to different topics. While Azov's diagnostic framing at the global level must be understood as a time-diagnostic metanarrative, the solutions Azov offers to the international audience are very vague. The outlook for a global national revolution serves the movement more as a sketchy vision than as a concrete implementation plan. Nevertheless, a final chapter will address the few narratives the movement offers to its international audience at the global level before a conclusion will summarize the findings of this thesis and provide a final answer to the research question.

3.4. Building an Alternative World Order: Joint World-Wide Struggle against Globalism

Azov's communication is primarily related to Europe and addresses a mainly European far-right audience. The narrative Azov spreads is nevertheless global in its dimensions and contains a vision of global change. This chapter should therefore be understood more as an outlook, in which central elements of the movement's framing are connected again and discussed within a global dimension. It has already been explained in the first chapter of the empirical part of this thesis that Azov uses a time-diagnostic framing to embed its political program in a metanarrative. This metanarrative presents the world in captivity of a global world order that is hostile to the nations of this world. As a reverse conclusion from this diagnosis, Azov derives the necessity of organizing transnationally to be able to counterbalance the supremacy of globalism. In its framing, the movement emphasizes that there can only be global answers to global problems and that nationalist forces must break away from the narrow confinement of their national

frameworks. The movement's "global" audience, however, is usually a Western one, and by global responses Azov usually means responses that concern the so-called European or Western civilization or, in some framings, the "white race".

As a counterproposal to the rule of globalism, Azov advocates an alternative world order. What this exactly means and what shape it should take can hardly be derived from the movement's framing. However, considering the movement's diagnostic and prognostic framing at the different levels, some conclusions can be drawn about Azov's global plan. Azov rejects liberal societies and what the movement calls liberal modernity and wants to abolish them. Instead, the movement yearns for a society in which the organic potential of the world's ethnic communities is represented in a state entity. Every nation has the right to homogeneity and plurality of cultures should exist not within state communities but between them, according to Azov's ethnopluralist program. When it comes to far-right ideologies, usually only the most radical actors within this political camp spell out what the implementation of their plans actually means. In the context of Azov's vision of society, two questions arise. First, who decides on what basis who is part of the ethnic collective and who is not? And second, how is the fact that all modern societies are multiethnic to be dealt with? So, if one takes this kind of political program seriously, its vision is aimed at an ethnic cleansing of society, based either on the voluntariness of those who do not belong to the collective – that is, that they leave the country, or are forced to do so.

Azov's answer to the diagnosed global problems, apart from emphasizing the need for transnational cooperation, is to be found at the national level. Since all political enemies are identified as actors of globalism, this is not a contradiction. As a rule, the concept of globalism hides the idea of a superior power of sinister elites who direct world events and are implicitly or explicitly identified with a Jewish conspiracy – or represent Jewish principles (see Rensmann and Schoeps 2011). Even though Azov is rarely explicitly anti-Semitic in its international framing, it serves an anti-Semitic discourse and does not manage to conceal this at every point. Given the movement's neo-fascist agenda and its contacts in neo-Nazi milieus throughout Europe, this is hardly surprising.

In the depths of the Internet, however, one can find statements by Azov that are explicitly anti-Semitic and provide information about the radical nature of the movement. Statements of this kind demonstrate that Azov's global prognostic framing is ultimately aimed at fighting globalism in the national context – that is, ultimately persecuting those whom the movement identifies as agents of globalism. Furthermore, statements of this type prove that Azov's worldview is strongly influenced by anti-Semitic conspiracy theories and sees "Jewish

principles” as the root of all of modernity’s evil. In an interview on a neo-Nazi podcast conducted by a member of the Nordic Resistance Movement, the international secretary is asked quite explicitly about the “Jewish Question.” The interviewer first asked Semenyaka blatantly “What’s Azov’s opinion of the eternal nose people, namely the Jews?” and Olena Semenyaka responded with an unequivocal answer:

“Our opinion is that we must change the world economic system because financial interest is connected with certain groups of this origin. Of course, they harm the interests of Europeans, like with the artificial problem in the Middle East they have created which we have to pay for. Without the support of Israel, we would not have this kind of refugee influx we’re seeing now. We therefore believe that these international circles should be restricted in the economic sphere but also in public discussion. Otherwise, they will always have some instruments to harm us with.” (Semenyaka 2018)

Semenyaka thus states not only that Jews dominate the economic system with their interests, but also that “the Jews” in their manifestation as the state of Israel are responsible for the refugee crisis. The international secretary pleads for a “restriction” of these “international circles”. What this means exactly, however, is not clear. But when the interviewer asks Semenyaka whether Jews will still be allowed in Ukraine when Azov comes to power, she answers that Jews who are involved with “international capital” will have to leave Ukraine:

“If any minority remains loyal to Ukraine they can stay. However, having had a minority of Jews involved within our nationalist political sphere has damaged our reputation. We will at the very least consider their political power and see if they have ties to the international capital. This means that Jews like Igor Kolomoisky would not be allowed to stay.” (Semenyaka 2018)

In summary, Azov’s prognostic framing is multilayered, linking the global to the national level. The global problem is to be fought at the national level by attacking those who, in the eyes of the movement, represent liberal modernity. At the same time, Azov’s solution strategy is transnational since it assumes that combating national problems can only be accomplished in cooperation with like-minded people abroad. The national revolution, and with it the rebirth of the Ukrainian nation, points beyond the borders of Ukraine.

Since the national sovereignty of Ukraine and other states in the region is permanently threatened and undermined not only by internal but also external enemies, a geopolitical union of these states is necessary, Azov proclaims in its geopolitical program. Thus, the Adriatic-Baltic-Black Sea Union or Intermarium is to be built step by step, not only to preserve the ethnocultural identities of the region, but also to carry the national revolution across the entire continent. As

a geopolitical third way, Azov's goal is to establish a Europe of nations that can resist both Western and Eastern influence. The way to this Paneuropa, as Azov calls it, is to succeed by reconquering the European continent. Because the historical conditions in Central and Eastern Europe are ideal to initiate the Reconquista, it is necessary for Western European far-right actors to support Azov in its aspirations, according to the core of Azov's motivational framing.

On the horizon of Azov's prognostic framing, there is a dream of an alternative world order in which it is no longer the rule of globalism but the will of the ethnic peoples that determines social life. To conclude this chapter, and thus the empirical part of this thesis, a quote from the Intermarium Support Group will be cited, which paradigmatically sums up Azov's program between national struggle and global claims:

"The rebirth of the Third Way in the revolutionary Maidan, the third geopolitical way in particular, an undertaking by Ukrainian nationalists of such ambitious projects as Intermarium and Paneuropa, accordingly, was not only a result of understanding that only global changes might provide a satisfactory for us solution of the Ukrainian national question. This is the evidence of all-consuming flame of the awakened national-revolutionary spirit, which, having born out of the patriotic needs of a particular nation, can never remain in narrow national limits and always strives for the alternative world order. Whether this is also a sign of metaphysical shifts that promise a better future for the West, is a question to us. But it is important to keep in mind that every time when you hear the patriotic national-liberation rhetoric on the part of Ukrainian nationalists, it is both sincere and incomplete since the planetary and metahistorical changes they crave for remain unspoken." (Semenyaka 2019b)

Azov's global outlook concludes the empirical part of this thesis. It is narratives of this kind with which Azov integrates its national agenda into a global framework and attempts to generalize its own affairs within the transnational far-right network. In a concluding part, the findings of this thesis will be reflected upon in summary and examined with regard to the question of what mobilization potential emanates from Azov's international communication. Furthermore, in the question of mobilization potential, it is necessary to relate Azov's communication to other framework conditions that help decide who will prevail in questions of geopolitical interpretive sovereignty within the far right. Ultimately, communication alone does not determine political success; there are many other factors to consider. Although this thesis cannot address these factors in depth, they will be pointed out in the conclusion.

CHAPTER V: Conclusion

In its attempt to constitute itself as a transnational social movement, the European far right has often failed due to internal conflicts. This case study has shown that this issue is still relevant today and addressed openly in the field of geopolitics. The conflict between Russia and Ukraine divides the European far right on the question of how to relate to it and with whom to show solidarity. While the Russian position is certainly dominant, especially among radical right-wing populist parties, the Ukrainian Azov movement is trying to counter this tendency. The aim of this thesis was to show that the transnational network of the European far right is characterized by contested discursive processes in which its self-image is permanently negotiated by a multitude of participating actors. Who prevails in these contentious and discursive negotiation processes is determined by many factors, of which the applied communication strategy of participating actors is only one. It has been this thesis project's aim to demonstrate that social movement research approaches can contribute significantly to explaining these discursive dynamics within the transnational far right. In the theoretical part of this thesis, I have argued that social movement frame analysis informs us about what core tasks social movement actors' communication should fulfill to optimally mobilize for collective action based on a shared understanding of the world. Based on these theoretical assumptions, the research question can now be answered by considering the results of the frame analysis conducted in this thesis.

The research question that guided the analysis asked what international communication strategy Azov is pursuing in the context of the geopolitical conflict between Russia and Ukraine and what insights Azov's geopolitical positions provide into the current state of the forming transnational far right. The results of frame analysis show that Azov offers its European far-right network a variety of narratives designed to resonate through the use of a wide range of framing strategies. Azov's communication includes diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational framing at various geographic levels that is ultimately intended to convince the far-right audience that Russia is not an ally of national-revolutionary aspirations in Europe but pursuing a neo-imperialist agenda in which the European far right is merely exploited. The counterproposal Azov offers its European audience is that instead of putting all hopes in Russia, it should join Azov's fight against globalism and restore the ethnic foundation of European societies within the framework of equal transnational cooperation. In order to credibly explain why Russia is part of the problem and Azov is actively working to solve it, the movement employs various framing strategies to discredit Russia and to present itself as a vanguard of national-revolutionary efforts. At the same time, Azov's agenda goes beyond the conflict between Russia

and Ukraine and encompasses a global perspective of overcoming liberal modernity and establishing an alternative world order based on ethnic principles.

It is difficult to say whether Azov's global agenda is a means to an end in order to create cultural resonance with the addressed audience and convince them to solidarize with Azov in its struggle for geopolitical sovereignty. However, since Azov is a movement that not only agitates against Russia but is actively trying to build a radical opposition to the political establishment in Ukraine itself, it can be assumed that the movement has political goals that go beyond the geopolitical conflict with Russia. Azov explains in its framing that a struggle is taking place in Ukraine between globalist elites, which are responsible for the decay of culture and values, and nationalist forces, at whose forefront Azov sees itself. Applying Roger Griffin's (2018) definition of fascism to Azov's international framing, the movement undoubtedly pursues a neo-fascist agenda, which is about the rebirth of the ethnic nation in a completely new social order on Ukrainian soil. Also, regarding this question, one can ask whether Azov formulates this agenda only to appeal to its far-right target groups and to get them on its side in the geopolitical conflict with Russia. Given the history of Azov's leadership in the neo-Nazi milieu of post-independence Ukraine, Azov's continuous networking with radical and extreme right-wing actors across the European continent and beyond, and the movement's often violent political activities in Ukraine, this explanation does seem relatively unlikely.

At the heart of Azov's internationally communicated agenda is the vision of establishing a geopolitical bloc in the region of Central and Eastern Europe, brought to the European audience under the name Intermarium. Azov's vision for an Adriatic-Baltic-Black Sea Union is to militarily secure the geopolitical sovereignty of the region, protect it from Western and Russian influence, and act as a "laboratory for the rebirth of Europe." A new social order is to be born in the region of Central and Eastern Europe, in which the ethnic substance of the region is to be fully expressed through the use of modern technologies. Archeofuturism, geopolitical third way, pan-Slavic neo-fascism – the terms with which one can describe this project are manifold. Azov's agenda does not end in its region, however, but aims at the whole. The European continent is to be reconquered starting from Central and Eastern Europe, and instead of the European Union, a Europe of ethnic nations is to be established, in which the plurality of cultures exists not within but between national societies – ethnopluralism being the technical term. Azov's vision is an alternative world order that has replaced the age of world-wide dominance of globalism and in which political and social life is determined not by the interests of sinister elites but by the will of the ethnic peoples. This vision may sound harmless and idealistic in theory, but in reality, it could only be implemented with brutal racist violence against those that

are declared outsiders of the ethnic community – a field of action in which the far right has proven itself well in history.

Now, it has already been mentioned that Azov's agenda is an alternative to a narrative that sees Russia as the vanguard of national-revolutionary aspirations in Europe and beyond. And it is evident that the Russian narrative is the more dominant one within the far right. Now this thesis has addressed the question of what communication strategies Azov is pursuing to strengthen its position vis-à-vis the Russian one. By examining Azov's international communication through a social movement frame analysis, it was possible not only to identify central narratives, but also to examine the strategy with which these are linked, arranged, and highlighted. Azov's communication is characterized by clearly identifiable framing strategies which in many cases can potentially help the movement to connect its agenda to the addressed audience. The communication pattern employed by Azov consists mainly of appropriation, extension and transformation of already existing narratives that circulate within far right and enjoy a certain popularity. Through this strategy, Azov is able to create cultural resonance and relate to the audience in its worldview. Through the reception of influential theoretical traditions within the far right, Azov participates in the meta-political discourse, lends itself intellectual credibility, and creates a discursive space in which it can place its agenda. Azov's narratives are broad enough to appeal to a variety of different actors of the far-right spectrum, but in most cases, they are also personalized so that relevant audiences can feel addressed. With its historical-political narratives, the movement specifically addresses commonalities in the past between Ukraine and the respective countries and their national movements, creating a common ground on which solidarity-based cooperation can take place. Azov also invests a lot of framing activity in showing that it does not only talk about solutions, but actively works on implementing them. By presenting its activities at the national level, but also in terms of gestures of transnational solidarity, the movement tries to give credibility to itself and its agenda.

Azov's construction of social reality is permanently underpinned by references to empirical cases that are supposed to show that the movement's narratives have substance – we know from frame theory that this is relevant for the empirical credibility of frames. For far-right actors from Central and Eastern Europe, Azov's framing has the potential to achieve experiential commensurability, i.e. to connect to them in their everyday lives. The emphasis of the danger of Russia's expansionist foreign policy with the historical analogy of neo-Soviet imperialism draws on historical traumas and uses them to draw attention to alternatives. Even within the Western European far right, anti-communist sentiments may be evoked, potentially contributing to a weakening of the Russian position. In addressing existing positive narratives about

Russia, Azov further engages in active counterframing, offering alternative narratives that cast Russia in a different light. As part of this counterframing strategy, the movement builds on existing enemy images of the far right and transfers them onto the Russian government. Russia is staged as a globalist actor that promotes multiculturalism, Islamism, and repression against nationalists – a nightmare for every upright radical right-winger.

The biggest framing challenge for Azov is that of centrality. To successfully mobilize for collective action or for a political agenda, frames usually have to address not only issues that are remotely relevant to the target groups, but those that are central to them. Azov does this in its framing and skillfully ties in with existing discourses of the far right. The problem, however, is that at the heart of the movement's political agenda lies the region of Central and Eastern Europe and, in this context, a project whose implementation is very far away from reality. Azov's answer to the geopolitical tension in the region, and thus the solution to Azov's problems, is the creation of Intermarium – the Adriatic-Baltic-Black Sea Union. The implementation plan is intended to give plausibility to the project, Azov further refers to political developments at the official level to show that the historical dynamic is going in that direction and metaphysical and historical-political narratives are used to explain why the national revolution is about to begin in Central and Eastern Europe. For some far-right actors in the region itself, this vision may be convincing, and it is quite plausible that Azov will continue to promote the concept of Intermarium in its communication with allies in Central and Eastern Europe. For the majority of the Western European far right, however, the geopolitical conflicts in the region are simply too insignificant for them to allow Azov to score points with abstract geopolitical plans. The solidarity with Russia, which is dominant within the European far right, can be explained in the author's eyes, on the one hand, by the projection of political strength onto the Russian government and, on the other hand, by economic and power-political interests, and not because the far-right might care so much about the geopolitical situation in the region.

So, to return from Azov's framing to reality, it is necessary to take a look at the bigger picture. Azov's attempt to convince the European far-right network of its agenda does not fail in the movement's communication. The movement invests heavily in telling a credible story that can resonate with its audience, and it delivers. If it were only due to framing, Azov's communication would probably fail only due to the discussed factor of centrality. Of course, other elements in the communication strategy could be mentioned, ones that do not necessarily drive the mobilization potential, but they are negligible in the eyes of the author. But looking at the power constellation between Azov (and its allies) and Russia, one finds on the one side a conglomerate of small radical fringe groups, and on the other side a regional power with a highly equipped

military and global ambitions. Given Russia's power and proven influence not only on the European far right, but also on other political actors in the region and beyond, Azov's positions within the far right will most likely remain marginal. It remains to be seen how geopolitical tensions in Central and Eastern Europe will develop, and the movement is certainly right when it says that increasing escalation could make regional cooperation more likely – especially when the involvement of the United States, the EU and NATO is not sufficient for the leading political actors in the region. The only question is under whose leadership this cooperation will take place, and it is very unlikely that it will be forces like Azov and its allies.

However, it would be a completely false conclusion to consider the Azov movement a harmless phenomenon just because it is relatively insignificant compared to Russia. Azov is probably the largest militant neo-fascist movement in Ukraine, which, from the perspective of far-right research, is closely connected to other extreme right-wing actors abroad. The increasing networking of militant extreme right-wing actors in Europe and beyond is worrying and has the potential to create cross-border structures that can be a threat to national and international security, especially when it comes to right-wing terrorist efforts and the increasing militarization of the scene. Azov is undoubtedly an important player in this network, possessing resources, infrastructure and military experience and enjoying acceptance from political authorities and large parts of civil society in Ukraine, from which the entire network can potentially benefit. The movement has proven many times in the past that it is willing to use violence to advance its political agenda, and it is expected to continue in the future. Thus, the threat posed by Azov is not so much at a geopolitical level, but in its significance to the transnational militant extreme right-wing network and the situation in Ukraine itself. Ukrainian democracy and its unstable institutions are at risk, as well as those labeled enemies of the movement, such as ethnic minorities, political activists, the LGBT community, and all the others who are considered degenerate and inferior in the neo-fascist world view of Azov. To counter this, there needs to be an international public that continues to monitor the movement and – this is perhaps the greatest challenge – a condemnation of Azov by Ukrainian civil society and leading political actors in the country. Given the continuing hybrid war with Russia, however, this seems unlikely.

But what does this assessment tell us about the state of the transnational oriented far right in general? Just as the history of far right is characterized by conflict, so it is today. While it may be possible to overlook conflict in ideological matters, it is much more difficult to do so in geopolitical matters. For far-right actors who are not directly affected by the geopolitical tensions between Russia and Ukraine (and the other states in the region), the question of positioning may be more of an ideological side issue. For far-right players from the region, however,

things look quite different. The question of whether one looks to Russia as a national-revolutionary vanguard is completely different when one lives in a state affected by Russia's aggressive foreign policy. Thus, there is no sign that this geopolitical cleavage in the region will disappear. The intensity with which this conflict will be fought out will vary depending on the current situation and will also depend on how the political composition in the region will develop. For far-right actors in the region, however, and Azov has recognized this well, this enmity represents an opportunity to create a cross-border collective identity based on a common enemy. However, the extent to which this succeeds depends to a large extent on who can assert themselves in the respective national discourses of the far right in the region. As shown in this thesis, these contested discursive processes within political movements determine how collective identities emerge and transform. It is conceivable that the active participation of Azov and its allies in these discourses can intensify transnational cooperation of far-right actors in the region. The question, then, is whether Azov and its allies will succeed in displacing the conflict-ridden history of the countries in the region from the discourse of the far right and instead establish transnational solidarity based on a current common enemy.

In this context, it is important to emphasize that Azov's attempt fits into current developments within the European far right, in which trans- and supranational identities and ethnopluralist concepts of society are becoming increasingly hegemonic. In the eyes of the author, a transformation of the far right's identity is currently taking place, in which old identity concepts are being replaced by new ones. It is not the case that the ideological core of the far right has changed, but much more the geographical frame of reference that has expanded the national by the supra- and transnational. It is not surprising that these far-reaching processes of change also lead to conflicts within movements. Based on this assessment, the conflict between Russia and Ukraine must be understood as a disruptive factor rather than a rule. The far right is not expected to retreat to its national frameworks any time soon, reviving national chauvinism and breaking off the process of transnational networking. The far right will continue to be in the process of precariously trying to consolidate itself as a transnational movement. Geopolitical conflicts such as the one between Russia and Ukraine do not necessarily contribute positively to this process, but they cannot stop it due to their lack of relevance for many actors within the far right. Only time will tell whether the far right will develop into a consolidated global anti-globalist movement. However, the danger posed by far-right organizations to democratic societies does not only exist when they have consolidated as a transnational movement, but also increases during their process of consolidation. The increasing transnational cooperation of far-

right actors therefore represents a threat that must be monitored and countered by democratic actors in research, government, and civil society.

Primary Sources

- CC Azov. 2016. "March of Unbowed." *Nackor*. <https://nackor.org/en/marsh-neskorenih>.
- Der III. Weg. 2016. "Ukraine: Azov-Bewegung expandiert." *Nationale Partei - DER III. WEG*. <https://der-dritte-weg.info/2016/09/ukraine-azov-bewegung-expandiert/> (Accessed June 29, 2021).
- Interregnum. 2019. "The Azov Movement in the West: achievements in 2019." <https://interregnum-intermarium.tumblr.com/post/184469943719/the-azov-movement-in-the-west-achievements-in>.
- ISG. 2018a. "Descendants of the Free named after Kniaz Konstanty Ostrozky." *Intermarium Support Group*. <https://www.facebook.com/intermariumsupportgroup> (Accessed April 20, 2020).
- ISG. 2018b. "Latvian National Alliance did it again!" *Intermarium Support Group*. <https://www.facebook.com/intermariumsupportgroup> (Accessed April 20, 2020).
- ISG. 2019a. "March against capitulation yesterday on Ukraine's defender day." *Intermarium Support Group*. <https://www.facebook.com/intermariumsupportgroup> (Accessed April 20, 2020).
- ISG. 2018c. "National Corps commemorated ally Swedish King Charles XII." *Intermarium Support Group*. <https://www.facebook.com/intermariumsupportgroup> (Accessed April 20, 2020).
- ISG. "Program." *Intermarium*. <https://intermarium.org.ua/en/about-en/> (Accessed April 20, 2020).
- ISG. 2019b. "'The Evolution of the Azov Movement' at the event of NPD in Saxon Switzerland." *Intermarium Support Group*. <https://www.facebook.com/intermariumsupportgroup> (Accessed April 20, 2020).
- ISG. 2020. "Today, March 16, is the Remembrance Day of the Latvian Legionnaires." *Intermarium Support Group*. <https://www.facebook.com/intermariumsupportgroup> (Accessed April 20, 2020).
- Johnson, Greg. 2018. "Greg Johnson 'Fukuyama on Identity Politics.'" *YouTube*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QKqYSY4Rl_w&t=172s (Accessed June 21, 2021).
- Nackor. 2016a. "Intermarium - An Alternative of the EU." *Nackor*. <https://nackor.org/en/intermarium--alternativas> (Accessed March 30, 2020).
- Nackor. 2016b. "On April 14, 2014, the Ukrainian government announced the beginning of the so-called anti-terrorist operation." *Nackor*. <https://nackor.org/en/14-kvitnya-2014-roku-ukrainskiy-uryad-ogolosiv-pro-pochatok-provedennya-tak-zvanoj-antiteroristichnoi-operacii> (Accessed March 30, 2020).

- Semenyaka, Olena. 2018. "Article III: Azov Interview." https://archive.org/stream/TheFashCastAnthologyWithoutImages/The_FashCast_Anthology_without_images_djvu.txt (Accessed June 28, 2021).
- Semenyaka, Olena. 2019a. "Intermarium as a laboratory of the European Archeofuturism." *Intermarium*. <https://intermarium.org.ua/en/intermarium-as-a-laboratory-of-the-european-archeofuturism/> (Accessed June 28, 2021).
- Semenyaka, Olena. 2019b. "'Intermarium as the Third Geopolitical Way on Brzezinski's Grand Chessboard. Assessment of Putin's Russia.'" *Intermarium Support Group*. <https://www.facebook.com/intermariumsupportgroup> (Accessed April 22, 2020).
- Semenyaka, Olena. 2019c. "Nationalists vs. Euromaidan." *Intermarium Support Group*. <https://www.facebook.com/intermariumsupportgroup>. (Accessed April 22, 2020).
- Semenyaka, Olena. 2016. "Olena Semenyaka about Azov Revonquista." https://www.mixcloud.com/a_radio/azov-fm-azov-w-family-olena-semenyaka-about-azov-reconquista/ (Accessed June 29, 2021).
- Semenyaka, Olena. 2019d. "The Conservative Revolution & Right-Wing Anarchism." *Counter-Currents Publishing*. <https://www.counter-currents.com/2019/05/the-conservative-revolution-right-wing-anarchism/>
- Semenyaka, Olena. 2019e. "The Finnish-Ukrainian Cooperation then and now as seen by National Corps." *YouTube*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JIUP7PuiSbo>.
- Semenyaka, Olena. 2019f. "The First Lady of Ukraine with Anton and Jonas." *YouTube*. (Accessed November 11, 2019).
- Semenyaka, Olena. 2019g. "The role of the West in the Maidan Revolution and War with Russia." *Intermarium Support Group* (Accessed May 21, 2020).
- Semenyaka, Olena. 2019h. "Mid-Europe in the Age of Caesarism and the Purpose of Ethnofuturism." Ethnofutur III conference, February 23. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SDCHO_zXIic. (Accessed July 1, 2021)
- Yurchenko, Eduard. 2016. "Our understanding of the nation." *Nackor*. <https://nackor.org/en/nashe-rozuminnya-nacii> (Accessed June 28, 2021).
- Zheleznov, Roman. 2016. "Russia becomes a hotbed of Islamic terrorism." *Nackor*. <https://nackor.org/en/rosiya-sta-rozsadnikom-islams-kogo-terorizmu> (Accessed June 28, 2021).

Bibliography

- Adams, Ian. 2001. Political ideology today. Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press.
- Adorno, Theodor W., ed. 1969. The authoritarian personality. New York, NY: Norton.

- Aliyev, Huseyn. 2016. "Strong militias, weak states and armed violence: Towards a theory of 'state-parallel' paramilitaries." *Security Dialogue* 47(6): 498–516.
- Balzer. 2021. "Rechtsextreme in der Ukraine: Olena Semenyaka auf ideologischer Mission." *Belltower.News*. <https://www.belltower.news/rechtsextreme-in-der-ukraine-olena-semenyaka-auf-ideologischer-mission-110353/> (Accessed June 29, 2021).
- Balzer, Erika. 2021. "Rechtsextreme in der Ukraine: Olena Semenyaka auf ideologischer Mission." <https://www.belltower.news/rechtsextreme-in-der-ukraine-olena-semenyaka-auf-ideologischer-mission-110353/> (Accessed June 25, 2021).
- Bar-On, Tamir. 2018. *The Radical Right and Nationalism*. ed. Jens Rydgren. Oxford University Press. <http://oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190274559.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780190274559-e-2> (Accessed June 23, 2021).
- Bellingcat Anti-Equality Monitoring. 2019. "Ukraine's Ministry of Veterans Affairs Embraced the Far Right - With Consequences to the U.S." *bellingcat*. <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/uk-and-europe/2019/11/11/ukraines-ministry-of-veterans-affairs-embraced-the-far-right-with-consequences-to-the-u-s/> (Accessed November 28, 2019).
- Benford, Robert D., and David A. Snow. 2000. "Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment." *Annual Review of Sociology* 26(1): 611–639.
- Bennetts, Marc. 2018. "Ukraine's National Militia: 'We're not neo-Nazis, we just want to make our country better.'" *the Guardian*. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/mar/13/ukraine-far-right-national-militia-takes-law-into-own-hands-neo-nazi-links> (Accessed June 29, 2021).
- Berger, Peter L., and Thomas Luckmann. 2018. *Die gesellschaftliche Konstruktion der Wirklichkeit: eine Theorie der Wissenssoziologie*. 27. Auflage. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch.
- Bergmann, Werner, and Rainer Erb. 1994. "Eine soziale Bewegung von rechts ? Entwicklung und Vernetzung einer rechten Szene in den neuen Bundesländern." *Forschungsjournal Neue Soziale Bewegungen* 7(2): 80–98.
- Bevir, Mark, ed. 2010. *Encyclopedia of political theory*. Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage Publications.
- Bezruk, Tetjana, and Andreas Umland. 2015. "Der Fall Azov: Freiwilligenbataillone in der Ukraine." *Osteuropa* 1–2: 33–42.
- Bezruk, Tetjana, Andreas Umland, and Volker Weichsel. 2015. "Der Fall 'Azov': Freiwilligenbataillone in der Ukraine." *Osteuropa* 65(1/2): 33–41.
- Bieber, Florian. 2019. "How Europe's Nationalists Became Internationalists." *Foreign Policy*. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/11/30/how-europes-nationalists-became-internationalists/> (Accessed June 29, 2021).
- Blatter, Joachim, Phil C. Langer, and Claudius Wagemann. 2018. *Qualitative Methoden in der Politikwissenschaft*. Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden. <http://link.springer.com/10.1007/978-3-658-14955-0> (Accessed February 26, 2020).
- Boichenko, Nina. 2017. "Inside Ukraine's ideological renewal." *New Eastern Europe* (5 (28)): 70–75.

- Britannica Academic. 2019. "Reconquista." Encyclopædia Britannica. academic-eb-com.uaccess.uni-vie.ac.at/levels/collegiate/article/Reconquista/62907 (Accessed June 29, 2021).
- Bukkvoll, Tor. 2019. "Fighting on behalf of the state-the issue of pro-government militia autonomy in the Donbas war." *Post-Soviet Affairs* 35(4): 293–307.
- Busher, Joel. 2016. *The making of anti-Muslim protest: grassroots activism in the English Defence League*. London ; New York, NY: Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group.
- Caiani, Manuela. 2018. "Radical Right Cross-National Links And International Cooperation." In *The Oxford handbook of the radical right*, ed. Jens Rydgren. New York: Oxford University Press, p. 394–411.
- Caiani, Manuela, Donatella Della Porta, and Claudius Wagemann. 2012. *Mobilizing on the extreme right: Germany, Italy, and the United States*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Caiani, Manuela, and Patricia Kröll. 2015. "The transnationalization of the extreme right and the use of the Internet." *International Journal of Comparative and Applied Criminal Justice* 39(4): 331–351.
- Caiani, Manuela, and Donatella della Porta. 2018. "The Radical Right as Social Movement Organizations." In *The Oxford Handbook of the Radical Right*, ed. Jens Rydgren. Oxford University Press. <http://oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190274559.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780190274559-e-17> (Accessed June 16, 2020).
- Castelli Gattinara, Pietro, and Andrea L. P. Pirro. 2019. "The far right as social movement." *European Societies* 21(4): 447–462.
- Cohen, Josh. 2018. "Ukraine's Got a Real Problem with Far-Right Violence (And No, RT Didn't Write This Headline)." Atlantic Council. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/ukraine-s-got-a-real-problem-with-far-right-violence-and-no-rt-didn-t-write-this-headline/> (Accessed June 29, 2021).
- Colborne, Michael. 2020a. "Dispatches From Asgardsrei: Ukraine's Annual Neo-Nazi Music Festival." <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/2020/01/02/dispatches-from-asgardsrei-ukraines-annual-neo-nazi-music-festival/> (Accessed February 17, 2020).
- Colborne, Michael. 2019a. "Inside the Extremist Group That Dreams of Ruling Ukraine." Haaretz. <https://www.haaretz.com/world-news/europe/.premium-inside-the-extremist-group-that-dreams-of-ruling-ukraine-1.6936835> (Accessed October 29, 2019).
- Colborne, Michael. 2019b. "The far right just got humiliated in Ukraine's election — but don't write it off just yet." Haaretz. <https://www.haaretz.com/world-news/europe/.premium-the-far-right-just-got-humiliated-in-ukraine-s-election-but-don-t-write-it-off-1.7563138> (Accessed January 6, 2021).
- Colborne, Michael. 2020b. "The 'Hardcore' Russian Neo-Nazi Group That Calls Ukraine Home - bellingcat." <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/uk-and-europe/2019/09/04/the-hardcore-russian-neo-nazi-group-that-calls-ukraine-home/> (Accessed February 17, 2020).

- Colborne, Michael. 2019c. "There's One Far-Right Movement That Hates the Kremlin." *Foreign Policy*. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/04/17/theres-one-far-right-movement-that-hates-the-kremlin-azov-ukraine-biletsky-nouvelle-droite-venner/> (Accessed October 29, 2019).
- Colborne, Michael. 2019d. "U.S. Congress Accidentally Boosted Ukraine's Far-Right." *Foreign Policy*. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/11/01/congress-max-rose-ukraine-azov-terrorism/> (Accessed November 20, 2019).
- Counter Extremism Project. 2020. *Violent Right-Wing Extremism and Terrorism – Transnational Connectivity, Definitions, Incidents, Structures and Countermeasures*.
- Della Porta, Donatella, and Mario Diani. 2006. *Social movements: an introduction*. 2nd ed. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.
- Diani, Mario. 1992. "The Concept of Social Movement." *The Sociological Review* 40(1): 1–25.
- Edwards, Bob, and John D. McCarthy. 2004. "Resources and Social Movement Mobilization." In *The Blackwell companion to social movements, Blackwell companions to sociology*, eds. David A. Snow, Sarah Anne Soule, and Hanspeter Kriesi. Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub, p. 116–153.
- Europol. 2020. *EUROPEAN UNION TERRORISM SITUATION AND TREND REPORT (TE-SAT) 2020*. <https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports/european-union-terrorism-situation-and-trend-report-te-sat-2020>
- Fielitz, Maik, and Nick Thurston, eds. 2019. *Post-digital cultures of the far right: online actions and offline consequences in Europe and the US*. 1. Auflage. Bielefeld: transcript.
- Freedon, Michael. 1996. *Ideologies and political theory: a conceptual approach*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Froio, Caterina et al. 2020. *CasaPound Italia : Contemporary Extreme-Right Politics*. Routledge. <http://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/9781003005513> (Accessed November 20, 2020).
- Gamson, William A. 1992. "The social psychology of collective action." In *Frontiers in social movement theory*, New Haven, CT, US: Yale University Press, p. 53–76.
- Gerhards, Jürgen, and Dieter Rucht. 1992. "Mesomobilization: Organizing and Framing in Two Protest Campaigns in West Germany." *American Journal of Sociology* 98(3): 555–596.
- Goffman, Erving. 1974. *Frame analysis: an essay on the organization of experience*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Gomza, Ivan, and Johann Zajackowski. 2019. "Black Sun Rising: Political Opportunity Structure Perceptions and Institutionalization of the Azov Movement in Post-Euromaidan Ukraine." *Nationalities Papers* 47(5): 774–800.
- Götz, Irene, Klaus Roth, Marketa Spiritova, and Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, eds. 2017. *Neuer Nationalismus im östlichen Europa: kulturwissenschaftliche Perspektiven*. Bielefeld: transcript.
- Griffin, Roger. 2018. *Fascism*. Medford, Massachusetts: Polity Press.

- Griffin, Roger. 2013. "Fascism" ed. Gregory Claeys. *Encyclopedia of modern political thought*: 271–276.
- Griffin, Roger. 2016. "Fascism's Modernist Revolution: A New Paradigm for the Study of Right-wing Dictatorships." *Fascism* 5(2): 105–129.
- Griffin, Roger. 1991. *The nature of fascism*. London: Pinter.
- Grumke, Thomas. 2011. "Globalized Anti - Globalists – The Ideological Basis of the Internationalization of Right - Wing Extremism." In *The Extreme Right in Europe*, eds. Uwe Backes and Patrick Moreau. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, p. 323–332. <https://www.vr-elibrary.de/doi/10.13109/9783666369223.323> (Accessed July 13, 2020).
- Häusler, Alexander. 2016. "Themen der Rechten." In *Handbuch Rechtsextremismus*, eds. Fabian Virchow, Martin Langebach, and Alexander Häusler. Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden, p. 135–180. http://link.springer.com/10.1007/978-3-531-19085-3_6 (Accessed July 17, 2020).
- Hermansson, Patrik, David Lawrence, Joe Mulhall, and Simon Murdoch. 2020. *The international alt-right: fascism for the 21st century?* Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY: Routledge.
- Holzer, Willibald I. 1993. "Rechtsextremismus. Konturen, Definitionsmerkmale und Erklärungsansätze." In *Handbuch des österreichischen Rechtsextremismus*, ed. Dokumentationsarchiv des Österreichischen Widerstandes. Wien: Deuticke, p. 11–97.
- Hornuff, Daniel. 2019. *Die Neue Rechte und ihr Design: vom ästhetischen Angriff auf die offene Gesellschaft*. Bielefeld: transcript.
- Hunter, Montana. 2018. "Crowdsourced War: The Political and Military Implications of Ukraine's Volunteer Battalions 2014-2015." *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 18(3): 78–124.
- Janin, Maygane, and Flora Deverell. 2020. *Covid-19: Far right violent extremism and tech platforms' response*. Foundation Four L*Innovation Politique.
- Janiszewski, Jakub. 2021. "Neither In Nor Out: The Paradox of Poland's 'LGBT-Free' Zones." *Balkan Insight*. <https://balkaninsight.com/2021/04/15/neither-in-nor-out-the-paradox-of-polands-lgbt-free-zones/> (Accessed June 29, 2021).
- Jaschke, Hans-Gerd. 2016. "Strategien der extremen Rechten in Deutschland nach 1945." In *Handbuch Rechtsextremismus*, eds. Fabian Virchow, Martin Langebach, and Alexander Häusler. Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden, p. 115–134. http://link.springer.com/10.1007/978-3-531-19085-3_5 (Accessed June 29, 2021).
- Jaworska, Sylvia. 2011. "Anti-Slavic imagery in German radical nationalist discourse at the turn of the twentieth century: a prelude to Nazi ideology?" *Patterns of Prejudice* 45(5): 435–452.
- John-Stucke, Kirsten. "Ideology and Terror of the SS. An exhibition about the perpetrators, victims and bystanders in the memorial museum of Wewelsburg." <https://europeanmemories.net/magazine/ideology-and-terror-of-the-ss-an-exhibition-about-the-perpetrators-victims-and-bystanders-in-the-memorial-museum-of-wewelsburg/> (Accessed June 25, 2021).

- Käihkö, Ilmari. 2018. "A nation-in-the-making, in arms: control of force, strategy and the Ukrainian Volunteer Battalions." *Defence Studies* 18(2): 147–166.
- Kalinin, Kirill. 2018. "Russian Elites and Dugin's Neo-Eurasianism: Empirical Analysis of 2012 and 2016." *SSRN Electronic Journal*. <https://www.ssrn.com/abstract=3160401> (Accessed June 29, 2021).
- Karagiannis, Emmanuel. 2016. "Ukrainian volunteer fighters in the eastern front: ideas, political-social norms and emotions as mobilization mechanisms." *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 16(1): 139–153.
- Kern, Thomas. 2008. *Soziale Bewegungen*. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften. <http://link.springer.com/10.1007/978-3-531-90764-2> (Accessed February 13, 2020).
- Klare, Heiko, and Michael Sturm. 2016. "Aktionsformen und Handlungsangebote der extremen Rechten." In *Handbuch Rechtsextremismus*, eds. Fabian Virchow, Martin Langebach, and Alexander Häusler. Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden, p. 181–203. http://link.springer.com/10.1007/978-3-531-19085-3_7 (Accessed June 29, 2021).
- Klose, Bianca, and Sven Richwin. 2016. "Organisationsformen des Rechtsextremismus." In *Handbuch Rechtsextremismus*, eds. Fabian Virchow, Martin Langebach, and Alexander Häusler. Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden, p. 205–223. http://link.springer.com/10.1007/978-3-531-19085-3_8 (Accessed May 4, 2021).
- Kuzmenko, Oleksiy. 2019. "'Defend the White Race': American Extremists Being Co-Opted by Ukraine's Far-Right." *bellingcat*. <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/uk-and-europe/2019/02/15/defend-the-white-race-american-extremists-being-co-opted-by-ukraines-far-right/> (Accessed November 18, 2019).
- Kuzmenko, Oleksiy. 2020. "The Azov Regiment has not depoliticized." *Atlantic Council*. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/the-azov-regiment-has-not-depoliticized/> (Accessed June 25, 2021).
- Lauer, Stefan. 2017. "Debunking: Die „Reconquista“ der „Identitären Bewegung“." *Belltower.News*. <https://www.belltower.news/debunking-die-reconquista-der-identitaeren-bewegung-44714/> (Accessed June 29, 2021).
- Likhachev, V and Institut français des relations internationales. 2016. *The far right in the conflict between Russia and Ukraine*. https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/rmv95_uk_likhachev_far-right_radicals_final.pdf (Accessed December 10, 2019).
- Likhachev, Vyacheslav. 2018. "Far-right Extremism as a Threat to Ukrainian Democracy." : 7.
- Likhachev, Vyacheslav. 2015. "The 'Right Sector' and others: The behavior and role of radical nationalists in the Ukrainian political crisis of late 2013 — Early 2014." *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 48(2–3): 257–271.
- MacKenzie, Alex, and Christian Kaunert. 2021. "Radicalisation, Foreign Fighters and the Ukraine Conflict: A Playground for the Far-Right?" *Social Sciences* 10(4): 116.

- Marker. 2020. Far-Right Confrontation and Violence. Monitoring results of 2020. <https://violence-marker.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2021/ENG-2021-WEB.pdf> (Accessed June 25, 2021).
- Miller, Christopher. 2018a. "Azov, Ukraine's Most Prominent Ultranationalist Group, Sets Its Sights On U.S., Europe." RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty. <https://www.rferl.org/a/azov-ukraine-s-most-prominent-ultranationalist-group-sets-its-sights-on-u-s-europe/29600564.html> (Accessed November 19, 2019).
- Miller, Christopher. 2018b. "Far-Right Vigilantes Destroy Another Romany Camp In Kyiv." RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty. <https://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-far-right-vigilantes-destroy-another-romany-camp-in-kyiv/29280336.html> (Accessed April 10, 2020).
- Miller, Christopher. 2018c. "In Ukraine, Ultranationalist Militia Strikes Fear In Some Quarters." RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty. <https://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-azov-right-wing-militia-to-patrol-kyiv/29008036.html> (Accessed January 6, 2021).
- Minkenberg, Michael. 2019. "Between party and movement: conceptual and empirical considerations of the radical right's organizational boundaries and mobilization processes." *European Societies* 21(4): 463–486.
- Mudde, Cas. 2007. *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/product/identifier/9780511492037/type/book> (Accessed November 25, 2020).
- Mudde, Cas. 2019. *The far right today*. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=2283546> (Accessed November 26, 2020).
- Nonjon, Adrien. 2020. 1–14 Olena Semenyaka, The "First Lady" of Ukrainian Nationalism. Institut for European, Russian, and Eurasian Studies. The George Washington University.
- Pfahl-Traugher, Armin. 1998. *Konservative Revolution und Neue Rechte: rechtsextremistische Intellektuelle gegen den demokratischen Verfassungsstaat*. Opladen: Leske + Budrich.
- Polyakova, Alina. 2014a. "From the provinces to the parliament: How the Ukrainian radical right mobilized in Galicia." *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 47(2): 211–225.
- Polyakova, Alina. 2014b. "Strange bedfellows: Putin and Europe's far right." *World Affairs* 177(3): 36+.
- Potočník, Adam, and Miroslav Mareš. 2019. "Georgian Foreign Fighters in the Conflict in Eastern Ukraine, 2014–2017." *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 32(2): 159–177.
- Potter, Nicholas. 2021. "Nordic Resistance: The Pan-European 'Ikea Fascism' of Nordiska Motståndsrörelsen." *Belltower.News*. <https://www.belltower.news/nordic-resistance-the-pan-european-ikea-fascism-of-nordiska-motstandsroerelsen-109787/> (Accessed May 7, 2021).
- Priester, Karin. 2016. "Rechtspopulismus – ein umstrittenes theoretisches und politisches Phänomen." In *Handbuch Rechtsextremismus*, eds. Fabian Virchow, Martin Langebach, and Alexander Häusler. Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden, p. 533–560. http://link.springer.com/10.1007/978-3-531-19085-3_17 (Accessed June 29, 2021).

- Ramírez, María. 2018. "How a right-wing party exploited Spain's divisions to win." *Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2018/12/12/how-right-wing-party-exploited-spains-divisions-win/> (Accessed June 29, 2021).
- Ramos, Jennifer M., and Priscilla Torres. 2020. "The Right Transmission: Understanding Global Diffusion of the Far-Right." *Populism* 3(1): 87–120.
- Rekawek, Kacper. 2020. 2–31 Career Break or a New Career? Extremist Foreign Fighters in Ukraine. Counter Extremism Project (CEP) Germany. https://www.counterextremism.com/sites/default/files/CEP%20Report_Career%20Break%20or%20a%20New%20Career_Extremist%20Foreign%20Fighters%20in%20Ukraine_April%202020.pdf.
- Rensmann, Lars, and Julius H. Schoeps, eds. 2011. "'Against Globalism': Counter-Cosmopolitan Discontent and Antisemitism in Mobilizations of European Extreme Right Parties." In *Politics and Resentment*, BRILL, p. 117–146. https://brill.com/view/book/edcoll/9789004190474/B9789004190474_004.xml (Accessed June 29, 2021).
- RFE. 2020. "Ukrainian Monitors Record 137 Episodes Of Violence, Confrontation By Ultraright Groups." *RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty*. <https://www.rferl.org/a/30388461.html> (Accessed June 29, 2021).
- Rose, Max, and Ali H. Soufan. 2020. "Opinion | We Once Fought Jihadists. Now We Battle White Supremacists." *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/11/opinion/politics/white-supremacist-terrorism.html> (Accessed August 27, 2021).
- Rydgren, Jens. 2018. "The Radical Right. An Introduction." In *The Oxford handbook of the radical right*, ed. Jens Rydgren. New York: Oxford University Press, p. 22–39.
- Salzborn, Samuel. 2020. *Rechtsextremismus: Erscheinungsformen und Erklärungsansätze*. Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft mbH & Co. KG. <https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/index.php?doi=10.5771/9783748908319> (Accessed October 18, 2020).
- Saessalo, Teemu, and Aki-Mauri Huhtinen. 2018. "The Information Blitzkrieg — 'Hybrid' Operations Azov Style." *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 31(4): 423–443.
- Schade, Henriette. 2018. *Soziale Bewegungen in der Mediengesellschaft: Kommunikation als Schlüsselkonzept einer Rahmentheorie sozialer Bewegungen*. Wiesbaden: Springer VS.
- Schedler, Jan. 2017. "Die extreme Rechte als soziale Bewegung." In *Handbuch Rechtsextremismus, Edition Rechtsextremismus*, eds. Fabian Virchow, Martin Langebach, and Alexander Häusler. Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien, p. 285–323. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-531-19085-3_11 (Accessed November 29, 2019).
- Schmidt, Ina. 2017. "Pegida." *German Politics and Society* 35(4): 105–117.
- Shekhovtsov, A. 2013. "From para-militarism to radical right-wing populism: The rise of the ukrainian far-right party svoboda." *Right-Wing Populism Eur. Polit. Discourse*.
- Shekhovtsov, Anton. 2019. "Radikale Parteien, irreguläre Verbände Ukrainische Milizen aus dem rechtsextremistischen Milieu." *Osteuropa* (3–4): 149–162.

- Shekhovtsov, Anton. 2018. *Russia and the western far right: tango noir. Fascism and the far right*. London ; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.
- Shekhovtsov, Anton. 2020. "Why Azov should not be designated a foreign terrorist organization." Atlantic Council. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/why-azov-should-not-be-designated-a-foreign-terrorist-organization/> (Accessed June 25, 2021).
- Snow, David A., E. Burke Rochford, Steven K. Worden, and Robert D. Benford. 1986. "Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation." *American Sociological Review* 51(4): 464.
- Snow, David, and Robert Benford. 1988. "Ideology, Frame Resonance and Participant Mobilization." *International Social Movement Research* 1: 197–217.
- SPLC. 2021. "Greg Johnson." Southern Poverty Law Center. <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/individual/greg-johnson> (Accessed June 21, 2021).
- Standard. 2018. "Reconquista Germanica: Wie ein rechtsextremes Trollnetzwerk arbeitet." *Der Standard*. <https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000074207699/reconquista-germanica-wie-ein-rechtsextremes-trollnetzwerk-arbeitet> (Accessed June 29, 2021).
- The Nordic Council. "The Nordic Council." <https://www.norden.org/en/nordic-council> (Accessed June 29, 2021).
- Umland, Andreas. 2019. "Irregular Militias and Radical Nationalism in Post-Euromaidan Ukraine: The Prehistory and Emergence of the 'Azov' Battalion in 2014." *Terrorism and Political Violence* 31(1): 105–131.
- Umland, Andreas, and Tetjana Bezruk. 2015. "Der Fall Azov: Freiwilligenbataillone in der Ukraine." *Osteuropa* 65(1–2): 33–42.
- Vejvodová, Petra. 2011. "Transnational Cooperation of the Far Right in the European Union and Attempts to Institutionalize Mutual Relations." In *The Extreme Right in Europe*, eds. Uwe Backes and Patrick Moreau. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, p. 215–228. <https://www.vr-elibrary.de/doi/10.13109/9783666369223.215> (Accessed July 13, 2020).
- Virchow, Fabian. 2016. "›Rechtsextremismus‹: Begriffe – Forschungsfelder – Kontroversen." In *Handbuch Rechtsextremismus*, eds. Fabian Virchow, Martin Langebach, and Alexander Häusler. Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden, p. 5–41. http://link.springer.com/10.1007/978-3-531-19085-3_2 (Accessed July 17, 2020).
- Weiss, Volker. 2017. *Die autoritäre Revolte: die Neue Rechte und der Untergang des Abendlandes*. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta.
- Yurchenko, Eduard. 2016. "Our understanding of the nation." *Nackor*. <https://nackor.org/en/nashe-rozumynnya-nacii>.
- Zheleznov, Roman. 2016. "Russia becomes a hotbed of Islamic terrorism." *Nackor*. <https://nackor.org/en/rosiya-sta-rozsadnikom-islams-kogo-terorizmu>.

Zúquete, José Pedro. 2018. *The Identitarians: the movement against globalism and Islam in Europe*.
Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press.