

A conversation with anarchists from Ecoplatform fighting in Ukraine

Pramen

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This interview was prepared as part of a campaign to raise money for a pickup truck for activists from Ecological Platform. Don't forget to donate to the comrades and support the struggle of anarchists against Russian imperialism! How to donate can be found here – t.me/ecoplatform

Pramen: Before we get directly to the current events, can you tell us a little about Ecoplatform? How and when did the organization come into being and what were you doing before the full-scale invasion?

Ecoplatform: The Ecoplatform appeared in 2015; it was created by people who had previously participated in anti-authoritarian and anarchist projects, but who felt it was important to raise an environmental agenda through the prism of anarchism. Initially, all the activities were mainly of an agitational and educational nature, as well as a popularization of radical actions. We organized marches, lectures, film screenings, performances, helped shelters, defended forests and green spaces, and fought the various people in power. Over time there was more vegan activity. There were projects that were more social in nature but had a vegan agenda, such as “food is a right,” a localized FNB (Food not Bombs) for Ukraine.

P: How important was the environmental agenda in general to Ukrainian society before February of this year?

E: In a global sense we cannot say that many people were interested in it. We have all sorts of liberal NGOs, and they raised environmental problems from time to time, but we were more active in supporting different local initiatives. On the subject of deforestation in the Carpathians, the fight against the construction of wind turbines in the Carpathian mountains, the fight against building sites, the problem of a garbage processing plant in Lviv, etc., of course, we supported these initiatives. In general, we can say that local environmental problems were more important for people.

P: Western Ukraine is full of different political movements, including ultra-right ones. Has this led to any conflicts in the past that made your work difficult? We heard that Ecoplatform activists were attacked by a group of people with knives. In general, how safe was it to be an eco-anarchist in the West before the war started?

E: Yes, absolutely. We have a long history of conflicts with the far-right, there were many unpleasant episodes, and it certainly interfered with our activities. However, over time, the far-right stopped being very active. Also because of the street and information war.

P: The Ecoplatform positions itself as an organization of green anarchism. Unfortunately, in Eastern Europe, the ideas of eco-anarchism are often viewed with skepticism. In Belarus, most of the eco-activism is associated with NGOs, which also include anarchists. Can you tell us a little about the theory of green anarchism? What do you stand for and what are you trying to achieve?

E: Green anarchism is a synthesis of anarchism and radical ecology. In essence, this is an expansion of anarchist ethics beyond human society, so green anarchism speaks to problems that usually remain less visible: speciesism, i.e. species discrimination, and anthropocentrism, the idea that “man is the king of nature”.

P: The attitude to anarchists from Western Ukraine in Belarus has not always been simple, also because of the influence of nationalist ideas on the political agenda. Can you tell us a little about your attitude to nationalism and patriotism?

E: We have a negative attitude to any form of chauvinism. Nationalism is, in most cases, closely associated with it. Patriotism can have reasonable justifications and limits, as in the case of Ukraine and its fight against Russian imperialism.

P: In one of your last posts before the invasion, you published a text about green nihilism. How much do you support these ideas and what does it mean to you?

E: In the idea of green nihilism, we find for ourselves both a complete acceptance of a reality in which mass extinction, climate change, and the destruction of natural ecosystems are already happening, and the strength to keep fighting in all conditions. Giving up the illusion of victory does not demotivate us, but rather helps us to cope with the daily challenges, keeping our sanity as much as possible.

P: There is a lot of talk online about Russian imperialism in relation to the territories of the former Soviet Union. Can you tell us a little bit about how this imperialism affected your politics before February 2022?

E: When the Ecological Platform was created (in 2015), it was the second year of the war that Russia had started by occupying territories in eastern and southern Ukraine. Several of the former members of our initiative had been on that front for a while.

We’ve always maintained social networks, created content and other things in Ukrainian, including doing translations from Russian into Ukrainian. This has always been organic to us, but if you analyze it, it’s a way to maintain our local identity (not to blend in with the Russian content) and the visibility of the Ukrainian eco-anarchist movement.

P: Part of the anarchist and anti-authoritarian movement had been preparing for the invasion for months before it started. Did your group prepare for the war in any way? What were the positions within the collective about military action?

E: We prepared on an individual level, emergency backpacks and so on and so forth. We made contact with other anarchist and anti-authoritarian initiatives, and talked about places to stay and stuff like that. In general, we can not say that we were ready, in principle, it’s hard to be prepared for such things, but we had thoughts about going to war. So that’s what happened.

P: As far as we remember, part of the activists of the Ecoplatform went to the Lviv military. At the same time an anti-authoritarian platoon was being formed in Kiev. Have you ever thought about joining the anarchists in Kiev?

E: We did. There were certain difficulties with that, although one person got in. Another part of the activists went to Odessa, and the rest started volunteering.

P: Now some of the activists were on the front line – can you tell us a little bit about the path from the Lviv defense to the fighting in Eastern Ukraine? How did you end up there, how many people from the Ecoplatform are now fighting with weapons against Russian imperialism?

E: There were difficulties with registration in Lviv, especially for women.

During the first days a lot of people rushed to sign up, that's why we didn't stay here long. One activist was in an anti-authoritarian platoon, later took part in the liberation of Kharkov region, the rest were in the south. We cannot give the exact number of people.

P: How does an anti-authoritarian fighter's day go? Do you allocate time for political conversations, or everything is fully occupied with military affairs?

E: Yes, when there are no combat missions and the situation allows, in addition to everyday life, we periodically talk about political topics, about veganism and so on.

P: How do the other soldiers feel about your political views?

E: We have a pretty good reputation here, because we try to demonstrate solidarity, mutual assistance and self-organization through interaction with other branches in practice. Of course, not everyone here believes in a life without hierarchy and oppression, but to a certain extent we popularize anarchist ideas, including through discussions.

P: You were among those who took part in the liberation of Kherson – can you tell us a little about that experience? How did you feel when you entered the city, how did the locals react to you and how important was it to you personally?

E: Generally speaking, the main task we had in Kherson was mop-up operations. We worked together with the marines. In addition, we provided help to the locals, food, medicine, moral support. People were intimidated by the presence of Russian forces, who would often beat or shoot someone. In addition, our drones were constantly working, helping to correct the artillery, and medics, as they were constantly evacuating the wounded. And entering Kherson itself was more of a symbolic act, to talk to the locals. The locals were mostly very happy, crying, asking to sign somewhere, either on flags or on jackets. There were some dissatisfied, of course. But on the whole they were waiting for us.

P: Now you are collecting money for a pickup for your squad. Some in the West wonder why the Ukrainian army does not provide equipment for its soldiers? Can you explain to these comrades what are the reasons for numerous crowdfunding of this kind?

E: Regarding such equipment as machines, it should be understood that they are expendable material. They often fall into disrepair because of shelling, mines, or banal some of the machines are simply not suitable for off-road work, even in the winter season. For this reason, of course, the army can not constantly provide machines, and we have to rely on ourselves. In short, it is expendable, but it is necessary.

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