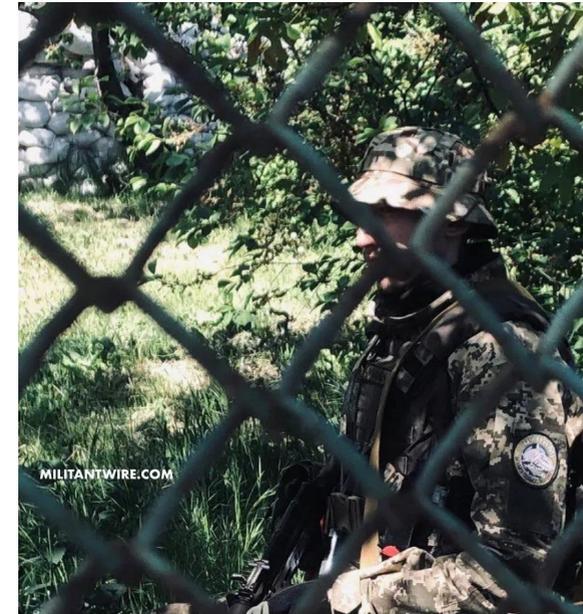


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# An Interview with Ukraine's Fighting Eco-Anarchists

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The war in Ukraine has caused considerable damage to Ukrainian cities, villages, farmland, and countryside. Nuclear power plants lie in the path of airstrikes, artillery, and cruise missiles. The conflict itself has led to an impending global food crisis, as Ukrainian granaries have been both struck by Russian munitions and prevented from emptying their silos into foreign export markets. Little if any account has been established of the ongoing war's effect on local flora and fauna in Ukraine and more broadly in Eastern Europe. Ecologically-minded Ukrainians and environmental activists in that country already shared the rest of the world's anxieties about a warming planet and unpredictable changes to climate prior to Russia's invasion on February 24th. For Ukrainian environmentalists, immediate concerns about the devastation and long-term impacts of war now accompany those felt by the rest of the world facing drought, rising temperatures, wildfires, flooding, etc.

In the following interview, Militant Wire gets a rare opportunity to speak with eco-anarchists organized under the Territorial Defense Forces (TDF) of Ukraine, who are armed and defending their country, while reviving the green anarchist movement in Eastern Europe.

In our last interview with the Ukrainian anarchist coordinating body, we spoke with a single representative of the Resistance Committee ("Ilya"). In this interview, questions were addressed to a group, answered in Ukrainian, and then translated by members of Eco Platform, before being sent back to Militant Wire for publication.

**Can you tell us a bit about yourselves (Eco Platform)? When was Eco Platform established, and for what purpose(s) initially?**

Everything began in Lviv in year 2015 in a collective of people worried about condition of environment in our region and animal

rights defense, regardless of species. During almost 7 years we held hundreds of pickets, marches and other kinds of street action, volunteered in animal shelters, joined green zones in many towns, organized educational events on ecology and veganism, held eco activist camp in Carpathians four times, covered topics of veganism and ecology in our own media and many other things. We describe our motivation with the motto: "It's impossible to save the environment without rebuilding of society."

**What led you to call yourselves "Eco Platform," and what exactly does the name mean?**

The vision that eco-anarchist movement should form a single front, unite and coordinate their actions through a common platform.

### **anarchism in Eastern Europe during wartime?**

Unfortunately, eco-anarchist movement is still on early stages worldwide. But it's relevance only rises and we face a lot of challenges. So we need to show solidarity and unite with like-minded people.\*\*

P.S. its not a mistake, we write "russian" [...] with a small letter :)



**both reconnaissance and I believe artillery siting purposes. I understand that they are not members of Eco Platform, but they are “comrades”. Can you tell us anything else about them?**

We are unsure the people agree to be discussed. We were keeping in touch earlier, before the full-scale war.

**We have also seen photos of your fighters manning defensive positions. How are they faring presently?**

Chill but alert.

**Eco Platform has an interesting logo, in my opinion. What is the significance of the bird? What kind of bird is it?**

We just found a picture that was suitable for us at the moment and have been keeping it without changes for several years. This logo was also used by other eco-anarchists in other countries.

**What do you think the war means for the international eco-anarchist movement, in general?**

This war means that it's time to abandon delusions about Russia's actions, if you haven't already done that. Unfortunately, from our experience many anarchists still haven't realised the problem of Russian government and fall for Kremlin propaganda about the need to "denazify" Ukraine. It's worth a reminder that the "prison of peoples" is in need of denazification itself.

**Thank you, very much, for agreeing to this interview. Is there anything else you would like our readers to know about Eco Platform, about the greater eco movement, or about**

**Are all of you Ukrainian, or are some of you from Belarus and Russia? Are any of your fighters foreigners from outside of the former Soviet Socialist Republics?**

Currently, everyone is from Ukraine.

**Famously, the Green Armies or peasant armies of Ukraine who were not a part of the Black Army of Nestor Makhno fought against all government factions they encountered during the Russian Civil War of 1917-1922, White and Red. Do you see yourselves as an extension of these agrarian militias, or is there no relationship between contemporary eco militants in Ukraine and the peasant armies of the last century?**

We see connection with the context that was relatable for these movements 100 years ago. Same as they did in their time, we stand for Ukrainian people in the struggle against imperial occupiers. But our position and principles are rather based on modern context, in which besides social injustice, the problems of ecocide, climate change, exploitative attitude towards other species and nature in general are acute.

**Was there a green anarchist subculture, or at the very least eco-activism during the Soviet period in Ukraine? What did this look like if it existed at all?**

From the end of the 80s until the start of 90s the phrase "eco activism" wasn't used. Eco movement started its active development after Chernobyl power plant disaster. The first ecological non-governmental and independent from government structures organization "Green World" (Zelenyi Svit) was founded. Approximately at that time, in 1988, first mass environmental protests against government-backed deforestation of Holosiivsky forest in

Kyiv emerged. The protests were organised by dissident Myhailo Myhalok, who had already served time in jail at the time for anti soviet actions, and wasn't afraid to resist. Earlier, there were nature defence, sanctuaries, Red Book etc. It was mostly done by scientists, sometimes joined by amateurs and school pupils. In 1930s one in three nature defense activists was repressed by soviet government. It was usual thing for the state to exterminate everyone who posed the least threat for soviet system, so for many movements it was hard to develop. Speaking of anarchists, after the end of collaboration with Nestor Makhno, soviet government tried to create a negative picture of them on purpose and repress them.

### **How did eco movements like yours develop or evolve after the fall of the Soviets?**

In the end of Soviet Union existence and in the 90s there were cells of Rainbow Keepers (Hraniteli Radugi) in Ukraine. Eco-anarchists and vegans became active in Ukraine in second half of 00s and in 10s. They mostly came from same environment as other anarchists, antifascist and feminist groups. There was a number of vegan and eco-anarchist organisations, initiatives and affinity groups, in some of which members of EcoPlatform took part before our organisation was founded.

death even its own species.

### **Do you see a connection between geopolitics, modern conflicts, and ecological/climate issues facing us today? What if any is the relationship, as you see it? Has this played a role in your decision to fight?**

One of key reasons for most of modern wars is struggle for access to fossil fuel. dependence on this resource is a reason for wars, as well as many ecological problems. Mostly, we observe war only sharpening problems already existing during "peace" due to nature exploitation.

\*+How is this war impacting the environment and the climate, from both your perspective and direct experience?\*

In battle zones and under air raids air, water and soil are polluted by toxic substances and ammo shards and explosion induced fires. There's also an indirect negative influence - for example, accidents caused by attacks on production facilities with hazardous substances etc. We also observe suffering of imprisoned animals being massively abandoned at farms, in cages, in locked apartments, without any opportunities to flee from the war.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine is, of course, a human tragedy, but just how destructive is the war for Ukraine's environment and the broader region? What long-term impacts do you think it will have on the environment, and what impacts has it had already?

It's what we've written [above]. It's hard to determine long term effects yet.

### **Recently Eco Platform posted photos of a female and male fighter near the frontlines operating a DJI civilian drone for**

**Is there anything you would like to tell our readers about this war from the perspective of an eco-activist/eco-anarchist?**

Violent assault on civilians, occupation and destruction of towns, genocide - all of this strongly resembles the way humans behave with wildlife and other species. What Ukrainians feel now when seeing consequences of russian aggression in their hometowns, we were and are feeling towards nature destruction. We call everyone for active solidarity with all occupation victims. These are all forest, steppe, river and sea inhabitants, struggling even during times that are relatively peaceful for humans. We say "relatively", because sadly, inhuman victims of our lifestyle usually don't count. But from our point of view we feel clearly how it is, when your life is worth nothing. This is an experience that should push towards value reassessment.

**Is there anything you would like to say about war in general, from an eco-activist/anarchist perspective?**

The cause of wars is the urge to dominate and greed, which is contradictory to mindful living in natural environment. This human mentality began thousands of years ago, when patriarchal agricultural societies with private property and other hierarchical principles began spreading their influence upon neighboring territories, and later - upon most of the world. Now we are in the historical moment when Earth's resources begin to exhaust and most of biodiversity is extinct or on the verge of extinction because of aggressive human behaviour. The war has become permanent, even if we don't count human wars - the war is against the last bastions of wildlife. Without reassessing global values and changing global principles humanity is dooming for inevitable



## **What were Ukrainian eco-activists' primary ecological and climatological concerns before the current war?**

When we speak about main challenges of eco movement, first of all we mean world scaled problems. These are climate change, deforestation and natural ecosystems degradation, horrendous scale of spoiling and annihilation of wild species, animal industry and its consequences etc. But in local Ukrainian context there's plenty of problems that are often seen in other parts of the world as well: fast city growth and huge construction projects ruining local ecosystems despite all forbidding laws and protests, mass deforestation, hunting and other things even on sanctuary territories.

## **Did Ukrainian eco-activists have a significant role in the Maidan Uprising?**

We can't recall eco movement being represented on Maidan. Some of eco-movement activists participated as a part other organisations or initiatives.

## **Are there other organized eco-militant groups in Ukraine aside from Eco Platform? What are they like, and how do you coordinate, if at all?**

Nowadays many nature defenders joined the armed forces. But we don't know about any separate groups, where and who is.

Prior to February 24th, did you think the Russian military would invade? Did you prepare yourselves for such an invasion, or did you react after the fact?\*

There was some probability of this turn if events, we observed gathering of enemy forces near state borders and knew that the



**or initiatives? Do you maintain any non-combat-related initiatives now during wartime?**

We'd like to underscore the fact that russian military aggression on Ukrainian land has been ongoing since 2014. Yes, until February 24th we held weekly vegan food giveaway, annual street agitation, eco-camps, anti-construction measures, wildlife protection and educational activities, for example, started a course of [lectures] about veganism. But now we put these and other initiatives on hold.

**Does Eco Platform have any relationship with the civilian anarchist aid effort, Operation Solidarity?**

Today we are a part of civil initiative "Solidarity Collectives" that emerged from "Operation Solidarity". You can read about the reasons of renaming and reforming on social network pages of "Solidarity Collectives".

**Are you or any of your members participants of the anarchist/antiauthoritarian coordinating body, the Resistance Committee?**

No, we aren't participants, but we stand in solidarity with this initiative.

**Did any of you fight during the Donbas War, 2014-2015?**

No.

invasion could begin at any moment. But the decision to join Territorial Defense Forces was made after these events.

**How did you all decide to join the war effort?**

Because full scaled war began at our country. Not all participants of Ecological Platform are at war now, part of us are busy volunteering. But everyone was ready to join Territorial Defense Forces as soon as we found out about this opportunity in first days of the war.

**Is Eco Platform a local movement in Ukraine, a national movement throughout Ukraine, or an international movement?**

There are our activists in several towns of Ukraine, and we get news about actions from all around the country, so we can call it nation-wide movement. But we are open to international relations and would be happy if like-minded people from abroad would like to join us. Principles and goals of the movement aren't restricted by local context and, we believe, can be applied anywhere.



**Are the armed members of Eco Platform all serving in the Territorial Defense Forces, or are some of you enlisted in the Armed Forces of Ukraine (AFU) as well?**

It depends. Not all of us are in the same unit. Officially, Territorial Defense Forces are part of Ukrainian Armed Forces, so law requires them to help regular army locally. But in the context of this war many Territorial Defense units were sent outside their regions, so there's almost no difference with regular serve. The fighters are mostly armed by the state, but defensive equipment, tech gear and many other stuff is often provided by volunteers.

**May we ask about how many people are members of Eco Platform?**

This information is not public.

**Are you recruiting or receiving new volunteers?**

Yes, we always encourage people to join our activities. Usually we suggest to take part in vegan and eco activities, and we do now as well. But we understand that in the context of full-scale war it's difficult to talk any other topics and many people delay their activism. Most of like-minded people, same as us ourselves, are either taking part in the war itself or volunteering. But it's also important to talk about war impact on the nature and other species, so if there's an opportunity, they should dedicate some time to this too.

**Is there a civilian counterpart to Eco Platform?**

Yes, part of our activists are volunteers.

**Before the war, did Eco Platform have any organized projects**