

# An Eyewitness Account of Events in Odessa on 2 May 2014

By Sergey Dibrov

A Special Investigative Report for Radio Liberty

*Translated by Arch Tait*

May 2016

This article is published in English by The Henry Jackson Society by arrangement with Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty. The article reflects the views of the author and not necessarily those of The Henry Jackson Society or its staff.



Part One: 'A Black Day in the History of Odessa'

<sup>1</sup> On 2 May 2014, I reported live to an audience of some one million viewers. Just after 11 o'clock that night, I left the blackened Trade Union House with a clear sense that a terrible tragedy had taken place, and that I had no idea what it was.

A few days later, I and some colleagues set up the 2 May Group and began a journalistic investigation. After a year's work, after hundreds of interviews and dozens of information requests, after studying numerous video recordings, photographs and documents, we had pieced together a picture of what happened that day. For a year after that we were seeking out and adding further pieces to the jigsaw. We published a detailed chronology of the events and many articles about particular episodes.

\* \* \* \* \*

My friend, Sasha Ostashko, had recently moved from Odessa to New York. We regularly communicated with each other on Facebook. He was normally cheerful and optimistic, but today something was plainly worrying him, and this was the first time he had telephoned. It was early morning on 2 May 2014.

'Hi, hello. What's up?' I asked, gradually returning from somnolence to wakefulness.

'Nothing here, but what have you got going on over there?'

'Just the usual. Yesterday a communist demonstration, today a march of football fans. I'll be streaming it. You can watch it yourself. Lots of fun.'

'Seryozha, forgive me, but I don't like the look of what is being planned there for today. If you can avoid covering that march, just stay away from it.'

That was odd. I have known Sasha for many years and he has always been a model of healthy cynicism, devoid of undue sentimentality. The clock was showing 7.30 in the morning. What time must it be with him in New York? Midnight, I supposed. What was he getting so worried about? There was a march. I'd known worse.

'Everything's fine,' I replied. 'Don't worry.'

'Seryozha, I beg you, take care.'

For all normal human beings, today was a holiday, but not, of course, for journalists. Yesterday I had been broadcasting the May Day demonstration and today I would be doing a live broadcast from a solidarity march of football fans of opposing teams and supporters of Ukrainian unity.

\* \* \* \* \*

In the spring and summer of 2013 I managed, together with Oleg Konstantinov, the editor of *Dumskaya*, a popular Odessa-based Internet publication, to bring together all the city's politicians

---

<sup>1</sup> This paper was written for the Russian Service of Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty. It can be accessed at, Dibrov, S. 'Chernii den' v istorii Odessi', *svoboda.org*, 1 May 2016, available at: <http://www.svoboda.org/content/article/27708905.html>

---

opposed to the illegal destruction and building development of the parks and squares of Odessa. It was a fiendishly interesting project. Extreme-left Trotskyites from the *Borotba* (Struggle) Association started cooperating with centre-rightists from Democratic Alliance. Pro-Russian politicians from the *Rodina* (Homeland) party and *Molodezhnoye Yedinstvo* (Youth Unity) organization began cooperating with pro-Ukrainian activists in the protests. We organized meetings, public hearings, round tables, and even direct action to dismantle fencing round the illegal building sites.

For Odessa and, I imagine, the whole of Ukraine this was a first. The municipal authorities were clueless as to what to do in the face of such powerful resistance, and in the end we managed to force them to return to the proper, legal channels in deciding how the city's architecture and green spaces should be treated. We won that battle together, but then everything changed. The events on Maidan Square in Kiev started up, anti-Maidanites appeared, and those who had fought together were once more bitter opponents.

I accepted an offer from Konstantinov and began working on the Odessa edition of *Dumskaya*. That is how I became a journalist: no longer an active participant in events but an observer from the sidelines whose task was, as objectively as possible, to communicate information to our viewers. I tried my best to do that, not from 'above the fray', but from a place a bit to the side.

On 2 May 2014, Konstantinov called me at around 11.00 am.

'Hi. Are we going to manage a stream today?'

'No problem. The equipment's ready, batteries charged. We're ready to go.'

'Good. Then, if you don't mind, I'll go out for a couple of hours to the park with the kids.'

Oleg graduated in history, and now, when historic events were unfolding before our eyes, he burned with professional zeal. For months we had been working from morning to night with almost no days off.

'Take a break, Oleg. Everything will be fine.'

At the *Dumskaya* offices I was considered the expert on streaming. Live broadcasting had become very popular during the events on Maidan Square, and we started streaming using ordinary smartphones with fairly weak 3G technology to cover demonstrations in Odessa.

'If anything kicks off, call me and I'll be right there.'

'Of course. Any problems, I'll call straight away,' I said, while thinking to myself, 'Actually, Oleg, if anything kicks off I expect I'll be able to cope with it without disturbing your family outing.'

That day, Oleg Konstantinov's outing was nevertheless disturbed. As soon as he heard what was happening in the city, he rushed back at 5.00 pm to the thick of the fray on Grecheskaya Square. By 7.00 pm he was in hospital with four gunshot wounds.

\*\*\*\*\*

Two months before, late at night on 2 March, friends had brought me a flak jacket. I was surprised. At that time I did not think my job was so dangerous that I needed to drag several kilograms of metal around on my person.

Of course, all sorts of things could happen. For instance, on 19 February several hundred thugs with baseball bats attacked participants in a peaceful protest in front of the Odessa Provincial State Administration building. On that occasion they beat up not only Euromaidan supporters demanding an end to the bloodshed in Kiev, but also journalists. The thugs' baseball bats broke several videocameras and reporters' skulls. Fortunately, there were no fatalities.

I was streaming at the time and was in the middle of the trouble. My broadcast was terminated by a blow from a baseball bat. Purely by luck, it hit neither my arm nor my head but my smartphone. Following a steep five-metre trajectory, it landed resoundingly on the asphalt and burst into pieces. I was more surprised than frightened. An hour later I was close to one of Odessa's resort hotels videoing these people as, accompanied by members of the police force, they unloaded motorcycle helmets and baseball bats from their buses. By the evening of 19 February 2014, we journalists knew everything: who had brought these hired thugs to Odessa, where they were staying, who was financing them, and who had given the order to beat people up. As for the official investigation, it has been going on now for over two years, and the investigators have succeeded in identifying just one of the assailants.

On that evening of 2 March, my friends were terse but insistent: 'Wear that flak jacket for the foreseeable future.' That day, Russian warships blockaded the Ukrainian Navy in Sevastopol; the Russian parliament authorized the Russian president to send troops into Ukraine; and 'little green men' seized the military units in Crimea.

'Is it really that serious?' I asked. I did not relish the prospect of lugging that heavy metallic clothing around. 'Yes,' my friends said, and I did not argue.

The following day, 3 March 2014, pro-Russian activists besieged the provincial administration building. They took the Ukrainian flag off the flagpole and replaced it with the flag of Russia, demanding that the Regional Council should declare an 'Odessan People's Republic' and announce a referendum. However, something went wrong. The deputies declined to secede from Ukraine and kicked Anton Davidchenko, the leader of the anti-Maidanites in Odessa and of Youth Unity, out of the chamber. Pro-Ukrainian activists meanwhile moved in on the building and the anti-Maidanovites found themselves surrounded. They were obliged personally to take down the Russian tricolore, put the Ukrainian flag back in place, and disperse.

On that occasion, on 3 March, everything passed off fairly peacefully, but I can see now that this was the end of the 'Russian Spring' in Odessa. Without the support of local elites, no 'people's republics' or separatism can be implemented. This was nothing to do with patriotism: quite simply, the commercial and political interests of the Odessan authorities coincided with those of a united Ukraine.

\*\*\*\*\*

After President Yanukovich fled at the end of February 2014, the police in Odessa abdicated their responsibility for maintaining public order during political demonstrations. This was taken over by *Samooborona* ('Self-defence') on the part of the supporters of Euromaidan, and by the People's

Militia and Odessa Militia of Kulikovo Field for the other side. These units comprised the best trained and disciplined activists on the two sides, their members undergoing special training, being provided with equipment, and ensuring public order during mass demonstrations.

Despite their bellicose rhetoric, these quasi-law enforcement organizations did liaise informally with each other and with the police. In March and April there were a number of occasions when marches several thousand strong supporting the opposing sides were taking place simultaneously in the centre of Odessa. Thanks to informal liaison, their routes did not intersect and several flare-ups were dealt with effectively. According to the activists themselves, their most difficult task was keeping the peace and controlling some of their own over-excited, overly radical, or simply stupid supporters.

Additionally, within these security organizations, ‘rapid response units’ appeared which were the first on the scene in case of conflict. One such was set up within the ‘People’s Militia’. It was driven around in a white minibus with Donetsk number plates by a burly anti-Maidan activist nicknamed ‘The Bo’sun’. With him in the bus there were usually a lawyer and several solidly built young men. I regularly saw it at the city’s flashpoints.

A serious reverse occurred on 10 April on the anniversary of the liberation of Odessa from the Nazis. Both sides had agreed to refrain from politicizing the occasion, but the anniversary procession was turned into an anti-Maidan parade. In retaliation, a group of pro-Ukrainian activists blockaded Oleg Tsarev in his hotel. He was a candidate for president and well known for his pro-Russian sympathies. Anti-Maidanites from Kulikovo Field came to rescue him. *Samooborona* were not on the scene and the militias were unable to keep the situation under control. The outcome was a major punch-up and the wrecking of a police bus which was trying to evacuate women and elderly people. Two ‘prisoners’ were brought to Kulikovo Field and immediately handed over by the militia volunteers to medics and the police.

The nature of the relationship between the security organizations of Odessa’s Euromaidanites and anti-Maidanites is clear from a tale told by Anton Raevsky, an activist of the Black Hundred, a far-right Russian organization. He arrived from St. Petersburg in March 2014, lived in the tented encampment at Kulikovo Field, trained with the Odessa Militia, and spoke very highly of their fighting qualities. Having acquainted himself with the situation in the city, he proposed ‘eliminating’ the leader of the Odessa Right Sector faction, and volunteered to undertake the murder himself.

‘Unfortunately, the leaders of the Odessa Militia turned me down. They offered various excuses: that it would not change anything because someone else would be sent to replace him, or that this was not an appropriate moment to escalate the conflict,’ Raevsky told journalists in late March, after having had to leave Odessa in a hurry.

\*\*\*\*\*

The annexation of Crimea changed attitudes in Odessa abruptly. Even people who were sceptical of integration with the European Community and prepared to put up with the Yanukovich regime were greatly alarmed by the prospect of ‘little green men’ appearing in Odessa. In early March, for the first time, thousands of citizens demonstrated in the streets under the Ukrainian flag. They marched the length of the city and held a protest rally in front of the Russian consulate.

The opportunity for setting up a 'People's Republic of Odessa', after the failure on 3 March 2014, had been missed. Time was working against the Russian Spring. On 17 March the Ukrainian Security Service arrested Anton Davidchenko and it is said that at the time of his arrest he was in possession of a large amount of money. Pro-Russian leaders began leaving Odessa. In mid-April, Igor Markov, a politician and businessman who led the Rodina (Motherland) party and was considered one of the main sponsors of the pro-Russian protests, left Ukraine.

The popularity of the anti-Maidan movement plummeted. If, in March and early April, 5,000-6,000 people marched in the streets of Odessa under Russian flags, by the time of the May Day demonstration they had difficulty scraping together a thousand communists, socialists, Russian supporters and anarchists.

In late April, the anti-Maidan camp on Kulikovo Field was suffering a serious financial crisis. Several dozen people were living in the tents and money was needed for maintaining the camp: several thousand hryvnia (100-200 dollars) each day for food, fuel for a generator, and other running costs. They had none. The protesters tried collecting donations during mass protest meetings, but failed. Summer was, in any case, approaching, and living day and night in the middle of 'field' of red-hot asphalt was nobody's idea of fun.

It was time for the encampment to be dismantled, but to tell people who had been protesting for months, 'It's over. We lost. You should go home!' would be the death of any politician. A face-saving compromise was needed that would take account of everybody's interests. The principal mediator in finding that compromise was Dmitry Fuchedzhi, deputy chief of police of the province.

Colonel Fuchedzhi had been serving at senior levels in the Odessa provincial police for over 15 years. He was always a deputy: deputy to the police chief in charge of public safety.

At the end of April 2014, the new governor, Vladimir Nemirovsky, demanded that Fuchedzhi should clear Kulikovo Field of its tents. The 9 May Victory Day holiday was approaching and, whatever people may say about post-Maidan Ukraine, the anniversary of the victory over Nazism remains both a national and a public celebration. On that day there is traditionally a military parade and, by tradition, it is held at Kulikovo Field.

Fuchedzhi was in no hurry to carry out these instructions. Prudent and pragmatic, he had in the course of his service at the top of the provincial police force seen three presidents come and go, as well as several interior ministers and many police chiefs, who were usually politicians. Needless to say, over these years he had built up extensive personal, commercial and corrupt connections.

There is no doubt that Dmitry Fuchedzhi intended to stay in charge of the Odessan police come what may. In spring 2014, he would often say to colleagues who were trying to show initiative, 'What's the hurry? Take it easy. Who knows what government and what flag we may have here by next month?' It is entirely possible that Fuchedzhi might have become the 'Interior Minister of the People's Republic of Odessa', if such an entity had suddenly materialized, and would have carried on serving without a twinge of conscience 'for the good of the citizens of Odessa', as he would doubtless have believed.

In such circumstances, any forcible dispersal of the anti-Maidan camp by the police was out of the question. Provoking large-scale conflict is, as we saw above, contrary to Odessa's traditions.

Certain Ukrainian oligarchs stepped in. They had an interest in preserving the unity and independence of Ukraine, as well as in maintaining peace and good order in Odessa. They produced US\$ 100,000 to facilitate a peaceful end to the encampment by, to put it bluntly, bribing the leaders of the movement.

At the end of April, the city authorities fenced off a large area of parkland on the outskirts of the city. The idea was for the encampment to be moved there, in the vicinity of the memorial to 411 coastal battery which had fought valiantly in the defence of Odessa in 1941. Behind-the-scenes negotiations with the leaders at Kulikovo Field were conducted by Fuchedzhi, who kept in touch with all parties. The offer was simple and unambiguous: you get the money, move your tents to the outskirts, and do there whatever you please. The main thing is not to be seen in the city centre before the end of summer.

Some of the anti-Maidan organizations, including the Odessa Militia, accepted the proposal. Our information is that, for doing so, they were paid \$ 50,000. Arriving on 1 May at Kulikovo Field with the May Day demonstration, I was surprised to find half the tents gone from the square.

The leaders of some of the other organizations refused to move, seeing it as political suicide. Accordingly, it was agreed that the remaining tents would be removed by 'persons unknown'. This approach had been used in Odessa to dismantle encampments before. In 2006, similarly unknown persons had, with a police presence, removed the tents of Communists who were guarding the Lenin statue. In November 2013, people resembling maintenance workers broke up and removed the tents of Odessa's Euromaidan supporters. On both occasions the job was done at night, in the presence of police officers who surrounded the site and prevented excessive resistance by one party and excessive violence by the other. Both times, the operation was seen through without casualties, and on both occasions Dmitry Fuchedzhi was the man in charge of public safety.

The option of having the tents removed by 'unidentified football hooligans' suited everyone. The anti-Maidan leaders guaranteed there would be a minimum of occupants in the tents and, after the clearance, could represent themselves as 'victims of the junta'; the Euromaidan got rid of a source of aggravation in the city centre; the provincial government cleared the area for the military parade; the police got the encampment dismantled without themselves being involved. If asked, 'How could something like this be allowed to happen?' Fuchedzhi could just shrug and say, 'Well, at least no one got hurt and public order has been restored.' As it had been in the past.

Our information is that a relatively peaceful and entirely bloodless demolition of the tent city was scheduled for late evening on 2 May 2014, after the end of a football match between Chernomorets (Odessa) and Metallist (Kharkov).

\*\*\*\*\*

After the protests in Kiev developed into confrontation and the government began using hired thugs to do their dirty work, something quite extraordinary occurred among football fans. The fan clubs and groups of violent 'ultras' for the first time in many decades set aside their mutual grievances, agreed a truce, and came out in support of Euromaidan. In all the cities of Ukraine, including Donetsk, the ultras began protecting rallies of local supporters of European integration from attacks by government-inspired thugs.

Before matches in the Ukrainian Premier League, fans from different cities organized Marches of Ukrainian Unity in which a joint procession was held under Ukrainian flags and the insignia of both teams. Such demonstrations were held in Kiev, Kharkov and Dnepropetrovsk with thousands of people participating.

The fan clubs of Chernomorets and Metallist have enjoyed friendly relations for many years. Matches between the teams were always characterized by a huge influx of away fans, who were given a friendly reception. Just such an influx was planned for 2 May 2014, which was a holiday Friday before the weekend, with the weather perfect for enjoying being out in the fresh air.

Sergey Kurchenko, the owner of Metallist Football Club, was a young oligarch close to the family of Yanukovich. In the past he had organized excursions for fans when their team was playing away in the Ukrainian championship and European cups. For the trip to Odessa, he rented an entire train, one of the carriages of which was reserved for fans with disabilities, who were members of the Metal Hearts para-fan club.

The plan was that, on 2 May, a joint unity march would process through the streets of Odessa, and after the match a large picnic would be held for which, we understand, a resort centre near the beach had been rented. Metallist fans were nationally renowned for their unprintable songs, and a march with their participation was expected to be very well attended.

It should be noted that the fans' marches did not always pass off peacefully. On 27 April 2014, a week before 2 May, several hundred young people sporting the anti-fascist black and orange ribbon of St George tried to halt a march in Kharkov in which many thousands of fans of the Metallist and Dnepr football clubs were taking part. In a violent clash, 14 people were injured, including two police officers, but ultimately the fans proceeded to the stadium.

The next day, 28 April, there was a similar incident in Donetsk. A pro-Ukrainian demonstration attended by some 2,000 people was attacked by several hundred individuals armed with shields, sticks, knives and firearms. Taken by surprise, the demonstrators were put to flight and then pursued through the streets by their assailants chanting 'Russia, Russia!' On that day, at least 15 people were seriously injured.

The forthcoming visit of the Metallist fans who, only a week before, had fought pro-Russian activists in Kharkov, was viewed at Kulikovo Field with consternation. There were rumours that the Kharkov ultras would demolish the tents on Kulikovo Field, which is close to the railway station, immediately after arriving in Odessa. The city was blanketed with appeals to 'protect Odessa from pogroms!' Social networks and the walls of houses were plastered with flyers protesting, 'We do not want people marching in OUR city and beating up passers-by. Help protect our city from the Nazis!' The anti-Maidan leaders denied any involvement with these flyers, but the calls were posted on the personal page of Captain Cocoa, one of the active members and a 'field commander' of the Odessa Militia.

This was not anything new for Odessa. The anti-Maidanites constantly resorted to this kind of rhetoric and regularly tried to scare residents with talk of 'fascists' and 'Bandera nationalists'. In spite of the fact that the leaders of the opposing sides were in informal contact with each other, hatred of their opponents among the rank and file had been very efficiently fanned almost continuously for several months.

Apart from these leaflets and appeals, on 1 May there were no portents in Odessa of trouble brewing. Some of the anti-Maidan activists were settling in nicely to their new encampment on the city outskirts. That evening they celebrated May Day with a traditional picnic, which six leaders of Euromaidan and their families attended as guests. Until late in the evening, activists on both sides of the divide discussed their plans for the summer. Happily, Odessa's extensive green belt meant that camps for children and joint activities could be readily organized.

That evening no one had the least suspicion that there would be bloodshed in the streets of Odessa the next day, and that 2 May 2014 would go down as one of the blackest days in the history of the city.

\* \* \* \* \*

2 May, 2 pm

Those joining the March for Ukrainian Unity were to assemble on Cathedral Square at 3.00 pm. From there the fans were to move down the pedestrianized Deribasovskaya Street to the stadium, where the football match would start at 5.00 pm.

A few blocks away from the assembly point, on Alexandrovsky Avenue, I saw a group of young people wearing masks, bulletproof vests, helmets, with sticks and wooden shields and St George ribbons. Many had bands of red tape on their arms. I recognized several Odessa Militia activists I had seen many times before, encountering them at anti-Maidan rallies and demonstrations and training at Kulikovo Field. Some of them were warming up on a sports field, and some formed a dense crowd in which I noticed the young man who called himself Captain Cocoa.

That day, I was to see these lads many times, during street fighting, at the burning Trade Union House building and, alas, among the dead.

\* \* \* \* \*

By agreement with all parties, the fans were to march peacefully to the stadium. Accordingly, the appearance of a large anti-Maidan group clearly looking for a fight, came as a complete surprise to the police. Several officers approached and told them to disperse, to which the response was a lordly silence.

The aura of aggression emanating from this crowd, began to spill out. There was an incident with a young man, either a passer-by or a 'spy', who pulled out an air pistol and fired several shots. The 'militia' took the pistol off him, handed him over to the police, and themselves moved to the gate of the nearby Euromaidan headquarters in Zhukovsky Street.

There the gates were barred and in the courtyard several men could be seen in camouflage fatigues and possibly armed. There was no storming of the HQ: the police arrived in time, formed a cordon and blocked the entrance. The anti-Maidanites smashed the windows of a car with Ukrainian insignia which was parked near the gate and returned to Alexandrovsky Avenue.

Meanwhile, Fuchedzhi rushed to the scene, having been at a meeting about public order in the provincial prosecutor's office. The appearance of the anti-Maidanites was a clear breach of the agreement and threw all his plans into disarray. Fuchedzhi immediately complained to Captain Cocoa. He phoned Dmitry Odinov, the leader of the Odessa Militia with whom he had negotiated

the withdrawal from Kulikovo Field. Odinov ordered Captain Cocoa to leave immediately, but the answer was: 'Too late. Your time is over. Now we are going into action.'

The situation was spiralling out of control. A faction of the Odessa Militia and a group of anti-Maidan supporters who had responded to the appeals were obviously spoiling for a fight. Almost all the police, however, were concentrated at the stadium and there was only a small reserve in the city. Fuchedzhi had to use all his diplomatic skills to try to defuse this unforeseen situation.

Under pressure, the anti-Maidanites told him their information was that the fans' march was a smokescreen and their real intention was to divert from Deribasovskaya to Kulikovo Field and destroy the tents. They themselves had come together to thwart that attack.

Fuchedzhi tried to seize the initiative. He had insufficient forces in the city to deal with the mutineers, so he decided to lure them into a trap. Instead of surrounding them, he would kettle them in the middle of a block and seal the two exits with a police cordon.

The colonel persuaded the anti-Maidanites they should move to a more convenient position, and personally led the column into a trap he prepared on Yekaterininskaya Street, between Deribasovskaya and Grecheskaya. Subsequent photographs of a police colonel leading a group of masked hoodies flashed round the world. What the photographs did not show, however, was that Fuchedzhi, like the Pied Piper of Hamelin, was leading pro-Russian activists away from Cathedral Square, where by then several thousand fans and Euromaidan supporters had gathered. Instead of a pipe he had a phone over which he was constantly issuing instructions to his subordinates.

At the Yekaterininskaya-Grecheskaya crossroads Fuchedzhi held the activists for two cycles of the traffic lights, while riot police set up a roadblock at the junction with Deribasovskaya. The colonel's plan was that the column would advance one more block and come up against a police cordon, after which the trap would be sprung and another cordon would cut off the way out of the block. If he had succeeded, the events of 2 May would have been over before they began.

When the column had already entered the colonel's trap, however, something unexpected happened. Captain Cocoa, himself a former police officer, saw the police cordon and evidently guessed what Fuchedzhi was up to. In the middle of the block he loudly commanded, 'Column, halt!'

Some 200 pro-Russian activists stopped, turned round and, at first slowly but then faster and faster, began moving back, first to the exit from the trap, then turning right on to Grecheskaya Street. They were pursued by the police from the cordon, and the whole motley crowd charged towards Cathedral Square, where 2,000 people were massed under Ukrainian flags.

At 3.30 pm on 2 May, 200 people in masks and equipped with sticks, shields and bulletproof vests ran at 2,000 of their opponents. Some, as it proved, to their deaths.

\* \* \* \* \*

At this moment I was on Cathedral Square and knew nothing of these manoeuvres. Here attention was focused on a small group of Kharkov ultras. They were renowned for indecent songs directed at the person of Vladimir Putin, president of Russia. Their most famous had been released in late

March and quickly became a hit. Accordingly, the arrival of the ultras from Kharkov was treated by the Odessa Euromaidanites as a guest performance and they cheerfully joined in the singing.

For most of those in Cathedral Square the atmosphere was thoroughly convivial, as one would expect when friends meet up to walk through a city on their way to watch a football match and then enjoy themselves. Only *Samooborona* were looking uneasy. Their observers were constantly monitoring the movements of the pro-Russian activists on Alexandrovsky Avenue, and *Samooborona* realigned their shields several times to block the direction from which they now thought danger might be approaching. Most people in the square were quite unaware of this.

Finally, towards 3.30 pm, the march beginning lining up, to be escorted by police as it proceeded down Deribasovskaya towards the stadium. I continued streaming and placed a tripod with a smartphone in their path so the procession would flow round it. I often did this during marches and demonstrations because it was interesting, both for me and the viewers, to see people's expressions.

I did not get my images. As the first row began to move off, the anti-Maidanites, having escaped from the trap on Yekaterininskaya, rushed down Grecheskaya towards Cathedral Square. There were explosions, shots fired, clouds of smoke. It was out of the question that the march could continue towards the stadium after that. People bearing the Ukrainian insignia ran towards the fracas. They knew about the leaflets that had been distributed and about the appeals. They were aware of the group that had been assembling on Alexandrovsky Avenue, and were keyed up, ready for an attack. I ran in that direction too, because it was clear that the main events of the day would now be happening there.

Part Two: 'We had been heading towards this tragedy for several months.'

<sup>2</sup> The clashes on Grecheskaya Street were instigated by a small group of activists from Kulikovo Field. That their incursion had petered out and been followed by fixed battles everybody knew from the news, from streaming on the Internet, and from calls on their phones. The anti-Maidanites were clearly in a minority and called for backup.

At around 4.00 pm, half an hour after the confrontations began, a white minibus arrived at Grecheskaya Square with members of a mobile team. At the wheel was Vitaliy Budko, an activist of the 'People's Militia', known as The Bos'un, who in March and April had been a member of its rapid response group, driving around Odessa in this minibus with its Donetsk number plates. Eyewitnesses report that, a few days before 2 May, he acquired a firearm: a Vulkan TK assault rifle, which is a cut down version of the 5.45 mm calibre Kalashnikov.

By the time this team arrived, the police had firmly separated the opposing sides on Grecheskaya Square. Just after 4.00 pm, a group from the pro-Maidan *Samooborona* ('Self-defence') moved in formation from its position near Cathedral Square to Bunin Street. There it confronted and put to flight a column of People's Militia activists on their way to aid the anti-Maidanites and then, accompanied by football fans and pro-Ukrainian activists who had commandeered a fire engine, they headed off towards Kulikovo Field.

Recordings were later released of telephone calls from an official at the Provincial State Administration to the commander of *Samooborona* suggesting he take advantage of the fact that the anti-Maidanites' combat-capable units were bogged down in a battle on Grecheskaya Street, to clear the tent encampment off Kulikovo Field. It seemed unlikely there could be any serious resistance. If, just after 4.00 pm, *Samooborona* had gone through with that, events would probably have taken a very different turn. Trade Union House would most likely not have been occupied by the anti-Maidanites, there would have been no need to storm it, no fire, and dozens of lives would have been saved. *Samooborona* did not, however, make it to Kulikovo Field at that time.

Even in their absence, there were plenty of pro-Ukrainian activists in Cathedral Square, and they were spoiling for a fight. Jeering at their opponents was not enough. The pro-Ukrainian 'Euromaidanites' and Ultras began fanning out along parallel streets, encircling their opponents' block. A large group of football fans and activists crossed Deribasovskaya Street into Vice-Admiral Zhukov Alley and built a barricade to prevent the anti-Maidanites escaping in that direction. The police formed a line where the alley intersected Grecheskaya Street, but the distance between the opposing sides was minimal and soon there was a new clash. I could hear it as I was broadcasting by the entrance of the Russian Drama Theatre.

This was the moment The Bo'sun decided to start using his assault rifle. He can be seen on video at 4.22 pm firing into the alley. Five minutes later, on Preobrazhenskaya Street, I videoed an ambulance taking away Igor Ivanov who had been wounded. He died in hospital a few hours later: a 5.45 mm Kalashnikov bullet was removed from his stomach.

\* \* \* \* \*

---

<sup>2</sup> This paper was written for the Russian Service of Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty. It can be accessed at, Dibrov, S. 'Mi shli k tragedii neskol'ko mestatsev', *svoboda.org*, 2 May 2016, available at: <http://www.svoboda.org/content/article/27709390.html>

---

It is amazing that the Euromaidanites' reckless attack with sticks and stones against an assault rifle succeeded. The attackers were not numerous, only a few dozen, but their fearlessness and fury tipped the scales in their favour. The police and anti-Maidanites found themselves under a hail of stones, Molotov cocktails were thrown and, after a fierce battle, they retreated to Grecheskaya Street.

That was probably the turning point. Just after 5.00 pm, the Euromaidanites, enraged and greatly outnumbering their opponents, began surrounding and besieging them from all directions.

I find remembering what happened next very hard. Unbelievable things were being done around me, things I would have said were inconceivable in quiet, peaceful Odessa. Only the videos enable me now to recall some of the incidents.

I remember girls and women, and it was mostly them, providing logistical support on both sides: girls and women bandaging wounded young men with head and facial injuries; girls and women pulling up paving slabs and breaking them into smaller pieces; girls and women making Molotov cocktails. Someone brought a crate of beer to Deribasovskaya: in the middle of the street it was poured away and the beer bottles filled with petrol and pieces of polystyrene.

Ambulances were everywhere. That day 72 teams tended the wounded. Ambulance cars drove freely through police lines and barricades and evacuated more and more injured people.

The most violent clashes were near Athena shopping centre. The sky was darkened as several dozen people flung coordinated salvos of stones which it was impossible to dodge. The police formed a chain and blocked off the street with their shields, but could not keep the sides separated.

*Samooborona*, on their way to Kulikovo Field, turned back midway after hearing reports of the first fatalities. At first they tried to use the fire engine as a water cannon, and later as a battering ram to break through barricades and police cordons. The vehicle several times changed hands and was much damaged by stones and Molotov cocktails.

I was crossing the 'front line', to show viewers the events from both sides. At about 6.00 pm, I was standing near the Bulgarian Cultural Centre, with one of the anti-Maidan leaders commenting to camera on what was happening. Right in front of us we could see a continuous stream of casualties being carried by, all with gunshot wounds. I heard later that someone had opened fire with a shotgun from the balcony of the Cultural Centre, just round the corner. Those in the line of fire included policemen, anti-Maidan activists, and journalists. Oleg Konstantinov, the editor of *Dumskaya*, had rushed back from the seaside and was photographing in the thick of it. He was hit by shot in four places, one just two centimetres from his spine. Alexander Zhulkov, Gennadiy Petrov and Nikolai Yavorsky were all killed, and Yevgeny Losinsky was seriously injured, shot in the stomach.

I had known Yevgeny for many years but had never seen him at any anti-Maidan rallies. He was a keen participant in historical re-enactments, and the last time I saw him was on 10 April 2014 at the festivities for the anniversary of the liberation of Odessa from the Nazis. Costumed in the uniform of a Red Army lieutenant, he had raised the red flag atop the Opera House. On 2 May I had not recognized him. He turned up on Alexandrovsky Avenue wearing a shining knight's helmet and a heavy quilted vest usually worn under armour. Yevgeny was presumably expecting nothing worse than the usual sort of scuffle with stone-throwing, and at most the firing of rubber bullets. A charge

of buckshot hit him in the stomach. If he had been wearing a bulletproof vest or his titanium 'knight's armour' he would probably be alive today.

I only heard Losinsky had been wounded the next day, from a posting on Facebook by Zoya Kazanzhi, one of the Euromaidan leaders. She said blood donors were urgently needed: Yevgeny had lost a lot of blood.

Unfortunately his wounds proved fatal and he died nine days later, in hospital, without regaining consciousness. The money that friends and acquaintances had raised for his treatment was spent by his father on medical equipment for the hospital's intensive care unit.

\* \* \* \* \*

The fighting at the Bulgarian Cultural Centre was the last clash in the city centre. The pro-Russian activists were blocked on all sides and in a hopeless situation. Some hid in the Athena shopping centre, others managed to get away towards Preobrazhenskaya Street, protected by the shields of the police.

By 6.30 pm the battle was over, but several thousand people were still milling around on Grecheskaya, Deribasovskaya and Preobrazhenskaya Streets and in Vice-Admiral Zhukov Alley.

From Grecheskaya Square to Kulikovo Field is over two kilometres. An enraged crowd of thousands passed that day through the streets of the city centre, past banks and expensive shops, past synagogues and churches of the Moscow Patriarchate. Not one window was broken, not one car damaged or overturned. All that did suffer were the faces of pro-Russian politicians on street light boxes with election campaign advertising.

\* \* \* \* \*

That the battles in the city centre were not the end of the matter was very clear also to the anti-Maidan activists. Several hundred of them assembled at Kulikovo Field, and they had plenty of time to think through their options.

Of these there were several. They could take down their tents and depart; they could remove everything of value; or they could organize a defence of the encampment and prepare to fight. Opinions were divided, and several times they even took a vote.

After 6.00 pm, Anton Davidchenko, the political leader of the anti-Maidanites, drove to the city centre to check out the situation. In the meantime, someone began spreading a false rumour that Russian tanks from Transnistria had crossed the Ukrainian border and were making for Odessa.

By the time Davidchenko returned to the square, the doors of Trade Union House had already been broken down. Petrol cans had been taken into the building along with a generator, and mattresses from the tents provided a kind of make-shift field hospital on the first floor. Activists from the anti-Maidan 'Odessa Militia' who had managed to escape from Grecheskaya Square made their way back to the encampment. Sandbags and wooden pallets which had been used to reinforce the perimeter of the encampment were dragged up to the main entrance. Those in the square were under the command of Alexander Trofimov and Yury Yakimenko from the 'Russian Orthodox wing' of the anti-Maidanites.

Davidchenko, when he returned from the city centre with The Bo'sun, was only too aware that an angry mob many thousands strong was about to descend on the Kulikovo Field square, and that there was no prospect of this ending well. He tried to persuade the anti-Maidanites to disperse immediately, but heard in response, 'We are going nowhere. This will be our Defence of the Fortress at Brest and we will fight to the death.' Davidchenko then offered a compromise: the men would defend the position and the women would leave. In response he was accused of being a traitor. Fighting broke out, and he failed to persuade people to leave. At the last moment, just before the football fans and pro-Ukrainian activists arrived, Anton Davidchenko managed to drive from the square.

'Into the building, everybody into the building!' Trofimov shouted through a megaphone. About 400 people took shelter in Trade Union House as several thousand Euromaidanites arrived from the city centre.

Nobody at Grecheskaya Square was aware that the Kulikovo Field encampment's occupants had barricaded themselves in Trade Union House, let alone how many of them were in there. From the video, it is clear that at first the pro-Ukrainian activists and football fans took no interest in Trade Union House at all: their aggression was directed at the tents, which they tore down, ripped to shreds, and set on fire. In one they found a man with an axe in one hand and an entrenching tool in the other. When they started wrecking his tent, he fled from the square. Nobody went after him.

\* \* \* \* \*

I arrived at Kulikovo Field at 7.30 pm, by which time all the tents were ablaze. People were shouting, shots were being fired. Where the tents had been, great bonfires were roaring and you could see the smoke from several blocks away. Everything was burned that had anything to do with anti-Maidan, from propaganda posters and leaflets to a crate of gas masks found in the square.

Initially, nobody took much notice of Trade Union House, but when all the tents were burning, a few dozen people started attacking those standing on the porch. Stones and Molotov cocktails were thrown, shots were heard. Under a hail of stones, the defenders retreated into the building. In the hall at the main entrance they erected another barricade from pallets, furniture and anything else they could find in the house. The petrol-powered generator was moved back deep into the hallway and the spare cans of petrol were moved upstairs. In the offices and on the stair landings 'emplacements' were set up. Later wooden shields, sticks and piles of stones were found there.

People continued to arrive at the square, mostly spectators from the football stadium. The fan zone for Chernomorets had been empty by 6.00 pm, after the first half. In the second half, Metallist Kharkov fans cheered on both teams. When the match ended, some 20,000 left the stadium, and many promptly headed for Kulikovo Field.

Relatively few people were actually involved in the 'military' operations. The main battle was at the porch in front of the main entrance, where Molotov cocktails caused the massive wooden doors to catch fire. Nobody in the square was in any hurry to put it out because, for one thing, it was dangerous to go closer, but secondly because they saw no great danger, and even supposed the smoke and flames would force their enemies to abandon their resistance and surrender.

I heard several people in the square dialling 101, and thought rescuers would soon be on the scene, because the nearest fire station was only a few hundred metres away on the square by the railway station. The fire engines, however, were in no hurry to attend the scene.

\* \* \* \* \*

At 8.00 pm a huge fire blazed up in the entrance hall of Trade Union House. The barricade erected there caught fire and the building was turned into a furnace. Afterwards, we found the charred frames of office chairs, wood ash from the incinerated pallets, and the electricity generator, whose petrol tank had exploded. The experts in our group established that the temperature of the walls in the ground floor hall must have reached 700 degrees. A great rush of hot air would have swept up the stairwell, and several dozen people by the windows up there would suddenly find themselves trapped.

This happened at 7.54 pm and came as a complete surprise to everyone, whether inside the building or standing nearby. In one of the videos we see at that moment Euromaidan activists discussing the situation with senior police officers. 'Form a corridor, and if they come out peacefully no one will touch them,' a *Samooborona* activist in a green football shirt proposes. Sergey Gutsalyuk, the Ataman of the Ukrainian Cossack organization, suddenly stops in mid-sentence and looks over towards the building. 'What's that man doing,' he exclaims. 'He'll be killed.'

Up till that moment there was nothing visible from the back of Trade Union House to indicate a fire had started at the front entrance. The situation changed in an instant, and people on the central staircase found themselves in a current of superheated air. Their options were limited: stay where they were and burn, or jump out the window into the inner courtyard.

It was a horrendous sight. People were leaping from every landing of a tall building, falling to their deaths, falling on top of each other. One person's body broke off the canopy over the rear entrance, and in the lower windows huge crimson-red tongues of flame appeared. There was a loud popping sound, presumably as the petrol tank of the generator blew up; the windows on the landings filled with smoke; glass and burning debris crashed down. Pro-Ukrainian activists, followed by the police, rushed to the courtyard to bring out the victims.

The barricade blazing in the entrance hall was giving off thick black smoke. It rose upwards, spread along the corridors and out through the landing windows: that was what I had seen above the roof. People in the offices opened windows, but that only made matters worse: the smoke came in from the corridor and out through the windows. Trapped by fire and smoke, people started leaning out the windows and calling for help. It could come only from their enemies, the pro-Ukrainian activists standing in front of the building. There was nobody else.

And help was given. Shouts were heard: 'Stop throwing stones!' From that moment the battle was over and turned into a rescue operation. My smartphone camera showed pro-Ukrainian activists helping their opponents to get out of first and second floor offices. At first they tried throwing ropes up to the windows, but then someone had the brilliant idea of dragging up the remnants of a stage which had been erected in the encampment. Dozens of people, like ants, hauled the scaffolding over to the facade. It was just high enough to reach the first floor windows. Risking their lives, the pro-Ukrainian activists climbed up and began fixing boards and bringing people out through the windows.

That was surely the most dramatic spectacle of everything I saw. Switching from their ‘war’ to their ‘rescue’ mode occurred at different rates with different people; it was not instantaneous. Most of those in the square, even if not helping, did sincerely want to see those people rescued from the fire, and welcomed each new evacuee with shouts of ‘Long live Ukraine!’ There were, however, some still minded to fight. The hardest thing was to understand whether the person next to you was still at war or already on the side of the rescuers. I remember a young man coming up to the building, looking round, and then trying to throw a burning bottle in a second-floor window. Luckily, he missed and others, who were already evacuating people from the building, came close to beating him up.

The fire engines began arriving only at 8.15 pm, that is, 45 minutes after receiving the first reports about the burning tents. I have seen the record of the interrogation of the driver of the first fire engine to arrive: ‘We were sitting at the depot for a long time watching what was going on at Kulikovo on TV before we got the command to go. We were soon there. Nobody gave us any trouble, nobody tried to cut the hoses. Some people in masks came and yelled at us, asking what took us so long. They took our ladder and dragged it over to the building.’ Later I saw that ladder. It was lifted up the scaffolding and made it possible to reach windows on the second floor.

We subsequently obtained the transcript, and then the audio recording, of calls to 101 that evening. Dozens of people phoned the fire service, both people in the building, television viewers who saw what was happening from the live broadcast, staff at the UN mission, and Euromaidan activists. People who were trapped in a burning building were told, ‘Don’t worry, there’s no danger,’ and then lied to: ‘The fire engines are on their way, hold on.’

The fire engines were ordered to Kulikovo Field only at 7.56 pm, after a second call from the duty officer responsible for policing the city, when people were already flinging themselves out of the windows. A criminal investigation into the actions of officials of the State Service for Emergency Situations is continuing. The operator whose voice is heard on the video is under house arrest. the head of the provincial administration who ordered the fire engines not to be sent in order not to expose firefighters and equipment to risk has left Ukraine.

\*\*\*\*\*

The fire was put out fairly quickly. The building of the former Communist Party Provincial Committee had been robustly built: the fire had not been able to move freely from one floor to another or from office to office. The barricade in the lobby burned out before long, and within 15 minutes of their arrival the firefighters had extinguished the doors and entered the building.

At the exit from the rear courtyard a furious crowd gathered. People were led or carried from the charred building. Those who were unconscious were immediately taken away by ambulance. Nobody hindered the doctors: they had only to shout, ‘Make way,’ for the crowd to part and let them through. Those who came out without needing assistance were beaten up, some by people who had just helped to evacuate them. The beating was vicious, fuelled by hatred, till the victims were bloody. Anybody who tried to escape fared particularly badly. The police and *Samooborona* did what they could to protect the anti-Maidanites, but without too much success.

By then it was dark, but the area around Trade Union House was flooded with light from the flashing beacons of the emergency services. There were fire engines, ambulances and police vans.

Police cars drove up one after another. Hundreds of people were still in the building and needed to be taken away, not least, for their own safety.

Late that evening a group of Odessan Euromaidan activists and *Samooborona* members from Nikolaev set off to the memorial to 411 Coastal Battery and dismantled the encampment of Odessa Militia, which had moved there from Kulikovo Field. There was no vengefulness or violence. A few minors in the tents were handed over to their parents, who were summoned by phone. The tents were left, together with the encampment's other property, at the gatehouse of a nearby military unit. After completing the operation, the commander of Odessa Militia was phoned and told where to find his property.

\*\*\*\*\*

On 2 May, 48 people died. None of them were 'Russian saboteurs' or 'Transnistrian fighters' or 'bussed-in Bandera anarchists'. All were residents of Odessa and the surrounding suburbs.

Odessa is a small city of only one million people, and everyone knows everybody else. That is not an exaggeration or a figure of speech: it is a fact. Accordingly, everyone in Odessa had among those 48 people friends, or relatives, or people they knew, or friends of friends.

The city was intimidated. People hid away in their apartments, locked their doors and closed their shutters. No one could imagine how something like this could have happened. No one knew what to expect next.

The wildest rumours circulated: about poisonous gases and white phosphorus, about a *Sonderkommando* with flamethrowers, about secret burials, and medical teams which had removed organs for transplantation in the basement even while Trade Union House was burning. These rumours were skilfully nurtured by propaganda, and after what had happened, people were prepared to believe anything.

On the morning of 3 May, Odessans brought all the medicines needed to the hospital, and the blood transfusion service could not cope with all the donor volunteers. Nobody asked which side the victims who would benefit from their medicines and blood were on.

Three days of mourning were declared, and that was a wise decision: the three days of silence gave time for passions to cool and people to think. Everybody was bewildered, including the police. On 4 May, under pressure from a crowd which stormed the city's Department of the Interior and on the orders of Colonel Fuchedzhi, 67 anti-Maidanites detained at Trade Union House were released.

On 6 May, *Dumskaya* began collecting information about the dead and missing. We did so jointly with Yury Tkachev, editor of the Odessan website, *Timer*, which targets the pro-Russian reader, and this enabled us to gain knowledge from both sides. We analysed official data, collected information from viewers and readers, looked for relatives, and corrected lists. At that time, I agreed with Tkachev that we would also jointly elucidate and analyse the circumstances and details of the events of 2 May.

A few days later, on the proposal of the new governor, a 2 May Group was established. It included journalists well known in the city and independent experts in various fields. At my insistence, Yury Tkachev was included. At the very outset we codified principles intended to ensure our neutrality

and impartiality. In particular, all the group's key documents were to be adopted unanimously and signed by all the participants, with each member of the group retaining the right to publish any further material they chose under their own name.

We began work on 12 May 2014 within the framework of the possibilities which Ukrainian legislation affords journalists. We were fully aware that few hopes could be pinned on the official investigative agencies. Our aim was not to establish and apportion guilt. Ours was a different task: to reliably establish what had happened that day, and prevent any similar tragedy ever being repeated.

The very next day a young man came to us. He absolutely refused to give his name. He had the ID of one of the victims, who had been lying near Trade Union House covered with a Ukrainian flag; the man's driving licence, credit card, the service record and registration for his motorbike, till slips and receipts. Our visitor said he was certain the deceased was a pro-Ukrainian activist, and had taken the documents so the police could not identify him.

We found the addresses and telephone numbers of the dead man's wife and mother and, after making copies, I went to see them. The meeting was distressing, and our conversation was long and difficult. When we parted two hours later, his family gave me a flash drive with photos and videos that were on his smartphone. These were the first fragments of a huge picture which our group was beginning to piece together.

This was no simple matter. We interviewed hundreds of people, including some outside the reach of the Ukrainian justice system, established and checked a multitude of facts. We even created a legal precedent by asserting the right of journalists to obtain information in the materials of a criminal case and categorized as confidential to the investigation. The courts accepted our argument that what happened in Odessa on 2 May was so important that the public had a right to know the truth, irrespective of the wishes of investigators or prosecutors.

After a month and a half we published a detailed chronology of events in the city centre. One year later, in April 2015, as a result of a huge amount of work by our experts, we were able to recreate a picture of the fire at Trade Union House and compiled a full chronology of events at Kulikovo Field. Just the fact that our group, which included people with different and sometimes opposing views, was able to work together successfully, was our small contribution to restoring peace and calm in Odessa.

Back then, in 2014, we had been heading towards this tragedy for several months. Now, recollecting those days, I can see how over time, step by step, we had been breaking taboos and allowing more and more to go on that had previously been out of the question. At the time we did not see where we were headed. We did not understand, and did not restrain ourselves in time. We had forgotten how precious and fragile human life is. That is why I am certain that the people who died on 2 May were victims of a lack of care, victims of overconfidence and lack of foresight on the part of each of us.

2 May 2014 is a black page in the history of Odessa. I would like to believe that this terrible tragedy has sobered us, and that the sacrifices we offered up that day on the altar of mutual hatred will not have been in vain.

### Epilogue

The official investigation of criminal cases related to 2 May is not moving as fast as we might wish. There are many reasons for that, of which the main one is the sheer scale of what happened. The events of that day extended over seven hours and directly involved thousands of people. As a result of the clashes 48 people died, nearly 300 were injured, and over 100 arrested. Ukraine has no experience of or methodology for investigating public disorder on such a scale.

A further complication is that the events of that day are legally classified as a riot. This means that anyone who was in the midst of the events could, theoretically, be liable to prosecution. That ensnares thousands of people on both sides, most of whom witnessed or participated in important events. While the journalists in our 2 May Group have the legal right to interview citizens anonymously and to keep our sources of information secret, those same people, for entirely understandable reasons, want nothing to do with the official investigation.

Given this situation, I proposed declaring an amnesty, absolving through legal process all those who participated in the rioting, and prosecuting only organizers and those who committed other crimes, particularly murder. In May last year a bill to this effect was lodged in the Verkhovna Rada and is still pending.

Immediately after the 2 May events, Vitaliy ‘The Bos’un’ Budko and the political leader of Kulikovo Field, Artem Davidchenko, left Odessa. Sergey Dolzhenkov (Captain Cocoa) was arrested a few days later and is now facing trial. Along with him, 20 anti-Maidan activists, mostly those apprehended in the Athena shopping centre, also face trial. Despite the promises of police officials, they have not been released but removed outside Odessa province to a pre-trial detention centre. They are now accused of organizing and participating in mass public disorder. After the storming on 4 May 2014 of the remand prison, most of those detained at Trade Union House have been released. Only one now remains in custody, Yevgeny Nefedov, a Russian citizen. Five other people are behind bars, while a further 15 are at liberty and conscientiously attend court hearings.

In late May 2014, police officers arrested Sergey Khodiyak, a Euromaidan activist suspected of firing a shotgun from the balcony of the Bulgarian Cultural Centre. He is accused of murdering anti-Maidanites and wounding policemen. The investigation has been completed and the prosecutor is calling for him to be sentenced to life imprisonment. He has not yet been brought to trial, however, as judges are refusing to preside over the case because of its inevitably high-profile nature and in anticipation of ‘popular pressure’.

In summer 2014, criminal proceedings were brought against another Euromaidan activist. In one video a person resembling him can be seen beating with a stick someone who jumped out of a window at Trade Union House when the fire began. The police were unable to prove him guilty, or indeed to accuse him of any specific offence.

After 2 May, the question was several times raised of the responsibility of police and fire service officials. In theory, the Odessa Provincial Department of the Interior Ministry had the power to, at least, localize disturbances. For this there was a ready-made operational plan codenamed Wave, which provided for all combat-capable units of the police and National Guard to be concentrated in the city centre and authorized to use riot control weapons and, if necessary, firearms. For some incomprehensible reason, Pyotr Lutsyuk, the chief of the department, did not issue the necessary instruction or sign the order, with the result that the situation developed out of control and spread

to Kulikovo Field. We discovered that, on the night of 3 May, he sent a message to Kiev claiming that he had initiated Wave as early as 2.00 pm on 2 May (that is, half an hour before the first clash), which is plainly a lie. A year later, criminal proceedings were instigated and the case has now been brought to court.

Lutsyuk's deputy, Dmitry Fuchedzhi, who could shed light on many of the circumstances, left Ukraine a few days after the events and, according to some sources, is now in Transnistria. A warrant for his arrest has been issued in Ukraine: the colonel is accused of illegally releasing prisoners from jail in Odessa on 4 May 2014.

The Prosecutor's Office turned its attention to the actions of the fire service only one and a half years after the events. In the opinion of the experts of the 2 May Group, the 40-minute delay in sending the fire brigade was not only in violation of their statutes and regulations, but fatal, since it was during this period that the blaze in the hallway occurred, causing the deaths of people in the building.

The provincial board of the State Service for Emergency Situations was directed by Vladimir Bodelan, the son of an official well-known in the city, former first secretary of the Communist Party's Provincial Committee, Mayor of Odessa, and Governor of Odessa Province.

According to Bodelan, it was he who gave orders not to go Kulikovo Field because a fire engine had already been seriously damaged in the clashes in the city centre and he feared for the lives of his subordinates. Criminal proceedings were instigated in spring 2016. The duty officer whose voice is heard in the recorded calls to 101, has been placed under house arrest, and a warrant has been issued for the arrest of Vladimir Bodelan. He is currently out of Ukraine and apparently has no plans to return.

In January 2016, the State Prosecutor's Office unexpectedly transferred investigation of all criminal cases relating to the riots (including the Kulikovo Field episode) from the Main Investigative Board of the Interior Ministry to the Investigative Board of the Odessa provincial police. This obvious downgrading of the investigation has had some unexpected results: it became evident that there had been no progress in the investigation in the whole of 2015. An indication of this is that the recordings by surveillance cameras in the bank branch actually located in Trade Union House were asked for only in March 2016. That they could be produced then is only thanks to the farsightedness of the bank staff who, two years ago, saved the files. We can only hope that the investigators in Odessa will be more diligent than their colleagues in Kiev, and that sooner or later we will see results.

At all events, the investigation and court proceedings into the events of 2 May will not be completed in a single year, and for now there is no telling what verdicts they might reach.

Superficially, Odessa has recovered from a tragedy that took place two years ago. Last year saw a record number of tourists. Holidays and festivals are held regularly in the city, and this year Odessans enjoyed their renowned 'Humourina' April Fool's Day. All that reminds us now of what happened are the fresh flowers left around Grecheskaya Square, and the gathering of mourners at Kulikovo Field, held on the second of each month, but Odessans have not forgotten.



### **About The Henry Jackson Society**

The Henry Jackson Society is a think tank and policy-shaping force that fights for the principles and alliances which keep societies free - working across borders and party lines to combat extremism, advance democracy and real human rights, and make a stand in an increasingly uncertain world.



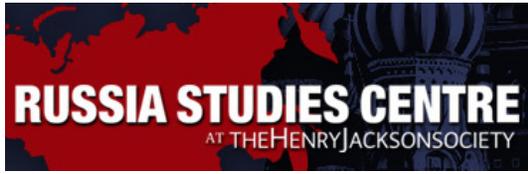
### **About the Russia Studies Centre**

The Russia Studies Centre is a research and advocacy unit operating within The Henry Jackson Society dedicated to analysing contemporary political developments and promoting human rights and political liberty in the Russian Federation.



### **About Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty**

RFE/RL's mission is to promote democratic values and institutions by reporting the news in countries where a free press is banned by the government or not fully established. Our journalists provide what many people cannot get locally: uncensored news, responsible discussion, and open debate.



The Henry Jackson Society  
Millbank Tower  
21-24 Millbank, London, SW1P 4QP  
Tel: 020 7340 4520

[www.henryjacksonsociety.org](http://www.henryjacksonsociety.org)  
Charity Registration No. 1140489

