

German public broadcaster criticised over biased report on Ukraine

By Sybille Fuchs
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A formal complaint was lodged at the end of November by the Permanent Viewers' Council for Publicly Funded Media against a contribution shown on German public broadcaster ZDF's *Heute Journal* programme entitled "Lemberg fights for more Europe" by Armin Zoerper.

The Viewers' Council accused the contribution of "displaying an ignorance of history", an uncritical attitude toward Ukrainian nationalist narratives and failing to mention the fascist past of one of the program's interviewees. The report was broadcast on 21 October, immediately prior to the Ukrainian parliamentary elections.

The complaint was mainly related to an interview with 90-year-old Ivan Mamtshur, who was casually introduced by the reporter using his first name as a former prisoner of the Soviet KGB intelligence agency. Armin Zoerper walked with him through the KGB prison where he was detained in 1946 and asked him if he believed in the freedom of Ukraine today. Mamtshur answered, "Well of course. The world will help us. Europe, America."

The report fails to mention that Mamtshur was no innocent victim of Stalinism. He was a combatant on the side of the German Wehrmacht and a member of the Waffen-SS Galician division and the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), which is still proud of its history today.

The Waffen-SS Galicia was formed in July 1943 out of 14,000 volunteers who mainly also belonged to OUN. They mainly served in combat against Soviet partisans and played an important role in the Nazis' war of destruction. They treated the Polish and Jewish populations with extreme brutality and carried out massacres against the populations of Huta-Pieniacka, Podkamie? and Palikrovy.

After the war they continued to fight the Soviet Union, this time under the direction of the western intelligence agencies, including the predecessor organisation to the German intelligence service (BND) and the CIA.

The online magazine *Teleopolis* wrote: "By 1951, this group of freedom fighters had murdered some 35,000 people, according to estimates by the CIA's Frank Wisner, head of the CIA Directorate of Plans. The CIA, along with Britain's SIS, supported the struggle for freedom of the Ukrainian SS butchers. The war only ended in 1957, when the Soviet Union formally protested to the UN and most of Ivan Mamtshur's comrades were in the very KGB prison that Armin Zoerper carefully presents to the German viewers."

A video shows Mamtshur as the participant in an eerie ceremony in 2013, in which members of the SS Galicia were ceremonially exhumed and hailed as heroes of Ukraine's fight for freedom. Mamtshur is not named in the report, but can be clearly seen in the front row of the veterans. Oleg Pankevitch, deputy leader of the fascist Svoboda Party, took part as an honorary guest in the reburial ceremony for the SS Galicia members.

Nationalist poet Teodor Kukuza from Lviv contributed one of his own works to the ceremony and shifted to speak in German during his speech. At the end, a Polish eyewitness recalls how the SS division, which was caught in the siege of Brodov in 1944, virtually demolished an entire village in Volhynia. The few who survived, mainly children, were murdered the next day by supporters of nationalist leader Stepan Bandera. The video shows Ukrainian nationalists dressed in SS uniforms firing a salute over the grave of the reburied fighters in the presence of a priest from the

Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

In another video, broadcast by the ARD's Panorama program, Mamtshur, on the occasion of the 66th anniversary of the founding of the SS Galicia division, declared himself a hero who had fought for the freedom of Ukraine.

The journalist Armin Zoerper has been the head of ZDF's Warsaw studio since January 2011 and has already been criticised for biased reports in support of the Kiev regime. In early April 2014, he was present "by surprise" in a Kiev supermarket with his camera team at the same time that a group of political activists threw themselves on the ground in a sort of flashmob action to illustrate how "Russia killed". The report was also broadcast by ZDF.

In its complaint, the Viewers' Council provided detailed evidence of the political background of the Ukrainian fascists and right-wing nationalists, particularly the OUN and its leader Stepan Bandera.

In Zoerper's report it was stated that Bandera had "made a pact with the Nazis against the Soviet Union with the aim of securing freedom for his people."

He thereby uncritically embraced the "western Ukrainian nationalist myth," questions "incontrovertible historical facts to the benefit of the culprits' perspective," and abused "not only the Ukrainian victims of Bandera, whose movement was 'heavily involved in the Holocaust'."

The complaint over the report cited as evidence Anton Tshekovtsov, a researcher on Ukrainian right-wing extremism, who writes of Bandera, "Stepan Bandera was one of the most notorious Ukrainian fascists, terrorists and Nazi collaborators, who was responsible for hundreds, if not thousands of Polish Russian, Jewish, and Ukrainian deaths. He played a key role in terrorist activities in Poland and other countries."

Bandera had been striving for a fascist one-party dictatorship, without the participation of national minorities. According to Ivan Kashanovki of Ottawa University, the OUN which Bandera led was "a terrorist organisation, which was involved in the murder of thousands of civilians and prisoners of war."

The ARD report also allows Dmitri Yarosh, head of the right-wing militia Right Sector, to speak. His western-backed militia played a key role in the coup in Kiev last February. Yarosh explains in the report that

he sees himself as a Ukrainian nationalist, and by no means a fascist or Nazi. Although Zoerper noted that Right Sector members greet each other sometimes with the Hitler salute, he allows Yarosh's remark to pass without comment.

In recent months, the Viewers' Council, founded in late February, has lodged several complaints over reports broadcast by public television, mainly on Ukraine. Other organisations, like ARD's program council, criticised the biased reporting.

In 2014 Germany's ruling elite once again openly endorsed a war policy. Germany's public broadcasters, for their part, have been increasingly transformed into propaganda instruments to impose this policy on the significant majority of the population which is opposed to a return to militarism.

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