

Repression of ongoing protests by social activists outside Odessa's City Hall

HRWF (27.04.2016) - At the end of March, social activists started protesting at the Prosecutor's Office in Odessa against the sacking of the perceived reformist Deputy Prosecutor General of Ukraine, and Odessa Regional Prosecutor, Davit Sakvarelidze by former Prosecutor General Shokin just hours prior to his own dismissal was approved by the Verkhovna Rada. They continued demonstrating against the out-going Prosecutor General appointed Nikolai Stoyanov as Odessa Regional Prosecutor. For several weeks they have now been protesting outside the City Hall.

Indeed, Mayor Trukhanov (and City Hall) have aroused their ire after the Panama Papers revealed that 20 (or more) offshore companies the Panama Papers were linked to his name, together with his (alleged) holding a Russian passport.

The problem for Mayor Trukhanov therefore is that the protests are not about to disappear quickly, as Odessablog has commented in its 27 April entry:

"With the second anniversary of the 2nd May tragedy, 9th May Victory Day, and Governor Saakashvili's first anniversary on 15th May, the coming fortnight may well become quite tense. It may even boil over occasionally. Thus escalation outside City Hall, as stated, would make matters worse rather than better in the lead up to so many difficult anniversary dates.

Having a 24/7 protest outside City Hall is clearly annoying for some within – particularly when visiting dignitaries are visibly reminded of the Mayor's close association with organised criminality, and of the City Hall reputation for generally ignoring the rule of law and its own protocols and ordinance, notwithstanding graft and thievery.

It was with more than a little suspicion that greeted the announcement of City Hall's [politically controlled Praetorian Guard](#) under the banner of 'City Watch' which would help the police to police – despite having no legitimate powers to do so outside those granted to any and every citizen of Ukraine during the commission of crimes against a person or property.

Those protesting outside City Hall immediately perceived the 'City Watch' entity as little more than a rent-a-mob/titushek/illegitimate paramilitary controlled by City Hall that would inevitably come into conflict with themselves when commanded by the politicians to do so. The timing of the announcement therefore perceived as a shot across the protester bow then comfortably encamped outside City Hall.

However, the inevitable violence came during the night of 25/26th April. Having gone without any incident outside the Prosecutor's Office in Odessa for 17 days, in far shorter time period outside City Hall the titushek/rent-a-mob struck.

The tents were destroyed, protesters belongings were thrown into the back of a Kamaz truck, the protesters were beaten – some quite badly.

In short, the predicted escalation surrounding the events outside City Hall materialised – and will make matters worse and not better in all probability. There is now a further societal complaint – and one which is likely to swell rather than reduce protester numbers – that complaint being the absence of the rule of law even outside the Mayor's office front door (which "mysteriously" are not caught on CCTV).

(...) This is clearly a politically manipulated titushek-fronted incident.

(...) It seems that of the 40 people involved in the assaults on the protesters, and damage to their property, 5 were arrested by the police and criminal proceedings against them under Part 4 Article 296 of the Criminal code of Ukraine have begun.

Whether those that hired them will be identified remains to be seen. Such people can be "professional Russians" one day, "professional animal rights" another, and "professional tree huggers" on yet another – depending upon who is paying for their muscle/actions.

It may very well be that they have no idea who ultimately sponsored/paid for their group, simply turning up, taking the money and doing their deeds. Alternatively once their faces/names become known, it may well be that they are regularly seen in the company of certain aforementioned personalities. Time will tell."