

VERKHOVNA RADA OF UKRAINE
5, Hrushevskoho Str, Kyiv, 01008, Ukraine

October 30, 2019

The Honorable Eliot L. Engel

**Chairman
The House Committee on Foreign Affairs
The United States Congress**

Copies to the 39 members of the United States
House of Representatives

Dear Colleague,

We, the people's deputies of Ukraine representing various political parties, with that address you, our colleagues in the United States House of the Representatives, who have signed the October 16, 2019 letter to the United States Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in regard to the "Azov Battalion".

First and foremost, we would like to assure you that we greatly appreciate and value the vitally important support the United States provides to Ukraine in all crucial areas, such as our national sovereignty and territorial integrity, development of Ukraine's defense capabilities, expansion of reforms, eradication of corruption, advancement of the civil society and other. All of us are staunch supporters of deepening the relations between our nations even further, to the point when we eventually become allies after Ukraine joins NATO.

We are proud that cooperation between the Ukrainian and US Armed Forces has already evolved into a real bond during peacekeeping and counter-terrorism operations in Afghanistan and Iraq and continues to grow through regular joint army exercises. It is worth remembering that during the hostilities in Iraq, a brigade of the Armed Forces of Ukraine supported the US Army. In early September 2003, there was a total of 1,680 Ukrainian troops in the conflict zone, making the Ukrainian unit the third largest after the American and British.

There can be no doubt that all of us are united in the most sincere respect to the servicemen that at any moment are ready to defend the values, democracy, sovereignty and territorial integrity of our nations. As you probably know, rebuffing the armed aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine has already taken the lives of over 13 000 Ukrainian citizens – both army men and civilians - a tragic toll

that unfortunately keeps rising almost daily. Considering that, support of the nation's Armed Forces is now the outmost priority for Ukraine.

Regardless, we believe that no one is above the law and that wartime should not and cannot be ever used as a cover for crime and wrongdoing. However, perhaps more than any other time, wartime demands that any criticism of the servicemen is well-grounded, while any proofs of their wrongdoing – undeniable.

In this context, we have no moral right to ignore your letter that among others, referred to the “Azov Battalion”, officially titled *the Separate Special Purpose Detachment “Azov” - military unit #3057 of the Eastern Operational-Territorial Command of the National Guard of Ukraine*.

Since January 2015, the detachment has been an official unit of the National Guard of Ukraine and when performing combat missions - subordinate exclusively to the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine.

The history of the unit began on May 23, 2014, when the Special Purpose Police Patrol Battalion “Azov’ya” was formed from the activists of the Revolution of Dignity and civil organizations Ukrainian Patriot and Auto-Maidan. Since inception and to this day, Azov has honorably fulfilled its missions, including taking part in the liberation of Mariupol and numerous smaller towns from the Russian occupation forces.

Over the five years of Azov’s service, 26 of its soldiers have fallen for the independence and territorial integrity of Ukraine, while 1414 - received rewards “For Courage and Heroism When Fulfilling a Combat Mission”. Of the latter, 171 has received state awards – 23 posthumously and 123 – for being wounded in combat, 28 – rewards of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 10 – of the Cabinet of Minister of Ukraine, 906 – of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine and 299 – of the National Guard of Ukraine.

At the same time, neither your letter to the United States Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, nor any open sources that we have seen provided information that would corroborate any connection of the Azov detachment to the terrorist acts in New Zealand, recruitment of the United States citizens to the Azov ranks and other statements made in the aforementioned letter.

Under the circumstances, we are convinced that only complete openness and sincerity can prevent an unfair decision and establish real justice. So, we call on all Ukrainian law enforcement and security agencies to thoroughly check all of the allegations listed in the letter and make the results public.

Needless to say, the attempts to label one of the most decorated official units of the National Guard of Ukraine a “terrorist organization” or an “overseas violent white supremacist extremist group” weigh heavily on our souls and painfully echo in the

hearts of the Ukrainian servicemen, veterans and volunteers who have taken part in the war in Donbas and continue to defend Ukraine from the Russian aggression.

Therefore, we urge you and all the United States officials involved to demonstrate restraint and total impartiality and conduct a thorough investigation before adopting any decision in this matter. On our part, we, the undersigned people's deputies of Ukraine, would be happy to aid the United States Congress in obtaining truthful, comprehensive and exhaustive information on this issue. We very much hope that our collaboration will ensure the establishment of the true facts that can pave the way to a well-grounded and fair conclusion.

Thank you for your understanding.

Sincerely,

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