

Political Repression in Ukraine: Pre-Trial Detention, Torture and Human Rights Violations of Kharkiv Activists

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Some time ago Kharkiv was leading the civil protest against the Kiev junta. Now it appears to fall silent forever. The city is often called the second capital of Ukraine and it may launch a new wave of protests, something the new regime is really afraid of. Late on April 8 almost 70 anti-Maidan protesters were arrested to face politically motivated trials in July. Today those who aspire to become part of Europe make dissenters face trials. The political opposition should be quelled by doing away with those who disagree. Now they try to install this kind of order throughout the whole Ukraine.

Sergey Udayev, a journalist, was arrested on April 8. He is accused of participating in an attack against the Kharkiv regional administration building. To increase pressure, he was transferred from an investigation cell of pre-trial detention center to a penitentiary where the criminals serve their sentences. But he is a suspect, not a prisoner; there has been no court ruling in his case. To protest the action, Udayev cut his veins. All appeals and protests related to this human rights violation go unanswered. Called to face trial on July 29, Sergey Udayev read out a statement of protest and sent letters to presidents of Ukraine and Russia, the head of Ukrainian Security Service, the Ukrainian Prosecutor General, the General Consul of the Russian Federation, the ombudsman at Verkhovna Rada. As a result, the court ruled to prolong his arrest without a right for bail until October 2. His wife Elena says he is kept in the same cell with real criminals, being under constant pressure. He is threatened. They also threaten the members of his family. *"Sometimes it seems to me I'm counting the last days,"* she says. Legally Udayev is a Russian citizen: he had his residence registered in Crimea at the moment of the March 16 referendum. When Crimea became part of Russia he became a citizen of the Russian Federation though he had no time to get the passport, as he was being detained.

There are nine people from Luhansk kept behind bars in a Kharkiv pre-trial detention center.

For instance, clergyman Vladimir Maretsky (the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate), abbot of St. Nicholas temple of Raygorodka, a village in the Novoaydar district of Luhansk. He is accused of involvement in terrorist activities.

Father Vladimir was arrested on May 25 together with 13 other suspects. The detained were forced to lay down on pavement, face to the ground, and were beaten. Some were maimed. They were transported by helicopter to the Kharkiv pre-trial detention center and tortured. Father was sure he wouldn't make it through and started to pray for his soul. He is still subject to torture and being interrogated with no lawyer present. He has kidney problems;

on May 26 he was to go through a serious surgery but was put behind bars instead. Now he is threatened with a sentence ranging from 7 to 11 years of prison.

They continue to torment the clergyman, they use force to make him confess and say that he was armed and shot at a poll station during the recent presidential election. The lawyers requested to appoint another SBU (the Security Service of Ukraine) investigator. The judge refused to do it.

Konstantin Dolgov, a Kharkiv-based journalist, a co-chairman of the People's Front of Novorossia, who follows the situation, expresses concern over the fate of the detained people from Luhansk and their lawyers. "It's hard to predict the fate of those who were detained after the Luhansk events."

Alexander Samoilov, the rector of Kharkiv International Slavic University, PH.D., an associate professor of the European University, was treated with extreme cruelty. They broke into his flat and beat him up with his small children looking. They tortured him. Maimed, he was in no condition to face trial. On June 29 he was put under arrest and charged with complicity in terrorist activities. According to medical diagnosis, he suffers from concussion, subcutaneous hemorrhage and a red left eye. His eye cannot see and his ear cannot hear. The torture resulted in chronic diseases, but instead of being brought to a hospital he was put into a pre-trial detention center in Poltava. Anna Rakovskaya – Samoilova, his wife, wrote a letter to the head of OSCE mission in Ukraine saying her husband is a victim of gross violations of human rights and the abuse of power by Ukraine's Security Service operatives.

Sergey Kochetov, a photographer who shot pictures of protests in Kharkiv, disappeared on July 1. Three days later it became known he was detained and then set free after giving a written commitment not to leave the city. Andrei Sosnovsky, an anti-Maidan movement activist and the head of the Kharkiv Association of Ukrainian Citizens, and Alexey Lukyanov, activist of Young Eurasia movement, disappeared the very same way. Ukrainian special services have failed to frame up charges against the detained. Now they are investigating "the case of Samoilov group."

One more fate – Spartak Golovacev. He is a well-known Ukrainian athlete, the national free diving champion. He was training for the European championship. By the end of April he was detained while taking part in a humanitarian mission to transfer medicine and food to Slavyansk.

Lawyer Dmitry Tichonenkov defends the Kharkiv activists. According to him, 65 people were detained in the building of the regional administration and suspected of taking part in mass unrest that took place on April 7-8 at night, when the building was set on fire. Golovachev is suspected of taking part in the events that took place a day before when people were entering the building.

Upon getting news that some activists among those who were detained during the mopping-up operation in the administrative building were beaten, Golovachev went on a hunger strike. He did not eat for 13 days (4 days without water) to lose 25 kg. *"I was arrested on April 30 to be forcibly kept inside the building of the investigation department. An advisor of Avakov, the Minister of Interior, was in the neighboring building giving orders not to set me free,"* said Golovachev.

Dmitry Pigorev is kept behind bars together with Golovachev. Late on April 8 he happened to be near the building on an editor's assignment. Since then he is kept in a pre-trial detention center. Alexander Shadrin, his lawyer, says, *"The details are vague. Many of those being detained were at other places at the time of alleged crime. It is corroborated by the investigation done before the trial"*.

Tigran Terteryan, Egor Logvinov and other Kharkiv public activists were also framed up. Meanwhile the real killers and terrorists, who shot dead local dwellers Artem Zhudov and Alexey Sharov from Dnepropetrovsk, are still at large.

Deviating from the Kharkiv events, it is worth noting that something egregious happened in Odessa. On June 27, the Security Service arrested Inna Avdeeva, a young lawyer. Her offense was posting a number of times the words "Long Live Novorossia!" on her social network page. The court ruled to keep her behind bars till August 21. They are preparing a charge to accuse her of terrorist activities. She is expected to be handed down a sentence of 12 years.

The police terror in Ukraine is in full swing. Anything will do to break the spirit of those who rebuff political and ideological diktat. Konstantin Kevorkyan, the head of "Pervaya Stolitsa" (First Capital) TV channel and member of Kharkiv City Hall, was expelled from the Ukraine's National Association of journalists. Stanislav Minakov, a member of Russian Authors Society and member of the International PEN centre, was expelled from the National Writers' Union of Ukraine. Both expulsions took place in July. Before that, the two men had been interrogated during the investigation of former head of the Kharkiv region. On March 10, 2014, former city governor Mikhail Dobkin was arrested on charges of leading a separatist movement. His case is investigated by the Organized Crime Department established within the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

Today Donbass is not the only place where the Ukrainian authorities wage war. They exert pressure on all those who express discontent and dare to criticize the regime. Ukraine is on the way to become a totalitarian state, even if it has signed an association agreement with the European Union. The question is: does Europe really believe that the support for the new order established in Ukraine meets its interests?

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