

Criminal Case for Separatism Opened Against Ukrainian Presidential Candidate Severely Beaten in Kiev

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Oleh Tsaryov, a former Party of the Region's deputy, was attacked by armed men

A pro-Russian candidate for the Ukrainian presidency was beaten on Tuesday morning by a crowd in Kiev and remains in critical condition, the politician's press service said.

Oleh Tsaryov, a former Party of the Region's deputy, was attacked by armed men outside the ICTV television station, where the lawmaker had appeared on a live broadcast, Interfax reported, citing the candidate's assistant.

Tsaryov, who was rescued from the mob by government security forces, said that the incident won't force him to withdraw from Ukraine's presidential election, scheduled for May 25.

Mikhail Dobkin, a Party of the Regions member and a presidential candidate, was also reportedly doused in flour and green liquid before he could get to the same television studio,

where he was to take part in televised discussions with Tsaryov and former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko.

Dobkin is an independent candidate, though he has the support of his party, while Tymoshenko is running for the Fatherland party.

Acting Ukrainian President Oleksandr Turchynov, who is not running in the May elections, made a statement Tuesday morning in which he called for Ukrainians not to obstruct candidates' public campaign activities and said that the country needs to stage an election that will be recognized by the whole world.

Konstantin Dolgov, the Russian Foreign Ministry's human rights commissioner, condemned the attack on Tsaryov in a post on his Twitter account, saying that the incident represented "Maidan tank democracy" and that Western powers were "bashfully silent" about the violence.

Monday night's attack was not the first violent encounter between Tsaryov and hostile crowds. Last week the lawmaker exchanged blows with demonstrators in the southern Ukrainian city of Mykolaiv while attempting to visit several pro-Russian separatists at a local hospital.

Update 3:40 p.m. MSK: RIA Novosti reports that Ukrainian authorities have opened a criminal case against Tsaryov on charges of "infringement of the territorial integrity" of Ukraine. A statement from the Ukrainian Prosecutor General's Office said that Tsaryov is thought to have called for the separation of the country in public appearances and to the media.

The statement added that confirmation of separatist rhetoric from the deputy would lead to an appeal to the Ukrainian legislature to strip Tsaryov of his parliamentary immunity and put a stop to his presidential bid.

Prosecutors also announced that they were opening a criminal case on charges of hooliganism, a case that will be handled by the local Kiev prosecutor.

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