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Olena Semenyaka, The “First Lady” of Ukrainian Nationalism



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For years, Ukrainian nationalist movements such as Svoboda or Pravyi Sektor were promoting an introverted, state-centered nationalism inherited from the early 1930s' Ukrainian Nationalist Organization (*Orhanizatsiia Ukrayins'kykh Natsionalistiv*) and largely dominated by Western Ukrainian and Galician nationalist worldviews. The EuroMaidan revolution, Crimea's annexation by Russia, and the war in Donbas changed the paradigm of Ukrainian nationalism, giving birth to the Azov movement. The Azov National Corps (*Natsional'nyj korpus*), led by Andriy Biletsky, was created on October 16, 2014, on the basis of the Azov regiment, now integrated into the Ukrainian National Guard. The Azov National Corps is now a nationalist party claiming around 10,000 members and deployed in Ukrainian society through various initiatives, such as patriotic training camps for children (*Azovets*) and militia groups (*Natsional'ny druzhyny*). Azov can be described as a neo-nationalism, in tune with current European far-right transformations: it refuses to be locked into old-fashioned myths obsessed with a colonial relationship to Russia, and it sees itself as outward-looking in that its intellectual framework goes beyond Ukraine's territory, deliberately engaging pan-European strategies.

Olena Semenyaka (b. 1987) is the female figurehead of the Azov movement: she has been the international secretary of the National Corps since 2018 (and de facto leader since the party's very foundation in 2016) while leading the publishing house and metapolitical club *Plomin* (Flame). Gaining in visibility as the Azov regiment transformed into a multifaceted movement, Semenyaka has become a major nationalist theorist in Ukraine. The "First Lady" of Ukrainian nationalism has shifted the movement toward a regional dimension that embraces both Eastern Europe and the wider continent, reactivating the old geopolitical myth of the Intermarium. She has also aimed to de-compartmentalize the Azov movement, enabling it to consolidate fruitful partnerships with other European nationalist movements through projects of which she is the main architect, "Reconquista-Pan Europa" and "the Pact of Steel." Last but not least, she has been working to forge political ties that are sufficiently broad to ensure the Azov movement goes beyond mere military action.

Semenyaka's growing influence and international ties make her a major intellectual contributor to the new pan-European identitarian landscape, much like the more media-exposed Aleksandr Dugin in Russia or Steve Bannon in the United States. In the second half of 2019, she was in the media spotlight of the British investigative journalism consortium Bellingcat, which accused Semenyaka of promoting a far-right International.¹ She is indeed seeking to impose her ideology in Western

¹ Oleksiy Kuzmenko, "Defend the White Race: American Extremists Being Co-Opted by Ukraine's Far-Right," <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/uk-and-europe/2019/02/15/defend-the-white-race-american-extremists-being-co-opted-by-ukraines-far-right/>.

metapolitical debates, successfully rousing interest in her conservative revolutionary vision of European geopolitics.²

From the Study of Traditionalism to the First Lady of Ukrainian Nationalism: A Trajectory

Little is known about Semenyaka and her background before the Ukrainian revolution of 2014. She was born into a modest, bilingual (Ukrainian and Russian) family in 1987, and she describes herself as a historian of philosophy by training.³ Semenyaka has a master's degree in philosophy, specializing in the German Conservative Revolution. Since 2010, she has been preparing a PhD at the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies of the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy (interrupted by the Maidan Revolution of 2013–14) on Ernst Jünger's hermeneutics of metahistory, including his dialogue with Martin Heidegger—two prominent German philosophical and conservative figures who shaped her current thinking, as we will see below.⁴ She is described by her former professors as a brilliant student, reserved, and introverted but committed to her work.⁵

She joined the Ukrainian Traditionalist Club (*Ukraïns'kii Traditsionalistichnii Klub*, UTK), which was founded in 2010 by the young (geo)political analyst Andriy Voloshyn, receiving the support of her professors, Serhiy Kapranov and Yurii Zavorodnii. As a participant of the political and cultural project "Politosophia," launched by her colleague Sviatoslav Vyshynsky, which aimed at spreading the themes of the conservative revolution and traditionalism among the Ukrainian student youth, Semenyaka published several studies in the *International Almanac of Tradition and Revolution* (*Mezhdunarodnyi al'manakh Traditsii i Revoliutsii*) and the departmental journal at the Kyiv-Mohyla Academy.⁶

Semenyaka rose to popularity in the Duguinian Traditionalist movement thanks to her article, "Conservative Revolution as Mythological Modernism,"⁷ published in volume 4 of Aleksandr Dugin's anthology, *In Search of the Dark Logos*. She was invited to speak at the international conference *Against the Post-Modern World*, which was organized at Lomonosov Moscow State University (MSU) in 2011 by the Tradition Center chaired by Dugin.⁸ Distancing himself from Ukrainian issues and being critical of the autonomist discourse of the Ukrainian branch of the Eurasian Youth Union based in Sebastopol, Crimea, Dugin hoped to open up new forms of cooperation between Russia and its

² I am grateful for the financial support provided for the translation from French to English by the Centre de Recherches Europe-Eurasie (CREE) at the National Institute for Oriental Languages and Cultures (INALCO) in Paris.

³ Olena Semenyaka, "The Conservative Revolution & Right-Wing Anarchism," <https://www.counter-currents.com/2019/05/the-conservative-revolution-right-wing-anarchism/>.

⁴ Interview with Olena Semenyaka, Kyiv, February 2017.

⁵ Interview with Tetyana Ogarkova, Kyiv, February 2017.

⁶ Olena Semenyaka, "Novyj nacionalizm" Ernsta Yungera yak metafizychnyj kodeks "novoho lyuds" koho typu" [Ernst Jünger's "New Nationalism" as metaphysical code of "new human type"], *Naukovi zapysky NaUKMA. Filosofiya ta relihiyeznavstvo* 115, (2011): 41–44.

⁷ Olena Semenyaka, "Konservatyvnaya Revolyuciya kak myfolohycheskyj modernyzm" [Conservative Revolution as mythological modernism], *Dekonstrukciya: V poyskax temnoho Lohosa, Arxeomodern, K russoj fylosofyy* 4 (2012): 381–392, <http://politosophia.org/page/konservativnaya-revoliutsia-kak-mifologicheskij-modernizm.html>.

⁸ "Tradition and Post-modernism Conference" homepage, <http://www.against-postmodern.org>.

western periphery through Olena Semenyaka, in line with his neo-Eurasianist vision. In addition to meeting Dugin, Semenyaka brushed shoulders with reactionary and traditionalist thinkers speaking on the different panels, including the French Laurent James and Christian Bouchet from the Third Way movement, as well as Sheikh Abdulvahid Pallavicini, President of the Italian Islamic Religious Community and founder of the Italian Metaphysical Studies Centre.⁹

The sudden outbreak of the Maidan Revolution in November 2013 was the turning point in Olena Semenyaka's activist career. Taking part in the street protests like many students, she was beaten up by the police, and, having escaped from the advancing repressive police forces at Bankova Street,¹⁰ Semenyaka and many other nationalist activists realized the uprising's historic nature. Not only did the fall of President Viktor Yanukovich redefine the horizons of Ukrainian national aspirations and make the West a source of overt polarity, but the unprecedented violence of the revolution and the scale of the mobilization reshaped the Ukrainian political landscape. New political and activist structures emerged, effectively opening up a period of political uncertainty that the Ukrainian nationalists, previously marginalized and now leading players in the revolution, "seize[ed] on." As Semenyaka declared:

Although it was an overthrow rather than accomplished National Revolution, the spirit of the latter has been awoken, and the massive patriotic consolidation in our country, not mentioning ascension of the Ukrainian Right, surprises us even more than this miraculous victory.¹¹

Semenyaka decided to get involved in politics following the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in Spring 2014. Her engagement brought a permanent end to her ties with Dugin, who positioned himself at the forefront of Russian imperial ambitions in Crimea and Novorossiia. Dugin resumed his anti-Ukrainian arguments, which he developed after the Orange Revolution in his *Fourth Political Theory*, where he regarded Ukraine as a "non-existent nation" or an "accident of history," hence condemning the Maidan Revolution and its supposed guidance by Atlanticist forces.¹²

Cutting links with the Russophile neo-Eurasianist circles, Semenyaka then joined Right Sector, a political and military platform that seeks to unite various Ukrainian nationalist movements. In her role as the movement's Press Secretary, she has started to internationalize the Ukrainian cause at a time when the European far right did not hide its support for the Russian perspective on the conflict.

[...] even though I took responsibility for the relations of Right Sector with foreign nationalist movements and organizations, I set a more complex goal for myself that requires strategic thinking, indeed. Thus regular updates in social networks that inform our supporters (and enemies) about the advancement of the Ukrainian Right and patriots in general, as well as interviews that mostly serve the goal of dispelling the myths of both the Kremlin's and Western propaganda are not an end in itself and were my main concern only after the outbreak of the information warfare on Ukraine and *Right Sector* in particular [...]. As a result, instead of

⁹ "Tradition and Post-modernism Conference" homepage, <http://www.against-postmodern.org>.

¹⁰ Mykola Kravchenko, *Den "provokatora. Spohady uchasykyv Pershohrudnevoho povstannya* [Provocateur's Day. Memories of participants of the First December Uprising], Mena Dominant (2016): 58.

¹¹ "An Interview with Right Sector," <https://www.traditionalright.com/an-interview-with-right-sector/>.

¹² Alexander Dugin "Horizons of our Revolution From Crimea to Lisbon," <https://openrevolt.info/2014/03/07/alexander-dugin-crimea/>; Anton Shekhovtsov, "How Alexander Dugin neo- Eurasianists geared up for the Russian-Ukrainian war in 2005-2013," <http://euromaidanpress.com/2016/01/26/how-alexander-dugins-neo- Eurasianists-geared-up-for-the-russian-ukrainian-war-in-2005-2013/>.

answering to everyone and establishing connections with formally “neutral” or openly pro-Russian right-wing organizations, I can be quite undiplomatic as the “Press Secretary”. [...] In fact, I’ve chosen the role of Right Sector’s advocate both inside and outside our country. Also informational support of Right Sector was necessary as a part of promoting the Third Way among ordinary Ukrainians who initially had too high expectations of the West.¹³

But Semenyaka and Right Sector would soon diverge. Two factors gradually but inexorably distanced Semenyaka from Right Sector: differing agendas with the movement’s leader, Dmytro Yarosh, and the movement’s electoral flop in the parliamentary election of May 2014 (with the movement receiving just 0.7% of the votes). The divorce was completed in 2015, when Semenyaka joined the Azov regiment’s Ukrainian National Guard unit in order to continue her activities.¹⁴ That decision was not just an instance of opportunism. Rather, it was driven by shared ideology and ambitions: war is omnipresent in the political discourse of the Azov movement. Building on the soldierly ideal of German revolutionary conservative authors like Ernst Jünger and Ernst von Salomon, war is a constant reference for Semenyaka, too: war justifies the need to design a new form of society where the interests and protection of the people are absolute priorities.

Unlike Right Sector, which was an aggregate of disparate and often competing movements, the Azov Regiment has a very strong vertical power structure embodied by its charismatic leader, Andriy Biletsky. Through its extensive financial resources stemming from various nationalist “warlords”¹⁵—and its integration into the Ukrainian National Guard, headed by the Minister of the Interior, Arsen Avakov, in May 2014—the Azov regiment has been capable of instigating numerous initiatives to enter the Ukrainian political arena in a true Gramscist style: a strategy in which the political battle must be fought above all in the cultural field. The Regiment has been even more popular than Right Sector thanks to its victories in the Anti-Terrorist Operation zone at Mariupol and Shyrokyne in March 2015 and its involvement in anti-Russian and anti-corruption activism.¹⁶ It aims to use its aura to engender a new legitimacy and political direction for Ukrainian nationalism.

Semenyaka was naturally at home in the Azov pan-European ideology. Her intellectual training in political philosophy, her charisma, and her ability to impose herself made her a pivotal figure and a major interlocutor of Azov’s political strategy. Once Press Secretary of the Azov’s Civic Corps, she took part in the formation of the political party National Corps in October 2016.¹⁷ At the same time, she designed the bases of two new geopolitical projects, namely “Intermarium” and “Reconquista-Pan Europa,” intended to anchor the Ukrainian cause in a new European metageopolitics (see below).

She then brought the metapolitical aspect of her engagement to the next level within the Plomin Club (Flame Club), founded by some alumni of the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy. In this new intellectual structure, she sought primarily to introduce European far-right thinkers to the Ukrainian nationalist young guard. Within this ecumenical project, she played an active role from 2017 to 2019 in the translation and publishing in Ukrainian of Ernst Jünger’s work, *Fire and Blood*, for which she wrote a preface, and of *A Western Samurai, For a Positive Critique*, and *The Rebel Heart* by Dominique Venner. Further, for the Reconquista-Pan Europa project, she edited a collection

¹³ “An Interview with Right Sector,” <https://www.traditionalright.com/an-interview-with-right-sector/>

¹⁴ Interview with Olena Semenyaka, Kyiv, February 2017.

¹⁵ Iryna Yavir, “Who runs Azov’s new party?” <http://reflight.euromaidanpress.com/>.

¹⁶ Adrien Nonjon, “L’Ukraine d’Azov : représentations géopolitiques et stratégie de propagande d’un régiment ultranationaliste ukrainien” [Azov’s Ukraine: Geopolitical representations and propaganda strategy of an ultranationalist Ukrainian regiment], master’s thesis, French Geopolitics Institute (2017): 230.

¹⁷ *Korotka ictopiya Azovs’kogo Ruxu* [Azov movement short history], brochure, Kyiv, 2017.

of the *Reconquista Materials (2015–16)* in English and completed an English–Ukrainian bilingual *Anthology of European Nationalism*, featuring texts by authors including Mircea Eliade, Hans Freyer, Julius Evola, and Arthur Moeller van den Bruck, as well as Dmytro Dontsov (1883–1973), the father of contemporary Ukrainian authoritarian nationalism.

In addition to these editorial activities, Semenyaka asserted herself as a powerbroker for Azov’s 2017 “National Manifesto,”¹⁸ which established an alliance between the nationalist parties for the presidential and legislative elections of April and June 2019. Her political rise as a zealous ambassador of Ukrainian nationalism was sudden, when she joined the political bureau of National Corps in 2019 as the movement’s international secretary. From April 2019, she was made responsible for coordinating transnational networks,¹⁹ holding many meetings with the European far right and taking part in conferences and meetings in Germany, Finland, and Croatia with the NPD (*Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands*), German national revolutionary socialists, Polish young traditionalists, Finnish neo-pagans, and American white supremacists aspiring to “reconnect to the European ideological roots.”²⁰ Since late 2019, she has also been working on a new pan-European think tank prototype based on the “Intermarium Support Group” project, aiming at developing and promoting her ideas in Europe.

The Intermarium: Renewing the Ideological Stock of Ukrainian Nationalism

Semenyaka’s publications contain intellectual references which are not related to traditional nation-centric references, as one finds in with Stefan Bandera. Indeed, they are instead very innovative, to say the least, within the Ukrainian nationalist ideology and culture. Her references include German figures such as Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, Carl Schmitt, and Armin Mohler, as well as those from the French New Right intellectual sphere. As examples, we can mention here Dominique Venner, former OAS (French Secret Army Organization paramilitary group) and member and founder of the “Europe Action” group; Alain de Benoist, founder of the French New Right (*Nouvelle Droite*); the collaborationist writer, Pierre Drieu de la Rochelle; and the religious philosopher, René Guénon. Considered as one of the fathers of traditionalist philosophy and fascism, the Italian author, Julius Evola, is also used in Semenyaka’s philosophy, placing her into the traditionalist genealogy. The idea of a primordial tradition as the common denominator of human societies and spiritualities has been used by historical fascist movements as well as contemporary right-wing groups.²¹

She also refers to the integralist nationalist thought of Charles Maurras, founder of the French monarchist movement French Action in 1899. However, it is to the German Conservative Revolution that she most owes her inspiration in her search for a new “Western metaphysics,” a philosophical world view which aims to establish, as Nietzsche or Heidegger suggested, a symbolic order capable of responding to the crisis of meaning that contemporary European societies are going through. This purpose is associated with a geopolitical Third Way and a pan-European optic, as Semenyaka explained in her 2019 piece “The Conservative Revolution & Right-Wing Anarchism”:

¹⁸ Interview with Olena Semenyaka, Kyiv, May 2018.

¹⁹ Interview with Olena Semenyaka, Kyiv, October 2018.

²⁰ Interview with Olena Semenyaka, Kyiv, March 2020.

²¹ Mark Segwick, *Key Figures of the Radical Right: Behind the New Threat on Liberal Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

The Conservative Revolution is also something like the transvaluation of all values. It is a revolutionary approach. It is not reactionary and it is not conservative, despite the title. It is moving towards the new world order, new values, and new metaphysics of the West.²²

According to Semenyaka, based on an Evolian reading of history drawn from *Fascism Viewed from the Right* (1964), which analyzes in a traditional and counter-revolutionary way fascist and Nazi doctrines and their failures, the national revolution in Europe has been plunged into a liberal interregnum that has impeded its ability to access power. However, she believes the revolution will eventually break out, leading to a spiritual and national renewal within Europe, so long as contemporary nationalism redefines its paradigms in line with Ernst Jünger's guidelines introduced in his essay *The Worker* (1989):

Nationalism does not want to accept the domination of the masses, but requires the domination of the individual, whose superiority is created by the inner content and living energy. He wants neither equality, nor excluded justice, nor freedom, which is reduced to empty claims. He wants to revel in happiness, and happiness is to be yourself and not others. Modern nationalism does not want to soar in the airless space of theories, does not strive for "free thought", but wants to gain strong ties, order, to take root in society, blood and soil. He does not want the socialism of opportunity, he wants the socialism of duty, of the rigid Stoic world to which the individual must sacrifice.²³

From Semenyaka's post-modernist point of view, the end of the Cold War and the emergence, in part within Fukuyama's idea of the "end of history," of a new liberal and globalized world called into question conventional geopolitics and cyclic historical processes. The current crisis of this new world order is, in Semenyaka's view, the confirmation of a desire for the return of the nation on the European scale, but without throwing away the technical benefits of modernity. Unlike most European nationalist movements that have held onto chauvinism and presentism, Semenyaka advocates for a long-term metapolitical strategy to take power.

Based on this "promethean" vision of geopolitics, Semenyaka intends to lay the ground for a new continental plan where the nations of Eastern Europe would be the epicenter of an alternative European integration: the Intermarium. This geopolitical bloc, encompassing the geographical configuration of the former Polish *Rzeczpospolita*, which ranged from the Baltic to the shores of the Black Sea, would be both a defensive Eastern European buffer against Russia and the matrix of a new Europe in which the restoration of the values of the past would be reconciled with the technological values of the future.

The Intermarium project calls for the region's various nationalist groups to unite under the banner of a single civilizational ideal, as conceived by Semenyaka in collaboration with Andriy Voloshyn, founder of the Ukrainian Traditionalist Club and of the Ukrainian Archaeofuturistic Association (*Ukrayins'ka arkheo futurystychna asotsiatsiya*, ARFA), a student organization promoting the modernization of Ukrainian nationalism and its geopolitical reorientation toward a metaregional identity. According to Semenyaka, the nations of the Intermarium are at the interface of two worlds, the West and the East. This position is the manifestation of a moral equilibrium between the extremes

²² Olena Semenyaka, "The Conservative Revolution & Right-Wing Anarchism," <https://www.counter-currents.com/2019/05/the-conservative-revolution-right-wing-anarchism/>.

²³ Olena Semenyaka, "Novyj nacionalizm" Ernsta Yungera yak metafizychnyj kodeks "novoho lyuds"kohto typu" [Ernst Jünger's "New Nationalism" as metaphysical code of "new human type"], *Naukovi zapysky NaUKMA. Filosofiya ta relihiyevnavstvo* 115 (2011): 41-44.

of “Eastern fundamentalism” and “Western progressivism,” the source of an original Eastern regional lineage and community.²⁴

Semenyaka explicitly considers the Intermarium project as a political and geopolitical Third Way for Europe, both geographically and ideologically. Based on a historical approach that is specific to the pan-Slavic legacy of Azov’s ancestor, the kharkivian paramilitary group called Patriot of Ukraine (*Patriot Ukrainy*), she asserts that the Intermarium is based on the equilibrium between the components of a North–South axis; this cultural dichotomy corresponds to the East–West binary, with Ukraine as the synthesis of the two. Her argument is founded on the ancient colonization of the Black Sea coast by the Greeks, who introduced the basis of Western civilization, and particularly its democratic foundations, from the South. The North, meanwhile, is considered to be very much tied to the migration of the Germanic peoples from northern Europe—the Goths—to the region in the third century CE. This North–South polarization was also the axis chosen by the Princes of the Kievan Rus’, a Europeanizing force, to expand toward the “barbarian” North as far as Novgorod.²⁵

For Semenyaka, the Intermarium’s aim is therefore to promote a uniting movement capable of taking into account these contradictory legacies and advancing a new North–South (instead of the historical East–West) integration for Eastern Europe. That is the overarching meaning of her initiative, which draws on ancient history rather than on recent geopolitical confrontations. She also refers to the notion of “Prometheism,”²⁶ which was used by Józef Piłsudski at the beginning of the 1920s to theorize the restoration of Poland as a modern reincarnation of the ancient Polish dominion, unifying the Baltic–Black Sea realm in a common effort against communism.

In this respect, Semenyaka adopts the “*Chornomorskyi*”²⁷ (Black Sea) theories of the Ukrainian geopolitical school, as developed by Yurii Lypa in his *Ukrainian Trilogy (Vseukrayinska Trylogia)*, or by Stanislaw Dnistrianskyi.²⁸ This approach reconsiders the “manifest destiny” of Ukraine through its geographical and historical substrates, and it highlights geography as a key identity vector. It is inspired by Dmytro Dontsov, for whom Eastern Europe was a natural rampart against what he called the “Mongol cultural mutation of Russia.”²⁹ Proponents see in the Soviet Union an Asian version of power.³⁰

²⁴ Olena Semenyaka, “*Intermarium as a Laboratory of European Archeofuturism*,” <http://Intermarium.nc.org/?p=317/>.

²⁵ Collective work, *Intermarium resolution from the Inaugural Conference of the Intermarium Development Assistance Group*, Orientyr, Kyiv (2016): 49.

²⁶ It is also the title of Piłsudski’s doctrine. At the beginning of the 1920s, in the context of the restoration of Poland and the Soviet–Polish war, the Polish marshal Jozef Piłsudski theorized the construction from Poland and its former borders of a zone stamped on a federal model: the Międzymorze. This project is thought of as a modern reincarnation of the ancient Polish *Rzeczpospolita*; it is articulated by the doctrine of “Prometheism” which represents the unification in a common effort against communism of the ancient dominated peoples from the eastern fringes of Europe.

²⁷ From the text by Yurii Lypa published in 1940, *The Black Sea Doctrine* [Чорноморська доктрина; *Chornomorska doktryna*].

²⁸ Andrew Wilson, *The Ukrainians: Unexpected Nation*, 4th ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015).

²⁹ Ostriouchouk Olya, *Les Ukrainiens face à leur passé, vers une meilleure compréhension des clivages Est/Ouest* [Ukrainians facing their past, towards a better understanding of East/West divides], Peter Lang, Brussels (2013): 394.

³⁰ Collective work, *Intermarium resolution from the Inaugural Conference of the Intermarium Development Assistance Group*, Orientyr, Kyiv (2016): 49.

Inspired by Lev Gumilev's theories of ethnicity, Semenyaka believes that ethnic groups are biosocial organisms that can be mutually symbiotic or exclusive. She calls for an "ethno-futurism" in which existing national divisions of the Baltic-Black Sea space will be overcome by wider ethno-regional synergies. By emphasizing cooperation rather than competition between the peoples of the Intermarium, ethno-futurism seeks to avoid the trap of geopolitical isolation imposed on Eastern Europe: once unified, the region would lead a "fourth industrial revolution" combining European traditions and new technologies. This ethno-futurism is, in fact, a direct loan from the French New Right thinker Guillaume Faye. In his work *Archeofuturism* (1998), Faye asserts that the fate of European civilization must pass through a return of societies to archaic values without demonizing technology, and that it must coincide with the formation of a large pan-European independent state bloc called "Euro-Siberia."³¹

Lastly, Semenyaka sees the Intermarium project as a launchpad for a pan-European revolution. The choice of a Latin word ending in *-ium* evokes the Imperium, which refers to Roman military power, and, to a certain extent, the idea of grandeur. Unlike *intra-*, *inter-* evokes the notion of broad, discontinuous spaces within a single bloc, which could be regarded in parallel to the Intrabalticum space. As with other Eastern European nationalists, Semenyaka dreams of revitalizing a declining, exhausted Western European nationalism by means of a new, refreshing, Eastern European nationalism:

the difference between the "old" and "young" (or belated) nations explains why the *Intermarium* union plays a role of the platform for the *Pan-European Reconquista*, or the laboratory of the all-European revival.³²

This pan-European revolution remains largely inspired by several classic fascist theories on regeneration through the need for cultural warfare, an enlightened ideological avant-garde and the existence of an occult world. Semenyaka, for instance, does not hide her attraction to Black Metal music. She theorizes it as a musical genre reserved for a privileged elite who believe in chivalric principles, a kind of supranational conservative avant-garde capable of reviving a certain idea of Europe based on the rejection of modern decadence. In 2012, she published the chapter "When the Gods Hear the Call: The Conservative-Revolutionary Potential of Black Metal Art" in *Black Metal: European Roots & Musical Extremities*, published by Black Front Press, which is run by the British national-anarchist activist Troy Southgate.

Semenyaka analyzes Black Metal heretical philosophy through the concept of "Aryan Luciferianism,"³³ inspired by references to Ariosophy, Ernst Jünger's nihilism, and the "aristocratic spirit" from Julius Evola. She sees this "Aryan Luciferianism" as a call for an extreme form of romanticism, power, and violence marked by neo-pagan principles and symbolism—even if she prefers to refer to gnosticism as a philosophical principle for this metaphysical interpretation of Black Metal.³⁴ Taking Satanism as an elitist norm, the concept of "Aryan Luciferianism" in Black Metal can be detected in Semenyaka's philosophy as a metaphysical sentiment of the unity of freedom and

³¹ Saratus, "Interview with Olena Semenyaka," <http://Intermarium.nc.org/?p=930/>; "1st Paneuropa Conference Report," Demon of an Old World (undated), <https://demonofoldworld.tumblr.com/post/161878114630/reconquista-europe-1st-paneuropa-conference>.

³² Semenyaka, "When the gods hear the call: The conservative-revolutionary potential of Black Metal Art," <http://militant.zone/the-conservative-revolutionary-potential-of-black-metal-art/>

³³ Semenyaka, "When the gods hear the call"; Olena Semenyaka, "Aristocracy of the Spirit and the Great European Reconquista," <http://militant.zone/pact-of-steel-2016-aristocracy-of-the-spirit/>.

³⁴ Semenyaka, "When the gods hear the call."

need presupposed in detail and precision by the concept of European ethnic voluntarism.³⁵ This echoes the idea of the Italian Julius Evola, a “radical traditionalist,” conservative revolutionary, and critic of fascism “from the Right”, who underlines, with some notions from Nazi esoteric culture, that the nobility of the spirit and the traditional nobility of Europe are combined in a single messianic enterprise.

The Networks of the New “European Voluntarism”

As Press Secretary and then international relations secretary of the Azov movement, Semenyaka has built herself an extensive network across various domestic and international far-right intellectual individuals and groups.

Ever since her engagement with the Ukrainian Traditionalist Club, Semenyaka has been keen to establish contact with actors in the Ukrainian nationalist movements, including Eduard Yurchenko’s Kyiv Monarchist Centre (*Kyevskyy monarkhycheskyy tsestr*), for which she spoke during the second All-Ukrainian Monarchist Conference (*Vseukrayinska monarkhichna konferentia*) in 2013. After joining Right Sector, Semenyaka cooperated with the All-Ukrainian Union Svoboda via parliamentary assistant Yury Noevy, and with the C14 vigilante group, both proactive during the Maidan Revolution. Despite the heterogeneity that can exist between these groups, Semenyaka’s role as press secretary of the Azov movement has enabled her to interface with other movements like the ultra-orthodox Katekhon, who support the establishment of a Ukrainian religious and conservative society against the influence of Russian Orthodoxy and Western liberal values, as well as the autonomist supremacists Karpatska Sich (*Carpathian Sich*) based in the Transcarpathian region of Uzhhorod.

In parallel to her contacts with various Ukrainian movements, Olena Semenyaka has forged relationships with several international movements. This strategy first corresponds to a desire to find international supporters with the clear goal of countering the pro-Russian narrative on the Ukrainian conflict and the support gathered by Moscow from the main European far-right parties.³⁶ To respond to Russia’s successes in reaching out to the European far right, Semenyaka has been developing her own range of contacts. Before the creation of the Intermarium Support Group, she first met with the leaders of the Swedish conspiracist newspaper *Nya Tider* in 2014 for an interview. The newspaper is linked to the movement *Nordisk Ungdom*, close to the Scandinavian North Front, which supported Right Sector financially at the height of the Maidan conflict.³⁷ She also took part in greeting the volunteer Mikael Skilt, now a moderate conservative, of the defunct neo-Nazi *Svenskarnas Parti*; a committee from the Sweden Democrats (*Sverigedemokraterna*); and members of the volunteer organization *Svenska Ukrainafrivilliga*.³⁸

As we have seen, the Intermarium is Semenyaka’s central long-term project. To build this union, it is clear that she needs to unite the nationalists of Eastern Europe and gradually incorporate them into a genuine ideological mission to achieve European unity. This is the aim of the “Reconquista,” whose name alone suffices to demonstrate its offensive, practical, and ideological nature. It is the instrument that is to ensure the eventual achievement of the Intermarium. Reconquista is a founding act for a

³⁵ Online interview with Olena Semenyaka, March 2020.

³⁶ Documentary by Rainer Fromm, “Putins völkische Fans: Europas Rechte auf Kreml-Kurs / Fans de Poutine : les extrêmes-droites d’Europe et la fascination pour le Kremlin” [Putin’s nationalist fans: European far-right movements on a Kremlin-course], Arte (April 2017).

³⁷ “Agony of Information Campaign Against Right Sector,” <https://uktk.org/agony-of-information-campaign-against-right-sector/>.

³⁸ Ibid.

movement to unite nationalist forces around Azov, Semenyaka, and her Intermarium project, and to disseminate nationalist thought across Europe. As an instrument to seize ground again, Reconquista also plays a mediating role to resolve the many memorial and ideological disputes of the various players in European nationalist movements—and subsequently to unite these players. The Reconquista project is political but also cultural: it is, in line with Semenyaka’s thought, a major thrust of Azov’s international strategy, with an ambitious, assertive slogan that sums up all her hopes: “Today Ukraine, tomorrow Rus’ and the whole of Europe!”

The Reconquista project, revealed in October 2015, is therefore set to become the central but not the sole thrust of the majority of communications by Azov and the far right on the internet and within related networks. It takes the form of a blog on the microblogging platform Tumblr. The blog is relatively active, with around six to nine posts per week. *Reconquista* is conceived as a platform for metapolitical reflection, aiming to unite the forces of European nationalists:

Reconquista is a central aspect of our communication with Europe’s other nationalist forces. By spreading our news, we make it clear that Azov has the same objectives they have for Europe. That allows us to forge ties with the other conservative forces.³⁹

In addition to the blog, several “Pan-Europa” conferences have been organized by Semenyaka in Kyiv. On April 28, 2017, and October 15, 2018, following the annual conferences of the Azov movement’s “Intermarium Support Group,” she welcomed various far-right activists divided into “parliamentary” and “metapolitical” sections. Examples include:

- the Italian militant, Sébastien Manificat, and Alberto Palladino, the international speaker of CasaPound Italia;
- the Germans Remo Kudwien (“Matz”) and Maik Schmidt of the NPD youth organization, as well as Julian Bender and several members of the “revolutionary, nationalist and socialist” party Der Dritte Weg, a longstanding ally of the Azov movement which has so far taken part in tributes to Ukrainian soldiers on October 14 every year;
- activists from the Lyon-based French identitarian Union Defense Group (GUD), including Steven Bissuel, and the New Right’s Pascal Lassalle, who defend Ukraine against the pro-Russian views of the French far right;
- the Swedish YouTuber and bodybuilder, Marcus Follin (“The Golden One”), who promotes a “right-wing way of life” on the web;
- the Norwegian, Bjørn Christian Rødal of the Eurosceptic and Nordic nationalist party Alliansen – Alternativ for Norge;
- the American white nationalist philosopher, Greg Johnson, whose site Counter-Currents has been translated and published in Semenyaka’s major English-language statements;
- Polish activists, Pawel Bielawski and Witold Dobrowolski, respectively of the Polish *Sturzm* magazine and metapolitical review *Niklot*; and
- Mindaugas Sidaravičius of the Lithuanian Nationalist Union.

By gathering pro-Ukrainian sympathizers or potential allies, despite their links with Russia, these meetings have aimed to establish a forum for dialogue and reflection to promote the idea of a pan-European nationalist revolution and to forge new personal and institutional ties. The same period, from 2017 onwards, also saw Semenyaka travel abroad with increasing frequency, forging

³⁹ Interview with Olena Semenyaka, Kyiv, February 2017; Post on the Facebook page of “Intermarium - Interregnum,” August 14, 2019, https://www.facebook.com/intermarium-supportgroup/posts/370334146992509?_tn_=K-R.

particularly important ties in Germany, where she gave an interview to the newspaper *Deutsche Stimme* and took part in the European congress of nationalists on March 22, 2015, at the invitation of the youth branch of the far-right National Democratic Party (NPD).⁴⁰ This experience, which showed Semenyaka's genuine affinity with German revolutionary philosophy, was repeated on May 11 and 12, 2018, at the "[RE]generation.Europa" conference organized in Riesa. The [RE]generation.Europa conference brought together various European far-right groups, ranging from the Spanish anti-immigrant Francoists Hogar Social to the Polish Third Way movement's Trzechia Droga. It was marked by the presence of the Croat white nationalist Tomislav Sunić, one of the key players in the meeting, along with Member of the European Parliament Ruža Tomašić and former French Foreign Legionary, Bruno Zorica, to open Croatia to Semenyaka's Intermarium project.⁴¹

On May 14, 2018, Semenyaka visited central Germany for the "Phalanx Zentropa II" congress organized by the pro-Ukrainian branch of Die Rechte,⁴² and on July 7, 2018, she attended the "Youth in Storm" festival organized by Der Dritte Weg. Far from focusing only on activist contacts in the Germanic world, Semenyaka has also gradually extended her influence in various metapolitical circles. During conferences and "Ukrainian Evenings" on geopolitics, she has discussed her views on Ukrainian history and Azov's strategy to groups such as the Flamberg Club (June 15, 2018) in Halle or the Dresden publishing house *Jungeuropa Verlag*, the Young Europe Publishing House (August 3 and 5, 2018).

At the same time, she has also extended her contacts in Western Europe, forging close ties with the Italian Casapound, which describes itself as "fascism of the twenty-first century." She visited Italy in January 2019 to attend the annual Acca Larentia March commemorating the anniversary of the murder, on January 7, 1978, of three members of the Italian Social Movement's Youth Front, accompanied by a delegation from Karpatska Sich and Ukrainian Casapound activist Yaroslav Zakalyk.⁴³ Lastly, she took part in "Forum Prisma Actual" in Lisbon on May 4, 2019, at the invitation of Portuguese identitarian group Escudo Identitario. This last visit was an opportunity to present herself to the Iberian public as the representative of a new "Reconquista" in Ukraine.

Semenyaka never fails to strengthen the North-South synergies that underlie her Intermarium project. She takes part in meetings and conferences organized by supporters of ethno-futurism, such as the Estonian white nationalist metapolitical group Sinine Äratus (Blue Awakening) and, currently, Eesti Konservatiivne Rahvaerakond (EKRE) party MP Ruuben Kaalep. She also participated, on February 24, 2019, in the celebration of Estonia's independence alongside nationalist activists from EKRE. More than simply supporting a party that criticizes both the EU and Russia, this parade showed that the Intermarium space can establish itself on the basis of a common memory: namely, the struggle for independence from the Soviet Union.

⁴⁰ "Nation als Einheit von Blut und Geist" [Nation as a unity of blood and spirit], Taz, <https://taz.de/Europaeische-Allianz-der-Ultrarechten!/5046197/>.

⁴¹ Interview with Olena Semenyaka, Kyiv, October 2018; field observation in Kyiv, October 2018.

⁴² "DIE RECHTE zu Gast beim Phalanx Zentropa II Kongress" [THE RIGHTS visiting the Phalanx Zentropa II Congress], <https://die-rechte.net/lv-sachsen-anhalt/die-rechte-zu-gast-beim-phalanx-zentropa-ii-kongress/>; Olena Semenyaka's reference page on Counter Currents website, <https://www.counter-currents.com/tag/olena-semenyaka/>.

⁴³ Post on the Facebook page of "Karpatska Sich," January 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/karpatska.sich14/videos/378855692687948/>; "Inaugural conference Intermarium development assistance group held in Kyiv," <https://thenewnationalism.com/2016/07/27/inaugural-conference-intermarium-development-assistance-group-held-kyiv/>.

On the sidelines of these events, Semenyaka met the Faroese neo-pagan Fróði Midjord, who invited her to speak at the Nordic identitarian forum Scandza on March 30, 2019,⁴⁴ which aimed at highlighting the concept of Anarcho-Tyranny. In the presence of figures from the American alt-right, such as the editor-in-chief of the white nationalist journal *American Renaissance*, Jared Taylor, and anti-Semitic author Kevin MacDonald, who was visiting the region for the first time, Semenyaka promoted Ernst Jünger's theories on the neo-totalitarian police state and insisted on the need to make use of modern media technologies to support a pan-European project.

Following this Nordic meeting, she gave an interview to the podcast "Anton och Jonas" operated by Anton Stigermark, representative of the Alternativ för Sverige (Alternative for Sweden) party, and Jonas Nilsson, former Azov Battalion instructor for Swedish volunteers and the coordinator of the South African white nationalist "Boer Project,"⁴⁵ which provides political and media support to the Afrikaaner minority.⁴⁶ Semenyaka concluded her Nordic travels on April 6, 2019, at the Awakening II conference in Turku, Finland, where she set out the basis for future Finno-Ukrainian cooperation, building on the legacy of the partnership between Finland (under Herman Gummerus) and Ukraine (under Hetman Pavlo Skoropadskyi) in 1918.

Far from limiting her ties to the international metapolitical scene, Semenyaka also has many contacts in the Black Metal artistic sphere. Since 2015, she had been close to the neo-pagans and Esoteric Nazis of Wotan Jugend, led by Russian Alexey Levkin, vocalist in the Militant Black Metal band M8L8TH.⁴⁷ Playing an active role in the organization of the "Asgardsrei" Black Metal festival and the "Pact of Steel Conference," she forged ties with a number of groups, such as the German group Absurd,⁴⁸ the French Peste Noire,⁴⁹ and the Finnish Goatmoon.⁵⁰ Moreover, she maintains relations with Russian Ivan Mikheev, a disciple of the neo-pagan eco-fascist priest Alexey "Dobroslav" Dobrovolsky, who co-founded the exiled Russian traditionalist movement *Russkii Tsent* (Russian Center). However, in 2019, Mikheev left the Russian Center due to increasing disagreements with Wotan Jugend's agenda as a result of Alexey Levkin's membership.⁵¹ Contrary to Semenyaka, who is dedicated to the creation of a New Right in Ukraine, Levkin's initiatives were much too provocative. By associating himself with notorious neo-Nazi groups such as the Rise Above Movement (RAM), a violent American white

⁴⁴ Olena Semenyaka's entry in FOIA research documentation, <https://www.foiaresearch.net/person/olena-semenyaka>; "The Azov Movement in the West: achievements in 2019," <https://interregnum-intermarium.tumblr.com>.

⁴⁵ Jonas Nilsson's "Boer Project" homepage, <https://boerproject.com>.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Olena Semenyaka, "On my connections to Alexei Levkin," <https://intermarium.org.ua/en/on-my-connection-to-alexei-levkin/>.

⁴⁸ Hendrik Möbus, "The White God of War: Roman von Ungern-Sternberg," RECONQUISTA Україна (Reconquista Ukraine) on YouTube (December 22, 2018), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GSgGNh0TdEU>; "National Corps attended Ethnofutur III conference," <https://interregnum-intermarium.tumblr.com/post/183139437749/national-corps-attended-etnofutur-iii-conference/>.

⁴⁹ Olena Semenyaka, "Compte rendu de la 2nd conférence Paneuropa 3^{ème} et dernière partie" [Report of the 2nd Paneuropa conference, 3rd and last part], <http://www.europemaxima.com/compte-rendu-de-la-premiere-reunion-paneuropa-3e-partie-par-olena-semenyaka/>.

⁵⁰ Post on the Facebook page of "Militant Zone," May 16, 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/militant.zone/posts/2106763902892299>.

⁵¹ Online interview with Olena Semenyaka, March 2020.

supremacist group,⁵² or organizing events such as a commemoration of Hitler's birthday called "Führernacht" with his side band "Akvtl,"⁵³ he gave bad publicity to Semenyaka's ambitions.

Likewise, in 2019, during the annual Asgardsrei festival, Semenyaka spoke the Pact of Steel conference cycle jointly with *Plomin's* scholar of Indo-European studies, editor, translator, and researcher of the New Right, Sergiy Zaikovsky. A new conference cycle is called "Homeland," hinting at the primordial homeland of Indo-European peoples, the Pontic-Caspian steppe, partly occupied by modern southern Ukraine (a more probable hypothesis than the Indian peninsula and the associated Aryan migration hypothesis).⁵⁴

Finally, since the beginning of 2019, Semenyaka has been an activist in the "alt-feminist" organization "Silver Rose" (*Striblo Trojandy*) created by Julia Fedosiouk,⁵⁵ a member of *Plomin*. Far from taking on the image usually claimed by the Ukrainian extreme right, the Silver Rose proposes a feminist ideology that attempts to revalue the status of women within Ukrainian nationalist movements and to fight against the supposed excesses of contemporary feminism.⁵⁶ Olena Semenyaka participates at a distance in the elaboration of their doctrine of Athenism (in reference to the Greek goddess Athena, mother of wisdom, art, and war), a New-Right-inspired conception of European femininity and the status of women rooted in the experience of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.⁵⁷

Conclusion

Both ambitious and innovative in her thinking, Olena Semenyaka today embodies this new generation of Ukrainian nationalist thinkers who aim to move the doctrinal stock of Ukrainian nationalism away from old-fashioned topics. This new, shared ideological front inspired by the legacy of the German Conservative Revolution and the French New Right can now build a common language with other nationalist movements in Europe. One of Semenyaka's key missions is indeed to make Ukraine, once peripheral on the margins of Europe's debate of ideas, a new point of convergence for the whole of Europe and the avant-garde of the forthcoming Intermarium. In this strategy, fighting against Russia constitutes only one component amongst many others, and not the most important component: her innovative approach has profoundly decolonized Ukrainian nationalism from its Russian obsession by creating a new ideological pool shared with other radical European nationalist groups around the ideas of a continental unity whose racial component is quite clearly expressed. Through her unprecedented interactions, Semenyaka has enabled the Azov movement to consolidate and diversify its ideological apparatus but also to strengthen its influence abroad—an ideological mutation on a rare scale observed for the very first time in the history of the Ukrainian far right.

⁵² Michael Colborne, "The 'Hardcore' Russian Neo-Nazi Group That Calls Ukraine Home," <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/uk-and-europe/2019/09/04/the-hardcore-russian-neo-nazi-group-that-calls-ukraine-home/>.

⁵³ Bellingcat, "The Russians and Ukrainians translating the Christchurch shooter's manifesto," <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/uk-and-europe/2019/08/14/the-russians-and-ukrainians-translating-the-christchurch-shooters-manifesto/>.

⁵⁴ "HOMELAND seminar was launched in Kyiv," RECONQUISTA Україна (Reconquista Ukraine) on YouTube, December 21, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fKz4pV7XK60>.

⁵⁵ Kateryna Kovalenko, "Khoto taky Striblo Trojandy" [Who is the Silver Rose], <https://thebabel.com.ua/texts/40616-ne-hodyat-na-vibori-hochut-nositi-zbroyu-pohovali-feminizm-u-trunih-to-taki-sriblo-trojandi-velikiy-profayl-organizaciji>.

⁵⁶ "Striblo Trojandy," https://mesoeurasia.blogspot.com/2019/09/blog-post_7.html.

⁵⁷ Kateryna Kovalenko, "Khoto taky Striblo Trojandy."