



Українська  
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# REPORT

## on the specifics of conflicts along "Maidan" - "Anti-Maidan" line in Odessa

2015

*Report is prepared by the NGO "Promotion of Intercultural Cooperation", in the framework of the project "Ukrainian Peacebuilding School" financed by the British Embassy in Ukraine.*

*All findings may not correspond with the opinions of the British Embassy in Ukraine.*

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**Working hypothesis** - verification of existence of conflict between Maidan and Anti-Maidan in Odessa.

**Research goal** - assessment of main risks, factors and cleavages in public attitudes in Odessa.

**Methods of research** –in-depth interviews with representatives of both parties, as well as analysis of the focus group responses, whose members have different views on events in the city. In addition, local open sources were analysed. Participants of focus groups and interviews: activists of civil society organizations, policy experts, representatives of ethno-cultural communities; journalists who cover topics of social and political changes, representatives of the educational sector.

## INTRODUCTION

Before the events of November 2013 - February 2014 some members of "Maidan" and "Anti-Maidan" were united in a social movement "General protest" that aimed to hold local government accountable in terms of transparency of city planning. Since the beginning of Euromaidan in November 2013, with the attempts to capture official buildings in March 2014 (organized by representatives of "Anti-Maidan"), clashes during protests between two groups in March-May 2014, the conflict has been deepening.

*Note: Odessa Euromaidan ("Maidan") brings together representatives of pro-Ukrainian oriented NGOs (NGO "Youth of Democratic Alliance", NGO "Council of Public Security," "Odessa Self-defence"), local branches of political parties ("Udar", "Front for Changes", "Batkivschyna"), activists, bloggers, social activists who were not part of political parties and public associations. In fact, Odessa Euromaidan started its activity as a self-organized movement without a specific leader on November 24, 2013 during its first assembly (viche) next to the monument of Duke de Richelieu. Its goal was to support the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the European Union. During the subsequent events in May and June 2014 the first attempts to institutionalize Euromaidan were made. At the same time discussions on the representativeness of the Coordinating Council of Maidan among its members continue.*

*"Anti-Maidan" initially included representatives of political parties "Rodina", the local branch of the Communist Party of Ukraine, public associations "Bell", "Watch", "Youth unity", nonpartisan citizens. Odessa "Anti-Maidan" began to take shape in February 2014 as a response to the events of Kyiv Maidan. On May 1, 2014 Odessa Anti-Maidan split. Representatives of "Odessa druzhina", part of Cossack units, led by Y.Kvasnyuk made a camp at 411th battery memorial. Supporters of A.Davydchenko (organizations "People's alternative", "People's druzhina", "Youth unity"), which at that time were more radically pro-Russian (at least in public domain) remained at Kulikovo pole Square.*

Events of May 2, 2014 became the culmination of the conflict. They increased the number of "hate speech" in social networks and during public events.

*Note: clashes that took place on May 2, 2014 between pro-Ukrainian citizens and "Anti-Maidan", pro-Russian supporters. Pre-match common march "For Unity of Ukraine" by fans of FC "Chernomorets" (Odessa) and FC "Metalist" (Kharkiv) ended with clashes with pro-Russian activists who blocked the road to fans, coupled with shooting in the downtown of the city and controversial response of Odessa law-enforcement bodies. Subsequent events at Kulikovo pole (location of the "Anti-Maidan" camp) included conflagration in the House of Trade Unions and death of many people (total number of deaths in clashes on both sides comprised 48 people, more than 250 were injured). In order to make an independent investigation 2 May group was set up, which included journalists, former law enforcement officers and experts.*

Despite serious confrontation that was apparent in Odessa in November 2013 - May 2014, it should be noted that there has been a transformation of self-identification of supporters of these groups and of the perception of events in June and November 2014.

The specific of this research is the fact that one of the parties ("Anti-Maidan") remains closed for contacts and participation in the joint discussion of problems. In contrast to classical perception that both sides of any conflict seek for any opportunities to express and demonstrate their positions, attempt to explain and persuade third parties on the advantages of their ideas, in case of situation in Odessa, "Anti-Maidan" supporters mostly express their opinions through social networks and supportive media, avoiding direct contacts with foreign and Ukrainian researchers.

## RESULTS OF RESEARCH

According to the results of in-depth interviews (conducted in October-November 2014), focus group research, analysis of open sources (regional media, groups in social networks, monitoring of activists meeting of "Maidan" and "Anti-Maidan" between April and October 2014) in order to analyse hypothesis about existence of conflict between supporters of "Maidan" and "Anti-Maidan" in Odessa, it is relevant to identify a number of features:

Conflicts of identities of Euromaidan and Anti-Maidan supporters in Odessa can be divided according to the following criteria:

- Perception of Euromaidan events, fighting in eastern Ukraine, legitimacy of power;
- Perception of foreign and economic policy of the country, expectations from the European integration.

Respondents estimate **events of November 2013 - February 2014** mostly positively. Despite their tragic character they allowed Ukrainian nation to consolidate and realize its national identity. At the same time, there is a thought that it is a "coup". All interviewed experts noted that, of course, the events were tragic. At the same time, the focus groups' participants indicated that the events in specified period should be considered as natural, expected opposition against the inadequate power. Almost all participants indicated that these events were an attempt to protest against that time government.

At the same time thoughts about **annexation of Crimea** differ. Some respondents supposed that it is "defeat of Ukraine" and "victory of Russia". Recognizing the fact of aggression, however, respondents believe that Russia solved its geopolitical objectives and this is not perceived negatively. FG participants felt no obvious, direct threat to Odessa, but expressed concern about the accumulation of military equipment at the border and pointed out that if Mariupol have not "withstood", Odessa could follow.

Despite the perception of **anti-terrorist operation in Eastern Ukraine** as a war, there is a different understanding of this conflict among "Maidan" and "Anti-Maidan" supporters (supporters of Maidan consider it "people's war caused by external aggression"; supporters of Anti-Maidan call it "civil war").

Some respondents indicate that these events are the *result of Maidan*. Also such notion as "war of state with its people" is used to describe the events. There is a spread fear among respondents about the expansion of hostilities beyond two eastern regions. Odessa respondents pointed to the problem of "floating identity" or "acquired identity" in the east of Ukraine. This identity emerged due to the fact that Ukraine has not paid attention to the problems of the region and the conflict is just the result of "inaction" of the central government. Therefore, there are concerns about the expansion of the same trends to other regions of Ukraine.

There is a compassion felt towards internally displaced persons as "people who are in trouble." According to the focus groups' participants it is good that people migrate "from Ukraine to Ukraine" and not to other countries.

One of the conflicts that exist between "Maidan" and "Anti-Maidan" is a different **view on the legitimacy of the current government**. Potential conflictogenic factor in perception of power is

insufficient internal communication, unwillingness of President of Ukraine to explain the logic of decisions to civil society that in the short term may cause a crisis of legitimacy.

An interesting view was expressed by one of the respondents who believes that "our authorities – they are just media persons ... they live and work for pictures in the first place, not even for their own enrichment. The government suffers defeat after defeat. But they do their best to show off themselves and to find the guilty".

Another issue that may be potentially conflictogenic is that civil servants of lower and middle ranks have a negative perception of lustration as a method of combating corruption because of the lack of criteria by which lustration will be carried out with and low wages.

Odessa region demonstrated one of the lowest turnouts at the early parliamentary elections. Most of the people surveyed did not attend elections because they thought that "a citizen had nobody to vote for". It should be noted that despite the statement that major changes are needed significant number of people do not use their suffrage rights. Readiness of citizens even towards conventional forms of political participation is very low due to the lack of new ideas and faces. At the same time, there is a requirement to see concrete reforms initiatives.

Passivity of Anti-Maidan supporters after **May-2-events** is able to serve as a carrier of latent conflict. Political activity of this category of citizens at this stage is low. Compared with the period prior to 2 May, and immediately after these events, level of political activism decreased (rallies at Kulikovo pole, marches and other activities). The result is a reduction in the use of "hate speech" at the rallies. At the same time use of "hate speech" in social networks and regional media which express the pro-Russian stance is still high provoking an escalation of the conflict. Obviously passive position of Anti-Maidan supporters can be explained by the fact that they feel themselves a defeated party and deliberately avoid different types of political participation.

Reluctance of Anti-Maidan supporters to contact on any issues with the representatives of research organizations and foreign media and argue their position is a factor which indicates the presence of latent conflict. They explain their passivity by the concerns for their security.

In case of external provocation, this latent conflict is able to transform into an open one. In case of its escalation risks of violent methods of protest cannot be ruled out, judging from the negative experience of the period in March-May 2014 in Odessa.

Representatives of both groups agree that May 2 events in Odessa are a "tragedy" for the city. Also both groups believe that there are grounds for destabilization of situation in the city. Supporters of "Anti-Maidan" also used the expression "mass murder for political reasons" which was preceded by the "coup" in Kyiv. Proponents of "Maidan", in their turn, believe that it was a "provocation" that was planned, but probably went out of control.

According to respondents, time and dialogue will help to solve the problem (but it should have strategies and some forms of expressions). Also it is important to have opportunity to work together on a common future. There are different opinions about the form and participation in the dialogue, from the use of foreign experience (South African Republic) to "elite dialogue" between the opinion leaders.

It can be assumed that at this stage Anti-Maidan supporters are not consolidated. Without resorting to active protest actions in Odessa in this case, this category of citizens at the same time refuses from conventional forms of political participation.

It should be noted that interviewed experts did not think that further **institutionalization of "Maidan" or "Anti-Maidan" movements** was possible and generally necessary because they had fulfilled their mission. At the same time creation of new movements involving active citizens who are willing to defend their rights at the community level, not "to engage in geopolitics" is not ruled out.

In Odessa environment there are certain **identity divisions** on the perception of "Euromaidan" and "Anti-Maidan" as a set of values and actions. At the same time local Odessa identity transformed

into nationwide. These identities equalled in their prominence. Almost all of the FG participants identified themselves as Ukrainians. Only one said he is Odessite firstly, and secondly a Ukrainian. Also, one of the audience members pointed out to the incorrectness of question – its form contains "a grain of conflict". 'To be Odessite and Ukrainian at the same time is normal'. Ukrainian identity is associated mostly with the respect to citizenship. Unlike in previous years, there is less emphasis on local identity and it is employed in case of highlighting the differences with other local identities.

There is a different vision of **European integration of Ukraine** and significance of this phenomenon for the city. On the whole, respondents envision the European way of development for Ukraine. Assessing the Customs Union there was expressed a thought that Russia is a symbol of the past. Citizens, who are, relatively speaking, choose Russia, actually choose not Russia, but illusion of stability, returning to the Soviet Union "so that everything would be as before, and not worse". EU is primarily associated with freedom of movement, opportunities for education, development of human potential. However, there is clear understanding that European integration takes a long way; one should be realist and develop Ukrainian economy.

Expectations of respondents from the signed Association Agreement with the EU vary from positive to pessimistic. The polls indicate a lack of information about the features of the European integration, existence of myths about Ukraine's accession to the EU, experience of other countries that joined the European Union. Obviously a topical issue is to develop separate education programs for various groups (journalists, civil servants, academics, social activists) to tackle the myths about European integration.

**Among the factors that cause anxiety**, experts pointed out, above all, economic and financial problems, banking system default. The second was the rise of banditry and relevancy of the war, its *justification* and its connection with the lack of deep systemic reforms. There is a fear that "opportunities that exist now will not be used".

It should be noted that the FG participants stated a threat of possible destabilization of the city. In their view, in this situation behaviour of inhabitants is important as threat exists when there is a domestic support. When support is absent there is no threat.

## **ANALYSIS OF OPEN SOURCES**

Additional sources of research, alongside with interviews and focus group research were:

- Content analysis of regional media to identify terms that characterize certain phenomena accompanying the conflict (publication "Dumskaya.net" and "Timer" as two opposite information resources according to their interpretations); discussion on the fora of these publications. These publications have been selected for analysis because they are the most popular media in Odessa. According to experts, the number of visits to these web-sites amount to 70 thousand per day.
- Posts in respective groups in social networks featuring conflictogenic issues along the "Maidan-Anti-Maidan" line (considerable number of supporters of Odessa "Anti-Maidan" are concentrated in the "Vkontakte" network);
- Analysis of the events conducted by the supporters of both sides.

### **Concepts used by regional media for coverage of events of November 2013 - February 2014**

**1. Coverage of events of Odessa Euromaidan:** in the first phase of Odessa Euromaidan "Timer", which is openly pro-Russian, published materials that expressed disagreement with abuse of authority by law enforcement officials and the use of force against protesters - members of Odessa Euromaidan. However, as soon as February 21, 2014 it calls Kyiv Euromaidan "*a rebellion*".

**2. Coverage of the beating of journalists and peaceful protesters on 19<sup>th</sup> of February 2014 near Odessa Regional State Administration**, which has become one of the defining events for the onset of the conflict in Odessa and led to decline in trust to the acting regional authorities. Absence

of results in the investigation of the case is a factor of de-legitimisation of regional bodies of Interior Ministry. Both media outlets clearly identified the attackers as "militants"; at the same time approaches to the consequences and responsibility for such actions differ. (Dumskaya: *Police knew and did not render any resistance to militants who beat my colleagues and other citizens of Odessa in Shevchenko Avenue...* February 19, 2014 <http://dumskaya.net/news/poboische-pod-oga-kto-vinovat-i-chno-delat-kolon-032764/>)

Timer: *Criminal proceedings on the fact of mass fighting next to the building of Odessa Regional State Administration on February 19 should be discontinued. Law is the law. The fact is that the actions of militants in helmets and with batons are fully covered by Law of Ukraine adopted by the Verkhovna Rada today, on February 21 "On prevention of harassment and punishment in connection with the events that took place during the peaceful assemblies".* February 21, 2014 [http://timer.od.ua/news/boeviki\\_ustroivshie\\_izbienie\\_pod\\_oga\\_ostanutsya\\_beznakazannimi\\_185.html](http://timer.od.ua/news/boeviki_ustroivshie_izbienie_pod_oga_ostanutsya_beznakazannimi_185.html)

**3. Attitude to "Anti-Maidan" supporters.** For "Timer" it is typical to refer to arrests of leaders of pro-Russian movements, who made calls for violation of the territorial integrity of Ukraine during public events and in social networks, as "political repressions" (Timer: *SBU (Security Service of Ukraine) has declared its readiness to exchange 225 detainees for military officers of government troops who are currently in captivity of self-proclaimed authorities of the DPR and LPR ... According to the information of Timer there will be Odessites among these 225 people. How many political prisoners from Odessa can gain freedom as a result of an exchange for captured soldiers is still unknown.* December 24, 2014. [http://timer.od.ua/news/odesskie\\_politzaklyuchennye\\_mogut\\_viyti\\_na\\_svolobodu\\_862.html](http://timer.od.ua/news/odesskie_politzaklyuchennye_mogut_viyti_na_svolobodu_862.html))

Most publications call "Anti-Maidan" supporters as "*pro-Russian activists*", "*supporters of Russia*", "*Anti-Maidanivtsi*" without insulting labels. (Dumskaya: *Supporters of Russia brought imprisoned Euromaidan supporter from 11th station of Bolshoi Fontan and gave him in charge of police.* April 10, 2014. <http://dumskaya.net/news/storonniki-rossii-privezli-na-kulikovo-pole-plen-034632/>.)

**4. Crimean events** are covered by the majority of regional media as annexation. Materials cover mainly attempts of the Ukrainian politicians to contribute to the settlement of the situation (including conduct of the pseudo-referendum on 16<sup>th</sup> of March). "Timer" published materials entitled "Crimean crisis." Emphasis was put mostly on increasing social standards in the ARC after annexation.

**5. Coverage of armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine.** Most regional publications from the beginning of the armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine covered it as "*anti-terrorist operation*", "*hybrid war*", while emphasizing the heterogeneity of combatants (separatists, pro-Russian and Russia-backed militants, mercenaries, professional Russian military).

(Dumskaya: *"As part of the anti-terrorist operation at a separatists' checkpoint near Slaviansk, four people were arrested, according to the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine".* May 2, 2014 <http://dumskaya.net/news/slavyansk-na-blokpostu-otkuda-sbivali-vertolety--035274/>)

(Timer: *"Almost nothing is known on what is really going on next to the building of Regional State Administration, from the very beginning of the uprising by the rebels. There are no official statements of DPR leaders on this issue, it is not possible to get information about what is happening also from Timer's own sources".* May 29, 2014 [http://timer.od.ua/news/donetsk\\_povstancheskiy\\_batal\\_on\\_vostok\\_otsepil\\_oga\\_govoryat\\_ob\\_arestah\\_145.html](http://timer.od.ua/news/donetsk_povstancheskiy_batal_on_vostok_otsepil_oga_govoryat_ob_arestah_145.html))

The general coverage in Eastern Ukraine in the regional media outlet "Timer" took place under the heading "*Insurgent Donbass*", using the terms "*civil war*", "*fratricidal war*", terms "*rebels*", "*militia*" were used referring to militants. There is no mentioning of the presence of Russian troops.

**6. Events of May 2, 2014.** It is important that after the events of May 2 forums of leading regional publications were closed for commenting to avoid spreading hate speech.

Description of the events' participants: Dumskaya - *"pro-Russian activists"*: *"Odessites and guests who truly love Russia and stick to federalist views today gathered at Kulikovo pole again"*. May 18, 2014. (<http://dumskaya.net/news/50-kadrov-prorossijski-nastroennye-odessity-snov-035805/>)

"Timer" calls pro-Russian activists as *"federalization supporters"*. Pro-Russian activists detained on May 2 are mostly called *"political prisoners"*. Events themselves were presented with a label *"May slaughter."*

**7. Appeals to disrupt the election process and ignore the current central government in pro-Russian editions ("Timer") as an attempt to create a crisis of legitimacy.** It refers to both presidential and parliamentary elections. Central executive power is called mostly illegitimate, all its actions and decisions are harshly criticized, chances of Donetsk scenario in Odessa region are being considered.

**8. Protest activity in Odessa as a factor of expression of conflict potential.** Both camps mobilized approximately the same number of supporters for their public events. An exception is the anti-war march of March 3, 2014, which, according to various estimates, gathered from 7 to 10 thousand people (supporters of the unitary Ukraine).

Number of participants of Kulikovo pole rally and their qualitative composition were gradually decreasing. If in March-April the average number of participants was 500-1500 people, after the events of May 2 it significantly decreased to around 50-100 participants. At the same time, holding hearings on the case of May 2 detainees leads to new protest initiatives of quite aggressive nature next to the courthouse, which are initiated by both sides.

The decrease of protest activity is also due to the fact that many leaders of Anti-Maidan movement left the territory of Ukraine.

Rhetoric of "Anti-Maidan" leaders has gradually changed after opening criminal proceedings under Art. 109 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine. In particular, Anton Davydchenko, 30.03.2014: *"In our slogans, there was nothing about the division of Ukraine. We asked about the referendum, Russian as a second state language, federalization - but we were not heard. That is why we turn to Russia - we are heard only there. We are not for joining Russia but for the friendship of fraternal peoples, customs and Eurasian unions"*. ([http://timer.od.ua/news/na\\_kulikovom\\_pole\\_sobiraetsya\\_traditsionniy\\_miting\\_531.html](http://timer.od.ua/news/na_kulikovom_pole_sobiraetsya_traditsionniy_miting_531.html))

Active **use of hate speech, anti-Semitic rhetoric** was observed in the first half of 2014 with the slogans "No to illegitimate elections", "Death to the Nazis", "Freedom to political prisoners", "Boycott to Nazi elections is the duty of honest citizens of Odessa", "Junta kills Odessites", "We demand a referendum" and spreading anti-Semitic materials at Kulikovo pole rallies (e.g. during the rally which took place on May 18, 2014).

In social networks hate speech was spreading using the markers "Banderovtsy", "Ukropy", "UkroNazi", "vatniki". The highest prevalence of hate speech in social networks was observed after the events of May 2. It is important that the most intensive calls for violence in Odessa and Odessa region in social networks (Odessa Anti-Maidan group) came from accounts registered in the Russian Federation.

Symptomatically that together with the activation of local protests about the possibility of illegal constructions in recreational areas of Odessa (October 2014) hate speech decreased somewhat because of the movement "General protest", which from 2011 united representatives of opposite political forces.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The analysis of open sources, the results of focus group research and in-depth interviews provide the following conclusions on conflict potential of Odessa region along the "Maidan" - "Anti-Maidan" line:

1. Today in Odessa there is a latent conflict along the "Maidan" - "Anti-Maidan" line. These two movements are diverse and not institutionalized, but clearly crystallized according to their political and civil positions.
2. "Anti-Maidan" supporters are not only pro-Russian citizens. Some of these are from "grey zone", which opposed the events of November 2013 - February 2014, do not consider the current government legitimate or do not support the European integration of Ukraine.
3. After the events of May 2, 2014, supporters of "Anti-Maidan" took a passive position not taking part in elections and conducting public events (with the exception of small protests), and moved its main rhetoric to social networks and supportive media.
4. The negative thing is the lack of consensus on the basic concepts to describe the developments of the conflict (especially events in eastern Ukraine).
5. There is a reduction in the use of hate speech which intensified in the peak period of the developments in Ukraine and Odessa itself.
6. There is a consensus on the need for dialogue and concentration on local issues, while there is no agreement on who should lead the dialogue.
7. There is in comparison with previous years the transformation of prioritization from local Odessa identity towards awareness of the importance of citizenship and Ukrainian identity, not as a purely ethnic identity. There came the understanding that one identity does not exclude the other and is a complementary element.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. To promote the transfer of political activity of local NGOs to solving local problems that can unite the efforts of hostile parties. To this end, it might be positive to hold the greatest possible number of public hearings on local development.
2. To increase turnout in local elections and explain the need for more active participation in legal electoral process.
3. To activate and reach maximum transparency of results of the investigation of May 2 events, inform media and public about current events.
4. To conduct an open trial over detainees in the May 2 case, with equal respect to the defendants both from "Maidan" and "Anti-Maidan."
5. To renew pre-trial proceedings against leaders of "Anti-Maidan" who were involved in active anti-state actions (for example, regarding E. Kvasniuk there were registered criminal proceedings under Art. 109, p. 3 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine in July 2014 (Actions aimed at violent change or change of the constitutional order or the seizure of state power), and he was declared wanted. However, preliminary investigation was suspended because the suspect is hiding from the investigation and trial, taking part in military actions at Donbass)
6. To monitor media and social networks on the subject of hate speech.
7. To promote ideas of European integration of Ukraine by doing advocacy on key aspects of the Association Agreement, with a focus on anti-corruption requirements and necessary reforms.
8. To prevent spreading rumours as an additional source of informal information that can promote conflict.