

The Committee for Ukraine's Salvation: a pawn in Russia's game

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On 3 August in Moscow, the appointment was announced of a Committee for Ukraine's Salvation, which aims to take power in Kiev. Consisting of former politicians from the pro-Russian Party of Regions, the Committee has demanded the resignation of the Ukrainian authorities, called on Ukrainian citizens to stage peaceful protests, and favours early presidential, parliamentary and regional elections. However, the Committee has distanced itself from the former president Viktor Yanukovich, and has put forward Volodymyr Oliynyk, a former Party of Regions politician now resident in Moscow, as its candidate for president of Ukraine. The former Prime Minister Mykola Azarov, acting on behalf of the Committee, also stressed the need to build friendly relations between Moscow and Kiev. The Russian president's spokesman Dmitry Peskov has denied that the Kremlin was involved with the creation of the Committee.

Commentary

- The pro-Russian puppet committee assembled in Moscow, composed of discredited politicians who have escaped from Ukraine, will have little ability to influence the course of events, and will therefore not be a viable alternative to the current Ukrainian authorities. It has limited scope to influence the Ukrainian public via the television stations controlled by oligarchs close to the Party of Regions, such as TRK Ukraine and Inter. Moreover, politicians associated with Yanukovich, including Azarov, have minimal public support. However, the Committee's call to hold peaceful protests and raise social problems may indicate that it will attempt to inspire protests in Ukraine based on social concerns. The appointment of the committee was ignored by the Ukrainian authorities; a few politicians and the majority of political columnists have identified this initiative as a clumsy attempt by Moscow to interfere in the domestic political situation in Ukraine. The Committee has become an object of ridicule on social networks, including in the form of parody memes.
- Despite the Kremlin distancing itself from this initiative, the composition of the Committee, the demands it has made, and the importance given to the event by Russian media mean it is unlikely that the project did not obtain the consent of the highest Russian authorities. The creation of the Committee is in line with the current Russian policy of contesting the legitimacy of the authorities in Kiev and presenting Ukraine as a 'failed state'. Regardless of the Committee's negligible importance, however, the initiative

appears to be an attempt to influence both the government in Kiev and Western countries. From the Kremlin's point of view, both the 'freezing' of the conflict at this stage and a large-scale escalation would be detrimental, which is why it is trying to create another tool to influence the situation in Ukraine in the hope of improving the effectiveness of its current tactics. Moscow hopes that building tension around the Ukrainian issue and showing its readiness to apply further pressure will help it achieve its political demands, which are mainly related to the federalisation of the country, halting Ukraine's integration with the West, and the recognition by Kiev of the authorities of the so-called separatist republics.