

Investigation Launched Into Ransacking of Russian Banks in Kiev

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Ukrainian police have opened a criminal investigation into demonstrators who trashed the offices of two Russian banks in Kiev on the day Ukraine marked the second anniversary of the Maidan protests that toppled a Russian-backed administration, news reports said Sunday.

Nationalistic demonstrators threw stones at the offices of Russia's Sberbank and Alfa Bank, Presa Ukrainy (Ukraine's Press) news agency reported. Protesters also smashed furniture and equipment inside, RFE/RL reported. A photo released by the Ukrainian Interior Ministry showed an officer surveilling the damage amid shards of broken glass and papers strewn on the floor.

The attacks came as thousands gathered in central Kiev to commemorate Maidan activists killed by sniper fire and in clashes with police on Feb. 20 two years ago — the bloodiest day in the months-long Maidan protest. Ukrainians now mark the day to commemorate the “Heavenly Hundred.”

Maidan demonstrations began after Ukraine's former President Viktor Yanukovich, under pressure from Moscow, backed out of a planned association deal with the European Union.

The protests ended with Yanukovich's ouster.

After the fall of the Moscow-backed administration, Russia annexed Crimea from Ukraine and supported separatist insurgents in Ukraine's east. The fighting in eastern Ukraine has been raging for nearly two years, and has claimed thousands of lives.

Police in Kiev did not interfere when protesters assaulted Russian bank offices this weekend, RFE/RL reported.

But police opened an investigation into the incident on charges of “hooliganism” — an offense punishable by up to four years in prison, Presa Ukrainy reported.

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