The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

ECHR Says Ukraine Failed to Prevent 2014 Odesa Clashes, Acknowledges Russian 'Propaganda' Role

March 13, 2025



The Trade Union House in Odesa after the May 2014 fire. **Lsimon (CC BY-SA 4.0)**

Europe's top human rights court on Thursday ruled in the case on deadly 2014 clashes between opponents and supporters of Ukraine's Euromaidan revolution in the city of Odesa.

Clashes that unfolded in the Black Sea port city culminated on May 4, 2014, when pro-Ukraine activists tried to storm Odesa's Soviet-era Trade Union building where dozens of pro-Russia and anti-Maidan activists had barricaded themselves.

Forty-two people trapped in the building were killed in the ensuing fire and six others were gunned down in clashes.

The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) on Thursday concluded that Ukrainian authorities had failed to both prevent and halt the outbreak of violence in Odesa and "ensure timely rescue measures for those trapped in the fire."

The unanimous ruling also said that officials had "failed to institute and conduct an effective investigation into the events" — a concern previously voiced by the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine.

The ruling was made in response to seven applications filed by 28 people connected with the events — 25 relatives of the victims and three survivors.

The ECHR acknowledged that Russia-waged disinformation and "propaganda" campaigns both fueled the violence in Odesa and subsequently used the event to serve its interests.

"Distortion of the events in Odesa had eventually become a tool of Russian propaganda in respect of the war waged by the Russian Federation against Ukraine since February 2022," said the ruling. "Enhanced transparency in the related investigative work by the Ukrainian authorities might have helped to prevent or counteract that propaganda effectively."

The court ruled that the Ukrainian government must pay varying amounts of monetary compensation to applicants featured in the case.

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