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Ukraine

After Odessa, “remaining human” as a political programme.

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In the two days that have passed since the tragic events in Odessa, we have heard dozens of versions of what happened. And all of these versions have been, one way or another, linked to the search for a “hidden hand” that sent two armed groups of demonstrators to clash with each other, and pushed one of them into the slaughterhouse at the House of Trade Unions.

Most of these versions – from those of official Kyiv to those of Russian propagandists – point to the local police, who in a conscious and organised manner held back from any attempt whatsoever to prevent the mounting violence.

These versions of events as a rule then offer an explanatory “scenario”, that works in favour of one or other side: Yulia Timoshenko [former Ukrainian prime minister] will sabotage the 25 May [presidential] elections [in Ukraine] in order to ensure her own victory in future; the Kyiv government will intimidate the “separatists” and pin responsibility for a bloodbath on their supporters; the Russian government will get more than convincing arguments to discredit supporters of the [Kyiv] “junta”; the [former Ukrainian president] Yanukovich clan will push Russia into open [military] intervention.

In a way, each of these versions sound convincing to us – Russian and Ukrainian people – because we know that none of the forces mentioned would stop at carrying out any crime in order to achieve their ends. This readiness to make victims out of one’s own citizens was always a necessary condition for selecting members of the post-Soviet elite. In that elite, there’s no-one, no-one at all, who is not morally capable of mass murder.

But whatever might have been the initial intention of whoever organised the Odessa tragedy, there will be – or, more likely, already is – another result: the logic of civil war has been let loose, and it is now almost impossible to stop it. For the last month – with its expectation of military operations, occupation of buildings, hostage taking, local skirmishes in Donbass – many people nonetheless retained the timid hope that the whole process was being managed somehow by somebody, and that that meant that it could be stopped. The principal basis for such expectations was not only the will of Putin, the western powers or the Kiev government – but the fact that the majority of Ukrainians were simply not prepared to kill each other.

But we need to remember from the not-so-distant history of the 1990s that feeling of that awful crossing-over of a border: friendly neighbours, “soviet people”, who over decades had forgotten how to divide each other into “enemies” and “friends”, suddenly, within a few days, lose any human characteristics and become absolute beasts, the possible existence of which was known only from patriotic films about the fascist invasion.

That was how, after the question of the “state language” was raised, the war in Transdnestr started. That was how Serbs and Croats reached a point of no return, at that notorious football match in Split. All this is too well known not to understand that the losers in these wars are all the participants, without exception. Revenge for the first victims just produces new ones – and provides the basis for new and just acts of retaliation. This is the most frightful result of the Odessa events: for both sides, they have made any vengeance, even the most brutal, justified and inevitable.

In the flames that erupted at the House of Trade Unions it was not hard to see the depths of barbarism into which Ukraine could easily sink. Depths, the extent of which seem not to be fully understood by a single one of the bastards who choreographed the clashes on the 2nd of May.

Not so long ago, the demand to “remain human” would have sounded like a completely abstract desire. Now, after

the Odessa slaughter, it has turned into a political programme.

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