Arrest of Pro-Moscow Rally Organizer Leads to Protests in Odessa

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Ukrainian Security Service officers have arrested an organizer of a pro-Moscow demonstration in Odessa, prompting a protest rally by dozens of his allies.

Supporters of Anton Davydchenko, the leader of the Youth Unity organization, held vigil in front of the Security Service offices in the Black Sea port in the early hours on Tuesday, facing dozens of police officers who blockaded the building, Interfax-Ukraine reported.

The protesters, who included Davydchenko's mother and brother, chanted: "Free Anton," "Return the son to his mother," and "Glory to Russia." Several of the protesters tried to storm the building but retreated, the report said.

An unidentified Security Service officer said that Davydchenko was arrested for ignoring investigators' repeated requests to come in for questioning.

He was wanted as a witness in connection with pro-Russian separatist actions, Interfax-Ukraine reported.

The run–up to Crimea's Sunday referendum on breaking away from Ukraine and joining Russia saw violence flare up in other Ukrainian regions, with clashes between pro–Moscow protesters and supporters of Ukrainian sovereignty killing several people in the eastern cities of Kharkiv and Donetsk.