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The scenario of violence in Ukraine

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The armed clashes which took place in Kyiv on 18 February have seriously weakened the Maidan's strength, although it remains an important player in the political game. As a result of the use of force, the possible resumption of talks between representatives of the government, the opposition and the Maidan has become much more difficult, and the success of any such negotiations without external mediation seems almost impossible. If the Maidan is broken up completely, violence would spill over the whole country; the Ukrainian authorities seem to be aware of this, which may be one reason they have not yet sought the total elimination of the protest in Kyiv. Within the ruling camp, impatience is growing with the prolonged crisis, as is the internal friction: the oligarchs are increasingly concerned about the threat of international sanctions, and the Party of Regions and the president's inner circle cannot reach a consensus on how to proceed. It is increasingly evident that time is working against Yanukovych. In the long term, it seems that any compromise will have to include his resignation, but as yet there are no signals that he is ready to take this step.

Fighting on the streets of Kyiv

On 18 February, before the session of parliament which had been announced, protesters started marching from the Maidan towards the parliament building in such a way as to block access to the seats of parliament and the government. Several thousand members of the Maidan Self-Defence took part in the march. Attempts to break through police blockades led to clashes which escalated into street battles, albeit with neither side gaining a decisive advantage. During the fighting, the *Berkut* (special police forces) used smooth-bore weapons on a massive scale, including firing on demonstrators from rooftops, and there are suspicions that firearms were used. The demonstrators used high-power airguns, among other weapons. Unlike in the previous clashes, the *Berkut* was supported by a group of civilians from the so-called *Antimaidan* (demonstrations organised by the Party of Regions), probably criminals recruited by police representatives.

Several hours of clashes ended in deadlock; the police then took strong and effective counter-strike. The main Self-Defence force was pushed in the opposite direction from the Maidan and scattered. The security forces then occupied the barricades around European Square and Hrushevsky & Instytutska Streets, encountering hardly any resistance. The October Palace, which overlooks the Maidan, was also occupied. These actions came as a complete surprise to those directing the protests, and from the speeches of the opposition leaders (who arrived at the Maidan just after these events, having come from the parliament

building), there appears to have been much confusion, and even panic.

In the evening, the police demanded that the Khreshchatyk and the Maidan be cleared, and gathered their forces to attack. However, the opportunity to quickly reoccupy the Maidan as soon as the barricades were removed on Instytutska was wasted. The assault only started at night, when around 17,000-20,000 people were on the Maidan again; their number rose constantly, and some of the Self-Defence units regained the ability to fight. A few more indecisive assaults by the police won them control of a part of the Maidan, south of the Khreshchatyk, but a barricade of burning tyres prevented them from making any further progress. During the clashes overnight, fire broke out in the House of Unions, the headquarters of the protest's leadership. In the morning the clashes died out, but tension persists, and the number present on the Maidan is growing by the hour.

The authorities' main success was breaking down the Maidan's defence system without serious violence, reducing the area controlled by the protesters and creating favourable positions to continue the attack. The fire in the House of Unions weakened and perhaps permanently disorganised the Maidan's management system. On the other hand, the police have still not succeeded in completely isolating the Maidan, an area which volunteers and supplies are still reaching.

According to available and not fully verified information, at least 30 people have so far been killed in the clashes, including several officers of the security forces. Hundreds of people have been injured and about 50 arrested.

In response to the news from Kyiv, new protests have begun in Lviv, Ternopil, Ivano-Frankivsk, Rivne, Lutsk, Uzhhorod and Vinnitsa. Buildings and local offices of the institutions of force have been occupied. The police's weapons stores in Lviv have fallen into the hands of the opposition. On the night of 18/19 February, a group of several hundred volunteers left Lviv, and despite the blockade of Kyiv, arrived unhindered at the Maidan.

During the night, President Viktor Yanukovych received Arseni Yatsenyuk and Vitali Klitschko. This meeting did not bring about any results: the President said the opposition leaders should break with the 'extremists' as a condition for further talks, to which they could not agree.

The situation after the battles

It is unclear why the leaders of the opposition initiated the 'march on parliament', and thus at least allowing the Self-Defence to try and break through to the parliament building, and then perhaps to plan a long siege of the government district. There are many indications that they were going to force Yanukovych to make immediate concessions, especially to restore the 2004 constitution. Apparently, the decision of the Prosecutor General's Office on 17 February that the protesters had met the conditions for the amnesty law to come into force (although in fact they had only partly been met) was seen by both the leadership of the Maidan and the opposition leaders as a sign of weakness on the authorities' part.

This action proved to be a mistake; it has led to a serious weakening of the Maidan, and thus the negotiating position of the opposition parties, with whom the Ukrainian authorities have hitherto been dealing only because the mass protest movement supported them (even

if not entirely). The weakening of the Maidan reduces the chances of a compromise in parliament, and reinforces those in the President's inner circle and the Party of Regions' leadership who do not want any agreement at all. On the other hand, serious concessions by the opposition in this new situation will be received by the protesters as a clear betrayal.

As a fortress in the centre of Kyiv, the Maidan has now virtually ceased to exist, but as a mass, nationwide protest movement, it remains an important part of public life. The Maidan Self-Defence in Kyiv is losing numbers, but it is more determined and ready to fight on (those who were more mentally fragile, or who treated participation in it as a kind of game, have now withdrawn after the severe defeat). Recent developments will accelerate the formation of similar branches in other cities.

The ruling camp is in a difficult situation. Their tactical success on the streets of Kyiv does not solve anything; on the contrary, the possible suppression of protests in the capital (which cannot be ruled out) will very likely transform the current, territorially limited confrontation into a 'dispersed' conflict, in which violence will occur in different places, and over which no-one will have any political control. The anti-government forces in the western regions would also then build up their forces significantly, and the current sabotage of the state bodies' activities would threaten to escalate into a take-over of power. From this point of view, tolerating a weakened Maidan in Kyiv city centre may seem to be the lesser evil.

At the same time, we see impatience rising among the oligarchs, who are concerned about the possibility of introducing sanctions against Ukraine; even if these were limited to a group of politicians, such a move would adversely affect the prestige of the country, including on the financial markets. This has clearly been demonstrated in recent statements by Rinat Akhmetov and Viktor Pinchuk. It is also known that there is no unanimity within the Party of Regions on an exit strategy from the current crisis, and the attempts to discipline the members of its parliamentary party have already required the President's personal intervention; on 19 February another deputy left the party. The attitude of Yanukovych himself is also questionable. The statement by Oleh Tsariov, an influential politician in the Party of Regions, that the Maidan was not broken up completely because the president did not issue such an order, may even be true. It is also possible that there is no unanimity even among the President's closest advisers as to how to get out of the current crisis.

Attempts at a forecast

Another attempt to liquidate the Maidan is possible, although its success is uncertain. Further, probably numerous, casualties resulting from such actions will deepen Yanukovych's international isolation, and make the search for a compromise to resolve the situation even harder. Prior to 17 February, negotiations between the presidential camp and the leadership of the Maidan were still possible, but at present there is no such possibility. Visible tension and mutual hostility mean that the search for a compromise without external mediation has little chance of success. The authorities are so far uninterested in mediation, as evidenced by Yanukovych's refusal to take telephone calls with EU leade rs. It is very clear that regardless of the developments on the Maidan, any possible compromise must include the resignation of Yanukovych.

Meanwhile, the break-up of the Maidan and the dispersal of its activists around the country will only deepen the conflict. However, continued autocratic rule by Yanukovych would be an extremely volatile solution, adversely affecting the president's support in big business; and Kyiv's control over the whole country would be merely illusory.

Appendix

Calendar of events in Kyiv on 18-19 February (up to 1pm Kyiv time [UTC +2 hours])

18 February

8.30 am

Demonstrators gather for a 'peace offensive'; this was the march, which had been announced over previous days by opposition and Maidan leaders, to the building of parliament, where a session was scheduled for 18 February at which the opposition wanted to vote to restore the 2004 constitution (limiting the powers of the president). The protesters included Oleh Tiahnybok, the leader of the nationalist *Svoboda* party, and the *Batkivshchyna* party leader Arseni Yatsenyuk.

9.00 am

Opposition representatives meet the chairman of parliament, Volodymyr Rybak, in his office, trying unsuccessfully to persuade him to sign a draft resolution on the restoration of the 2004 Constitution, which was supported by all three opposition parties. Yatsenyuk accused Rybak of breaking the law.

The opposition blocks the rostrum of the Parliament, to enforce the chamber's compliance with its demands.

between 9 and 10 am

Groups of protesters attack the security forces in the government quarter on Shovkovychna Street (according to the media, some members of the Maidan Self-Defence tried to restrain the most aggressive demonstrators). According to press reports, Internal Forces troops shoot at demonstrators from the roofs. The first reports of wounded.

before 10 am

In connection with the 'peace offensive' announced by the Staff of the National Resistance, the leader of *Pravy Sektor* [the Right Sector], Dmytro Yarosh, announces the mobilisation of all branches of the PS in Kyiv and Kyiv Oblast.

A meeting of the Party of Regions' leadership, which was expected to discuss the candidacy of the new prime minister, comes to an end. In the early afternoon, Party of Regions deputy Nestor Shufrych reports that during the party's morning meeting, the candidature for prime minister was not actually discussed, but that the deputies were given to understand that this could take place later this week. According to Shufrych, at the aforementioned meeting Andriy Kluyev, the head of the presidential administration, reaffirmed Viktor Yanukovych's desire to undertake constitutional reform.

around 10 am

Around two thousand members of the Maidan Self-Defence enter the Mariinsky Park and form a column along the cordon of the Interior Forces, separating them from the demonstration organised by Party of Regions supporters. Clashes begin at the intersection of Instytutska and Shovkovychna streets. Some of the demonstrators, [...] tear up cobblestones and start throwing them at the police, who in turn use tear gas and stun grenades. Two trucks blocking the street in the direction of parliament are set on fire, as are other vehicles.

between 10.30 and 11 am

At the Mariinsky Park, clashes between protesters and the police. The police are pelted with firecrackers and fireworks; they respond with tear gas and stun grenades. There are further reports of injuries (mostly wounds to the head from rubber bullets) by the parliament building.

The chief physician of the Maidan's medical staff, Olha Bohomolets, appeals for doctors to go to the Maidan's medical points due to the rising number of casualties.

11 am – 12 pm

Protesters begin to climb the barricade at the intersection of Shovkovychna and Instytutska. There then follows an attack by demonstrators on the Kyiv office of the Party of Regions at Lypska Street. Around noon, demonstrators enter the building.

around 12 pm

During a briefing in parliament, Vitali Klitschko calls on President Yanukovych to announce early parliamentary and presidential elections immediately, and to call for the Party of Regions to vote for the restoration of the 2004 constitution. This, in his opinion, is the only path out of the current crisis. Klitschko calls on the president as the person "with whom overall responsibility lies, in whose hands absolute power lies, and upon whom a solution to these issues depends." According to Klitschko, early elections will allow the easing of tension in society.

A report appears that the opposition's draft resolution on the restoration of the 2004 constitution has been registered in Parliament.

Deputies from the Communist Party of Ukraine and the Party of Regions leave the parliament building by side exits. In view of the situation, the parliamentary session scheduled for 19 February is not called.

12 pm – 1 pm

Security forces displace the demonstrators from the Party of Regions' HQ. About 12.20 pm, supported by so-called *titushky*, the *Berkut* forces begin a counteroffensive against demonstrators on Lypska Street. Ongoing clashes at the parliament building.

Demonstrators repel the *Berkut*'s attack by the parliament, displacing it into Shovkovychna Street.

1 pm

There is a report that the Chairman of the Parliament Volodymyr Rybak has fainted (which he later denies).

before 2 pm

On Instytutska Street, the *Berkut* begins a push towards the Maidan. There are renewed clashes on the corner of Instytutska and Shovkovychna.

At the Maidan's medical facilities, there are already at least 25 people wounded in the clashes. The Interior Ministry reports that eight security officers have been hospitalised. Around 2.40pm there is the first report of a fatality among the demonstrators after a *Berkut* action on Kriposny Pereulok Street in the government quarter.

2.25 pm

Foreign Minister, Leonid Kozhara in a notice published on the Ministry's website, calls on foreign countries and international organisations to make an objective assessment of the situation in Ukraine, and to strongly condemn the illegal activities of radical forces. In his statement Kozhara says that "radical forces in Kyiv and other Ukrainian cities, that have been trying to portray themselves as participants in peaceful protests, have launched a new outburst of gratuitous violence and lawlessness. The so-called protesters have made armed attacks on government buildings (...), set fire to buildings, inflicted serious wounds on representatives of the police forces, used firearms and called upon other citizens to do likewise."

before 3 pm

Security forces begin displace activists from the parliament towards the Arsenalna metro station. The clashes in the Mariinsky Park get worse. The security forces' counteroffensive in the government quarter is supported by organised groups of *titushky* armed with sticks and metal bars.

The opposition deputy Lesya Orobets reports that there have been three deaths among the demonstrators.

around 3 pm

A section of the Kyiv mayor's office building is on fire. The main entrance to parliament is cleared.

The heads of the Ministry of Defence call on demonstrators to leave the Officer's House in the government quarter, which they have occupied.

3 pm – 4 pm

The deputy chairman of the Party of Regions, and one of the main representatives of the radical, pro-Russian wing, Oleh Tsariov, declares that the president should use force to disperse the Maidan.

The *Berkut* moves to counterattack throughout the government district, and drives activist groups out of there in a rapid retreat towards the Maidan. About 4 pm, the *Berkut* moves through the now deserted European Square. The demonstrators also abandon the last barricade outside the Maidan, on Instytutska Street.

after 4 pm

In a joint communiqué, the Security Service of Ukraine and the Ministry of Internal Affairs call for opposition activists to cease all fighting, suspend their armed resistance until 6 pm, and return to the negotiating table. Otherwise, all the measures provided for in the law to restore order will be taken.

Justice Minister Olena Lukash holds the opposition responsible for the escalation of the conflict, and calls on it to start talks immediately.

5 pm – 6 pm

Security forces surround the Ukrainian House and displace the demonstrators from the October Palace on Instytutska Street. Security forces dismantle a barricade on Hrushevsky Street.

All trains are stopped in the Kyiv subway. After 5 pm, the traffic police restrict vehicle entrance to Kyiv.

5 pm

Up to twenty thousand demonstrators gather on the Maidan. The opposition leaders appear. *Batkivshchyna*'s leader Arseni Yatsenyuk declares that the opposition will not budge a single step.

Oleksandr Yefremov, the leader of the Party of Regions parliamentary party and a leading representative of its radical wing, declares that the opposition leaders bear responsibility for the events in Kyiv.

after 5.30 pm

The speaker of parliament Volodymyr Rybak announces that the president will hold talks with opposition leaders on 20 February at 11.00 am.

around 6 pm

Attorney General Victor Pshonka declares that the ceasefire has been violated, that responsibility for this lies with the opposition, and that no-one will avoid responsibility for the events.

The Interior Ministry mobilises forces to attack the Maidan. The government announces the introduction of a blockade on access roads to the city of Kyiv as of midnight (which turned out not to be fully effective).

around 7 pm

The head of the Greek Catholic Church Sviatoslav Shevchuk appeals for a halt to the bloodshed.

The speaker of parliament Volodymyr Rybak expresses the hope that the parliament will consider issues relating to changes in the constitution during its session on 20 February.

between 7 and 8 pm

Shortly after 7 pm, after the Ministry of Interior declares it is initiating an anti-terrorist action, the first assault on the Maidan with heavy military equipment begins (an BTR armoured personnel carrier and two heavy assault cars equipped with water cannon). Clashes continue until around 8 pm. There are reports of further fatalities on both sides of the

barricades.

The leader of the Third Republic movement, Yuriy Lutsenko, says the President has invited the opposition leaders to talks at around 11 pm.

after 8 pm

An associate of the President, Hanna Herman, states that the President will talk with the opposition “after the end of the use of force."

There are reports of residents attacking regional and other state offices in western Ukraine, blockades of Interior Troops and *Berkut* units, and of volunteers mobilising to go to Kyiv.

around 9 pm

The oligarch Rinat Akhmetov, through his company, issues a statement calling for a halt to violence and for political dialogue to resume; this is another in a series of such statements he has made in recent months. Before midnight, a similar appeal is made by another oligarch, Viktor Pinchuk.

between 9 and 10 pm

The broadcasts of the popular opposition TV station Channel 5 are disconnected, and are henceforth only available online and satellite transmission. At around 10 pm, the street lights on the Maidan start being turned off.

The police seal off the entrance roads to the centre of Kyiv.

The German Chancellor Angela Merkel and the President of Poland Bronislaw Komorowski try to telephone President Yanukovych, without success. The German Foreign Minister Franz-Walter Steinmeier threatens EU sanctions on those responsible for bringing about the bloodshed in Kyiv.

11 pm – midnight

Just after 11 pm, Interior Ministry forces start their assault on the barricade on Instytutska Street, which they complete after about 15 minutes. Security forces take over part of the Maidan, then suspend the attack.

The deputy president of *Batkivshchyna*, Oleksandr Turchynov, appears wounded on stage at the Maidan.

Around midnight, the chief physician of the Maidan medical services, Olha Bohomolets, reports that there are over a thousand wounded in the hospitals of Kyiv, and confirmes the death of seven people.

19 February

1 am – 2 am

In the trade unions building (which had housed the Maidan’s headquarters), a fire breaks out. According to opposition MPs, the building is set on fire by Molotov cocktails thrown by the *Berkut*. No-one in the building is injured.

Titushky are seen walking the streets of central Kyiv. According to witnesses, after midnight they shot two people on Velyka Zhytomirska Street, one of whom is a journalist for the Russian newspaper *Vesti*.

Vitali Klitschko and Arseni Yatseniuk meet President Viktor Yanukovych, after having to wait two hours; the meeting ends in failure. The opposition leaders propose a halt to clashes until the end of the negotiations. Klitschko tells the media that the President had stated that there is only one solution: everyone should leave the Maidan and go home. According to Klitschko, the President declared that the opposition bears the responsibility for the deaths of people in the recent clashes. According to Yatsenyuk, the president threatened to start criminal proceedings against the opposition leaders.

around 4.30 am

The *Berkut* make another attempt to assault the Maidan, and are once again repelled by the self-defence forces.

5.38 am

An official statement by the President of Ukraine, Viktor Yanukovych, in which he stressed that from the very beginning of the crisis he had called for political dialogue, "and a kind of dialogue did take place." He stresses that the government has shown goodwill, and adopted two laws on amnesty for participants in the clashes in December and January. The President states that he had been persuaded to use force to resolve the conflict (although he did not specify by whom) but, as he noted, he has always regarded the use of force as the wrong solution. He placed full responsibility for the current events on the opposition and its leaders, while stating that "there is still time to stop the conflict".

after 7 am

The deputy head of the presidential administration, Andriy Portnov, urges the protesters on the Maidan to surrender to the police, stressing that all reported violations of the law constitute serious crimes.

around 9 am

According to Anatoliy Hrytsenko, a former defence minister who has joined the opposition, the current leadership of this department has ordered the 25th Airborne Brigade from Dnipropetrovsk to head for Kyiv. The announcement was later confirmed by the acting defence minister Pavlo Lebedev. According to press reports, units of the Dnipropetrovsk brigade (approximately 500 people) had started to reach the base in Vasylkiv near Kyiv by noon.

around noon

President Viktor Yanukovych declared 20 February to be a day of national mourning.

Oksana Zinoviev, a spokeswoman for Vitali Klitschko, reports that talks between the opposition leaders and the President (which had been announced the previous day at 11 am by the speaker of parliament) have still not yet been scheduled. Meanwhile, talks between the opposition leaders and foreign ambassadors in Kyiv are being planned.

12.46 pm

The Russian Foreign Ministry issued a statement in connection with the events in Ukraine. In its communiqué the Russian government blamed the events on the Ukrainian opposition and radicals, and stated that “Ukraine is a friendly and brotherly country to Russia, a strategic partner; we will use all our influence to make this country live in peace."

about 1 pm

Nineteen unaffiliated and Party of Regions MPs call for the convening of an extraordinary session of parliament to devise a way to stop the bloody conflict. This statement is made by one of the move’s initiators, the former speaker of parliament and unaffiliated MP Volodymyr Lytvyn.

Until the afternoon, tension remains high on the Maidan; the security forces and the protesters on the barricades occasionally throw grenades and stones, but there are no serious clashes. During the day, the number of protesters increases significantly.