

European court orders Ukraine to pay victims of the 2014 Odessa fascist massacre

Jason Melanovski**21 March 2025**

The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) has ordered the Ukrainian government to compensate the victims of the 2014 Trades Union arson attack by fascist thugs in Odessa that resulted in the deaths of 42 individuals and wounding of 170 more.

It was the largest single act of violence by the far right in the wake of the NATO-backed coup in Kiev in February 2014, in which forces such as the neo-Nazi Right Sector and the Svoboda Party played a key role. The coup installed a pro-Western government and triggered a civil war in the country's east between government forces and Russian-backed separatists.

The lawsuit was filed with the ECHR in Strasbourg by relatives of 25 of the arson victims, along with three survivors of the massacre.

In its ruling, the court, as an institution of European "human rights" imperialism, did its best to uphold the narrative that the burning alive of 42 counter-protesters by right-wing thugs, who are referred to as "pro-unity" protesters, was somehow a result of "Russian propaganda."

It stated:

The Court considers that such disinformation and propaganda might have had an impact on the tragic events in the present cases too. ... The pro-Russian "Kulykove Pole" movement in Odessa relied heavily on aggressive and emotional disinformation and propaganda messages about the new Ukrainian government and Maidan supporters voiced by Russian authorities and mass media.

At several other points it attempts to turn the truth on

its head by suggesting that the massacre was the result of police and other officials working in tandem with the anti-Maidan protesters, thus forcing the far-right thugs to turn to vigilante violence to protect themselves. But this version does not explain why the Odessa police and fire departments then both stood by while 42 people burned to death.

Nevertheless, despite the court's best attempts to frame the events as a result of "Russian propaganda and disinformation," its decision in favor of the plaintiffs essentially proves correct what the WSWS wrote over 10 years ago on the Odessa massacre. The fire, started by far-right thugs who had first cornered and surrounded pro-Russian counter-protesters in the Trades Union building, was an act of political terror and mass murder carried out with the full knowledge and backing of the newly formed right-wing US-backed Ukrainian government.

The court found that government officials were well aware of the violence that far-right thugs were preparing. In addition to doing nothing, they purposely withheld fire and emergency services from the initial protest site in Kulykove Pole and then later actively engaged in a cover-up following the massacre.

As the court's findings state:

Despite numerous calls to the fire brigade, which was less than 1 km away, the fire service regional head instructed his staff not to send any fire engines to Kulykove Pole without his explicit order.

At 7.45 p.m., a fire broke out in the Trade Union Building. The fire extinguishers in the building did not work. The police called the fire brigade, to no avail. Some of the people in the

building including Mr Dmitriyev (application no. 59339/17) tried to escape by jumping from the upper windows. He survived the fall and was taken to an ambulance. A number of people fell to their deaths, including the son of Ms Radzykhovska (application no. 59339/17) and the son of Ms Nikitenko (application no. 47092/18). Video footage shows pro-unity protesters making makeshift ladders and platforms from a stage in the square and using them to rescue people trapped in the building. Other video footage shows pro-unity protesters attacking people who had jumped or had fallen.

In regards to the subsequent “investigation,” the court stated:

As regards the adequacy of the investigation, the Court considered that the investigating authorities had not made enough effort to properly secure, collect and assess all the evidence. For instance, instead of putting in place a police perimeter to secure the affected areas of the city centre, the first thing local authorities had done after the events was to send cleaning and maintenance services to those areas. The earliest on-site inspection there had been carried out only almost two weeks late and had produced no meaningful results. Likewise, the Trade Union Building had remained freely accessible to the public for 17 days after the events.

Serious omissions were also noted in the securing and processing of forensic evidence. Some essential evidence had never been examined, and some examination reports had only recently been issued or still remained pending eight years after the events.

In their final statement, the ECHR “concluded that the relevant authorities had failed to institute and conduct an effective investigation into the events in Odessa on 2 May 2014. There had therefore been a violation of the procedural aspect of Article 2 of the

Convention.” The court ordered the Ukrainian government to pay out various amounts to the plaintiffs.

The events of the Trades Union fire in Odessa had far-reaching consequences on Ukraine’s subsequent political future. For the next seven years, political opposition to the anti-Russian, pro-war regime in Kiev would be subjected to censorship, bans, violence and even outright murder with no prosecution of the perpetrators.

That figures such as the Trotskyist Bogdan Syrotiuk, who has now been imprisoned for almost a year, continued to voice their opposition to both the Kiev regime and the Kremlin and the ongoing NATO-backed proxy war under these conditions is a testament to their tremendous political courage.

On the other side, several of the massacre’s organizers would become well-known political figures within Ukrainian politics. Serhii Sternenko, the former head of the Right Sector in Odessa, was present at the massacre and is now one of the most popular Ukrainian YouTubers, who was reportedly once offered to head Ukraine’s Security Service (SBU) in Odessa by Zelensky, as he attempted to further his alliance with neo-Nazi forces after coming to power in 2019 on a promise to end the civil war in Donbass.

On March 15, in the wake of the ECHR court’s decision, Demyan Ganul, another Right Sector leader and organizer of the Trades Union massacre, was assassinated on the street in central Odessa.

While it had initially been speculated that Ganul was killed in retribution for his participation in the Odessa massacre, that appears not to be the case. Rather, the murder appears to have been tied to Ganul’s openly criminal efforts to benefit from the war effort. Like the former head of the Right Sector in Odessa, Sternenko, Ganul organized a fundraiser to buy cars for the armed forces and then embezzled it and was subsequently attacked and beaten by unknown assailants. The suspect now arrested for his murder is a Senior Lieutenant of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, Sergei Shalaev.



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