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Russia's most toxic 'Odesa Massacre' lie and the help Ukraine is giving it

Tuesday 3 May 2022, by [COYNASH Halya](#) (Date first published: 1 May 2020).

Six years have passed since the tragic disturbances and fire in Odesa on 2 May 2014 that Russia immediately tried to turn into an 'Odesa Massacre' by 'Ukrainian radicals'. If the Russian and pro-Russian propaganda campaign has had fairly limited effect, this is mainly thanks to committed journalists and civic activists from the 2 May Group. The Ukrainian authorities, on the other hand, have all but sabotaged the investigation into the events that day and the efforts to bring those whose actions caused the deaths to justice.

The 2 May Group, a bipartisan group formed by journalists, scientists and civic activists shortly after the deadly clashes and fire, [recently spelled out](#) the significant failures of the criminal investigation so far.

"The investigators have thus far not established and published the names of those who organized and those who commissioned the disturbances; the sources of financing; the level to which former and current people in power were implicated.

They have not published information of public importance about the causes of death of each of the victims. Due to the secrecy around this information, speculation around the holding of hypothetical independent expert assessments by foreign experts is causing additional tension among the public.

Officials whose actions from 2-4 May caused grave consequences have still evaded punishment. The time limits on the crimes they are accused of are running out.

A number of people implicated have already escaped liability, being quietly exchanged for Ukrainian prisoners of war. The verdicts passed by courts demonstrate the extremely low quality of the evidence and glaring infringements of procedural norms by the investigators.

The Council of Europe's International Advisory Panel, back in 2015, [recommended](#) uniting all cases linked with the events on 2 May 2014 into a single criminal prosecution, with this still not done. As of [November 2019], the investigation is de facto ended, and the in absentia proceedings against people in hiding have not yet begun."

Back on 5 November, 2019, the 2 May Group yet again called on the Prosecutor General's Office to heed the International Advisory Panel's recommendations and to properly investigate the events of 2 May 2014.

There is nothing at all to suggest that the call was heeded. It was learned in March 2020, that INTERPOL has even taken one of the suspects from its database. Volodymyr Bodelan is theoretically still on Ukraine's wanted list, however the case against him appears to have been suspended, after being sabotaged from the outset. Bodelan was the former head of the Odesa emergency services and was almost certainly responsible for the incomprehensible 40 minute delay in sending firefighters to

the Trade Union Building. It was this delay that caused most, if not all of the 42 deaths that evening. There are also strong grounds for believing that Bodelan was helped to flee the country and justice ([details here](#)).

The events on 2 May 2014

The coronavirus pandemic is likely to cause any events around the sixth anniversary to be confined to the Internet. In previous years, the anniversary has been used by various pro-Kremlin groups in different countries to hold 'remembrance events' which invariably push the idea that 'Ukrainian radicals' caused the disturbances earlier in the day and then drove pro-Russian activists into the Trade Union Building on Kulikovo Pole and set it alight. This 'Odesa Massacre' or 'Odesa Khatyn' [Одесская Хатынь] narrative was first heard and pushed, supposedly quite spontaneously by a suspiciously large number of people, on social networks within hours of the tragedy.

The narrative is totally refuted by the considerable research carried out by the 2 May Group. Their findings, presented in [Russian](#), [English](#) and [in German](#)) were also backed in 2015 by experts from the [Council of Europe's International Advisory Panel](#).

All confirm that the earlier disturbances arose after a group of pro-Russian anti-Maidan activists from the recently formed (and [seemingly Russian-funded](#)) Odesskaya Druzhyna attacked a peaceful march for Ukrainian unity. The violence escalated, with weapons and firearms used by both sides, and spun out of control particularly after news of the first death – that of Ihor Ivanov, a Maidan activist. Six people were killed, four of them anti-Maidan activists.

Pro-unity activists then moved to Kulikovo Pole Square intending to destroy an anti-Maidan tent camp, where they were shot at by pro-Russian activists from inside and on the roof of the Trade Union building.

Molotov cocktails were used by both sides, and independent experts have concluded that there is no way of determining whether the fire was started by a Molotov cocktail thrown by anti-Maidan activists from inside the building, or by pro-unity activists outside the building. Vladislav Balinsky, a biochemist and member of the 2 May Group, was one of the first people to enter the Trade Union building after the fire. He has provided [evidence](#) suggesting that barricades had been set up inside the building just before the attack, with large amounts of Molotov cocktails and inflammatory liquid for them. He and the Group have also amassed proof that various methods, including deception, were used to get around 380 people into the Trade Union building ([more details here](#)).

There are multiple questions related to the events that day, and the reactions from some officials and enforcement officers which were, at best, flawed. Perhaps **Petro Lutsiuk**, former head of the regional police, is still facing criminal charges over his failure to implement the riot prevention plan, which had been prepared, despite the clear need for it, but nothing has been heard of any proceedings for some time, and these will inevitably have a time limit.

There should also surely be an investigation into why the then and still current Interior Minister **Arsen Avakov** reacted to the tragedy by suspending Lutsiuk and replacing him with his deputy, **Dmytro Fuchedzhy**. This was baffling since Fuchedzhy had actually been answerable for public safety that day, and footage was being widely circulated from the outset suggesting his questionable role in the earlier disturbances. Fuchedzhy was responsible for releasing a large number of suspects on May 4 and is now in hiding in Russian-controlled Transnistria.

In September 2017, 20 pro-Russian activists [were acquitted](#) after many of them had spent very long periods in detention on charges that had been slammed by the 2 May Group and the International

Advisory Commission. Two of the men - Ukrainian **Serhiy Dolzhenkov** and Russian **Yevgeny Mefedov** - were immediately re-arrested, and faced new charges under Article 110 of the Criminal Code - encroaching on Ukraine's territorial integrity. There were almost certainly very strong grounds for those charges, but the men were both quietly released in December 2019, and at least Mefedov is now in Russia or Russian-controlled Donbas.

These are just some of the examples of 'an investigation' that appears to have been deliberately sabotaged, possibly because of the number of people implicated who were under the jurisdiction of the Interior Ministry.

This will almost certainly lead to Ukraine being found to have violated the rights of victims and their families at the European Court of Human Rights. The right to life, enshrined in Article 2 of the European Convention on Human Rights, demands that the state not only protects life, but carries out an effective investigation into cases where lives have been lost.

The stubborn refusal to properly investigate the events that day is also incomprehensible given Russia's open aggression against Ukraine. Moscow has spent vast amounts on its information war, using the events in Odesa and its claims that they were 'a massacre' as one of its most toxic weapons.

There are compelling grounds for believing that a proper investigation into the events from February through May 2014 would show the degree to which Russia was involved in trying to achieve the same chaos and carnage in Odesa, that it had in Donbas.

It is known, for example, that Russia was providing [support and funding](#) for the above-mentioned 'Odesskaya Druzhyna (or Odesa Druzhyna) who were involved in provoking the riots on 2 May.

A film produced by TV Dumskaya in September 2016 exposed direct links between Moscow and the disturbances from late February 2014 in Odesa. The film '[2 May. Moscow Trail](#)' provided additional proof of the authenticity of [recordings](#) in which Sergei Glazyev, an adviser to Russian President Vladimir Putin, can be heard discussing how disturbances in Odesa and other cities are to be orchestrated, as well as the formation of a 'government' in Crimea in which Russian soldiers had just seized control.

The film producers demonstrate how the same people involved in an earlier attempt to seize control and declare an 'Odesa people's republic' and heard discussing this on the Glazyev tapes, also initiated the mass disturbances in Odesa on 2 May 2014, and the seizure of the Trade Union building ([more details here](#)).

There is no justification for the ongoing protection of those officials and enforcement officers who should be held answerable. This is a betrayal of their victims and all those touched by the tragedy of 2 May 2014. When facing a formidable enemy like Russia, it is also bafflingly short-sighted. Rather than having to hide from warranted criticism of its own failures, Ukraine should be demonstrating to the international community how Moscow has used a terrible tragedy to incite violence, very much as was once achieved by those trying to provoke anti-Semitic pogroms.

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