

Russian and Ukrainian activists silenced at Greek MeRA 25 party event

Monday 13 March 2023, by [TEMIROV Artem](#) (Date first published: 10 March 2023).

Russian activist Artem Temirov writes on what he sees as a concerning trend within the Hellenic left to fall into a knee-jerk “anti-imperialism” that is in fact anything but.

Author’s note: A significant part of the Greek Left for a very long time has been plagued by narrow anti-Americanism that has replaced genuine anti-imperialism. As a result of that even supposedly more moderate voices on the Left often fell in the trap of siding, even if in a subtle way, with regimes that supposedly oppose the West, regardless of how authoritarian and oppressive they might be. This has created an increasingly widening gap between this Greek Left current and leftist dissidents that come from countries whose governments are perceived by the former as “anti-imperialist”. It seems that the former are disinterested in listening to those who have come to seek refuge and avoid arrest and torture. There have even been recorded cases of representatives of the more hard-line pro-Putinist Left in Greece physically attacked an Iranian refugee at a public event, because the latter protested the pro-Putinist, pro-Mullah propaganda he was hearing. The case presented below, if much milder in regards the confrontation, represents continuation in this worrying trend of Greek leftists refusing to listen to the voices of those who have lived under the boot of supposed “anti-imperialist” regimes. This comes to indicate an ideological dogmatism, as well as a loss in trust in the abilities of common people to self-organize and initiate from below revolutionary change. In the imaginary of such leftists greater hope for social change is placed not on the potentials of popular self-determination and self-emancipation, but on foreign geopolitical powers. This must be perceived as drastic counter-revolutionary regression towards Stalinist type of thinking that can only nurture authoritarian logics.

Last year, my wife and I arrived in Greece. While I am a Russian citizen, my wife is a citizen of Ukraine. She left Kyiv a week after the start of Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, and I left Russia a few days later because it became dangerous to stay there with an anti-war position, with both us always holding left-wing and antifascist positions. In Greece, we are living under a temporary protection program for Ukrainian families.

On Monday, February 20, we were invited to speak at an event entitled “[Ukraine, 1 year of war: The people under the boot of the Russian invasion](#)”. There we spoke with members of the Greek left-wing, anarchist, and anti-authoritarian movements about resistance in Ukraine and the anti-war movement in Russia.

Two days later, a friend of ours invited us to a public event organized by the Greek political party MeRA 25 titled “[From crisis to war: one year later](#)”. Although I was unfamiliar with MeRA 25’s stance on war, I was intrigued by the list of speakers announced for the event. I was particularly interested in hearing what individuals holding seats in parliament and teaching at universities had to say on this topic.

The speakers included: Angela Dimitrakakis (Senior Lecturer at the University of Edinburgh), Amineh Kakabaveh (former member of the Swedish Parliament), Stathis Kouvelakis (former Reader

in political theory at King's College London) and Yanis Varoufakis (Professor at the University of Athens, Secretary of MeRA 25, co-founder of DiEM25, and a former finance minister of Greece).

What I heard

Amineh Kakabaveh began her speech by stating that she voted against arming Ukraine in the Swedish parliament because weapons kill people.

Overall, she opposes supporting Ukraine in the conflict, seeing it as a war between Russia and the United States. Kakabaveh believes that by supporting Ukraine, Europeans are indirectly supporting the United States and increasing US influence over the European Union.

She ended her speech by saying that she wishes peace for the entire world.

Stathis Kouvelakis reproduced speeches made by Vladimir Putin verbatim. Kouvelakis stated that the conflict in Ukraine is an imperialist war between Russia and the collective West, led by the United States, taking place on Ukrainian territory. He also referred to the war as "asymmetric" because Russia does not possess the same military power as the United States.

Furthermore, Kouvelakis claimed that Russia had no choice but to take action against Ukraine, as NATO had planned to increase its presence in the Baltic Sea region.

It seems that Stathis Kouvelakis has relied solely upon Russian sources for his knowledge of modern-day Ukraine. He has stated that in 2014, nationalists supposedly took power in Ukraine and began oppressing the Russian-speaking population.

Kouvelakis maintains that Europeans should not offer support to Ukraine or its supposedly nationalist regime. He opposes the provision of weapons to Ukraine or endorsing its demands for the de-occupation of territories occupied by Russia and the return to internationally recognized borders, as of 1991.

Yanis Varoufakis started by referring to his own article, published in the first days of the war, in which he stated that the West must end the war within the first week. He argued that "Moscow and Washington must come to an agreement." Putin must withdraw troops to the borders that existed before February 24, 2022. In turn, Biden must guarantee Putin that Ukraine will remain a neutral territory and that new European countries will not become NATO members.

Varoufakis remarked that "the fighters of Azov are, of course, Nazis." However, "there is no need to assume that Putin is a leftist; he is a fascist as well". Varoufakis suggested that "we examine the dialectical relations and mutual empowerment of the different forces: both the totalitarian and fascist forces of Russia and the fascist forces of Ukraine. This is an amalgamation of two forces."

What happened

During the Q&A session of the event, I stood up to express my disagreement with the speakers' position. I started with an important disclaimer, saying that I am from Russia.

I expressed my belief that everything they said was bullshit and that it seemed to me they were not well-informed about the situation in Russia or Ukraine. I suggested that their sources of information were limited and that they were not interested in the opinions of real people.

Out of all the speakers, Angela Dimitrakakis was the only one who knew my wife and I. A few days prior to the event dedicated to Solidarity with Ukraine, she had listened to our speeches and even

quoted positively my wife in her own speech. Despite this, Angela interrupted me and asked, “Who are you? Who brought you here?”. Although she already knew the answer to the question.

After this, Yanis Varoufakis called me a fascist, and they turned off my microphone. My wife (the only Ukrainian citizen in the hall) and I were forcibly removed from the event without being allowed to say another word.

I was surprised that there was so much resistance to hearing from two refugees from the countries that the previous two hours of discussion were focused on. On the video, it’s very clear to see my willingness to apologise and tone down my emotions, but we were roughly escorted out of the room, and Yanis Varoufakis continued to shout after me that I was a fascist.

It’s not very clear how a politician can accuse a stranger of fascism without bothering to find out their opinion. But as the Putin regime says in Russia, “parliament is not a place for discussion.” And so this event, timed to the anniversary of Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, turned out to be not a place for any alternative opinion, even when it comes from refugees from Russia and Ukraine. This is a very common strategy in discussions among conservative parties – to accuse their opponent of excessive emotionality or verbal rudeness, with the aim of depriving them of the opportunity to express their position, or with the aim of avoiding a substantive response to the position that was expressed. It is called tone-policing.

However, there is a lot to say to MeRA 25 and its supporters.

I cannot comprehend how individuals who identify as left-wing politicians and internationalists can repeat Russian propaganda word-for-word about the Ukrainian supposedly nationalist regime that took power in 2014. You don’t even need to personally know anyone from the Ukrainian Left – just use the internet to learn that in the most recent parliamentary elections of 2020, the Right Sector coalition only managed to secure 2.17 percent of the vote.

After a year of war and numerous atrocities committed, how can anyone publicly justify the Russian invasion? In March 2022, anti-NATO and anti-US statements may have appealed to part of the leftist electorate. But after witnessing the devastation in Bucha and a year of full-scale war, it is difficult to understand how anyone could justify the Russian invasion by citing NATO’s supposed intentions to expand its presence in the Baltic Sea at a public event hosted by a left-leaning party.

After all, how can the leader of the left-wing internationalist party, who claims in interviews to support the people of Ukraine, state that the war in Ukraine should be seen as a dialectical fusion of the fascist forces of both Ukraine and Russia?

These speeches lacked stories of living Ukrainians – their opinions, needs, aspirations, voices, and views. Instead, there was much reflection on the historical role of the left, political theory, geopolitics, the importance of the pacifist movement, and the struggle for world peace. At the event marking the anniversary of the war in Ukraine, there was also much discussion of US atrocities around the world, as if the US had unleashed the war.

What do the Ukrainians who are fighting think about this? What about the civilians who have chosen to remain in their homes, knowing that every day could be their last? Curiously, the speakers at their event decided not to address these questions.

Meanwhile, Ukrainians insist that the ongoing war is their fight for independence and decolonization. They are unwilling to compromise with Russia and unwilling to cede any territory. Surrendering now would not make them feel secure, as they would anticipate a new attack from Russia. They desire complete independence, not on Putin’s conditions, but rather the kind of

independence that any European country would fight for. This independence would allow them to determine their country's development, culture, and languages, as well as which alliances to form, without consulting Russia.

But the speakers easily deprived the population of one of the largest European countries of political subjectivity, giving up political rights of 43 million people. They openly stated that Putin and Biden should end the war and that Russia and the United States should come to an agreement.

These speakers define their position on the war in Ukraine not based on solidarity with the inhabitants of Ukraine or knowledge of the Ukrainians' desires, but rather on how they believe the war should end in order to prevent the strengthening of the United States.

These speakers, who identify as leftists, are willing to enable the strengthening of Russia, the fascist regime responsible for the deaths of tens of thousands of civilians, the destruction of Mariupol, and the perpetration of atrocities in Bucha and Izium. By allowing Russia to become stronger and keep its occupied territories, they are effectively allowing war criminals to remain free and creating horrors both in Ukraine and within their own country.

The speeches were phrased in such a way that one would assume any outcome of the war in which Russia wins is preferable to Ukraine's victory. This is because Ukraine's victory is not viewed as the victory of its inhabitants, but rather as the victory of the United States.

If someone view people as nothing more than numbers and votes, countries as mere drawings on a map, and believe that Ukrainians have no real say in their own affairs. That they are merely puppets of the United States, can they still be considered left-wing politicians and internationalists?

Yanis Varoufakis gave us this statement:

"The said gentleman requested and was given the floor (and microphone) to put his point of view to the audience and to the panel. He immediately abused the privilege by using offensive language and threatening behaviour especially toward a female member of the panel who, appropriately, challenged his behaviour. In response, the said gentleman – accompanied by a person filming the scene he was causing – continued to use abusive language and gestures at which point he was asked to hand back the microphone and leave. His intention was, clearly, to break up the meeting, not to contribute a point of view – a fascist practice that Greek audiences are familiar with. Thus, the organisers had no alternative than to remove him from the auditorium, as was their duty."

Angela Dimitrakakis and Amineh Kakabaveh did not respond to our request to comment. Stathis Kouvelakis was unreachable.

Artem Temirov (Prolubnikov)

[Click here](#) to subscribe to ESSF newsletters in English and/or French.

P.S.

Freedom

<https://freedomnews.org.uk/2023/03/10/russian-and-ukrainian-activists-silenced-at-mera25-event/>