

ARSEN AVAKOV

**2014.
SOME MOMENTS
OF THE KHARKIV
SPRING**

Kharkiv
«Folio»
2021

CONTENTS

Foreword by the Author	6
How did We Win That Spring?	8
Ukraine. February—April 2014. Headlines Only . . .	20
Kharkiv February 22—April 7, 2014.	136
Information Warfare and the Russian Trail	151
Rally on March 1, 2014. The Capture of the KhOSA Building.	160
On the Eve.	170
Kharkiv April 7, 2014. Assault of the KhOSA Building	180
Kharkiv. April 8, 2014. Slobozhanshchina— is Ukraine!	208
Why We Managed to Do It in Kharkiv.	215
The Photo Chronicles.	224
Annexes.	225

Annex 1	228
Annex 2	256
Annex 3	260
Annex 4..	263
Annex 5	270
Annex 6	276
Author's Afterword.	281

FOREWORD BY THE AUTHOR

This book is about Kharkiv and its people.

And also my story about one night, several hard days, and months of troubled 2014. That first year of the hybrid war against Ukraine and the very night that became a turning point for Kharkiv and Ukraine's fate.

After several years, I tried to analyze the events of that period in Kharkiv's life against the background of the country's general situation, when Putin's regime's military aggression was beginning, when we still did not understand real might, cynicism, and preparedness of the enemy.

As the Minister of Internal Affairs, I knew the situation in the country, in every city—and I will tell you about it. But what was happening in Kharkiv, I learned both from the reports of subordinates and friends and family calls. That's why I invited Kharkiv citizens to co-author this book—the very men and women who saw those developments with their own eyes and in those difficult days lived through both the fate of their city and their personal destiny.

I sincerely thank each of them for their attitude at the time and their help now!

Inna Petrykova, journalist, photo correspondent, and press secretary for the 125th Battalion of the 113th Separate Territorial Defense Brigade;

Father Viktor (Marynychak), rector of the St. John Church, theologian of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU);

Yevheniia Levinshtein, volunteer and co-founder of the Kharkiv Station (NGO to assist internally displaced persons);

Alexey Mirer, interpreter who worked with foreign journalists in Kharkiv in spring 2014.

My sincere thanks to Kharkiv photographers **Inna Petrykova**, **Sergiy Kozlov**, **Andrii Marienko**, **Vyacheslav Madiyevskyy**, **Serhii Bobok** — due to their gutsy professionalism, today we can see the footage, transmitting those days' nerve.

I want to say “thank you” for your attitude and your help in those difficult days to many other Kharkiv (and not only Kharkiv) residents: Stepan Poltorak, Igor Baluta, Anatoly Dmitriev, Dmitri Brooke, Vitaly Danilov, Marina Epishina, Igor Kotvitsky, Igor Rainin, Irina Efremova, Anton Gerashchenko, Yuri Sobolta, Serhii Gusarov, and many others...

HOW DID WE WIN THAT SPRING?

Spring 2014. What helped Ukraine to stick it out? How did the country find the strength to stand up to the vile blows, in the chaos of betrayal and weakness, mistakes and stupidity, treachery and hesitancy?

There is only one answer—People!

We did it due to Ukrainians, both famous or not but strong and ordinary, doing what they should do—those who found the strength and courage to fight back a powerful and insidious enemy.

Due to the fact that the will and mobilization of the best people in this country were high since February 2014.

Yes, we were weak at that time, and circumstances were against us, but at the same time, we were also much mobilized.

Yes, we did not expect these vile blows to the back—one, two, three...

But we were able to brace up, and we stuck it out.

For your dignity cannot be taken away by force.

Only you can give away your dignity on your own.

And we did not give it away.

Neither dignity, nor honor, nor our independence, nor our city.

No matter how hard it was, we held on.

There were several days when I sometimes simply did not understand how we were keeping the situation in the country stable.

We practically did not leave our office; the phones rang around the clock because all over the country something “burned”, we had to solve thousands of urgent issues with almost no resources and reliable people, in a situation of post-revolutionary shock, distrust, sabotage of the management system and fear in society...

At that time, a small group of people was responsible for maintaining the country’s overall balance. I would like to name two people—those who took the main blow.

The Chairman of the Verkhovna Rada and interim President Olexandr Turchinov—firmly kept the situation in the country and probably did it in the only proper way possible at that moment of time.

The Prime Minister of the first post-Maidan government, Arseniy Yatsenyuk, was leading the economy out of the most profound crisis—with an empty state budget and destroyed financial and economic balance of the country.

The figure of 108 thousand hryvnias of the balance on the treasury account was mentioned many times, but it is worth repeating here: when we came to lead the state, there were only 108 thousand hryvnias in the country's budget! And it had to cover everything: the Army, public sector salaries, pensions, social benefits, and all the other needs of the nation...

When I found myself in the Minister of Internal Affairs position—unexpectedly for everyone and, first of all, for myself—my official duties were to ensure security inside the country. But in those days, internal security, defense capabilities, border defense, and repelling military aggression were all one complex task that had to be done jointly without regard for mandates and capacities. We all worked as one team, trusting each other and without paying attention to the formal boundaries of authority.

Putin chose the most convenient moment for the onslaught, just after Maidan when the state chain of command essentially was not functioning, the law enforcement system was in shock, the lack of leadership disoriented the military structure. And just at this moment, the blow followed, first and then second...

And it was not very clear how to save the country in that situation, with such a package of entirely different serious problems... It was not clear to many, but not to all!

The main task was to hold the situation for the first few months, which would allow us to go further in a calmer atmosphere.

Right from the moment of my appointment as the Minister of Internal Affairs, I, as well as the entire leadership of the country, had to deal urgently with the main problem—the issue of state security. We had to put out the fire of disintegration, fear, destruction and preserve Ukraine as a single, sovereign state.

Russian agents created the three most dangerous hotbeds of anti-Ukrainian actions in Luhansk, Donetsk, and Kharkiv.

For the country's leadership, it was evident that this was a typical destabilization scenario, which was played by the Russian Special Services.

After that, of course, they were going to move on: Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhzhia, Odesa, Mykolaiv... The whole left bank of the Dnipro River and the south of Ukraine were at significant risk. It comprises the foundations of Ukrainian Statehood. If we had lost any of the key industrial and economic centers—Dnipropetrovsk, Kharkiv, or Zaporizhzhia, it would have been—I'm afraid—a huge risk for the Statehood of Ukraine as a whole.

I would also like to note and remind you that all crisis processes took place in 2014 simultaneously throughout all Ukraine's territory. It was not one, or two, or three, or four centers of the crisis—there were more than a dozen hotbeds of tension and permanent aggravations simultaneously throughout the country!

I want you to recall them all: the KhPR, the ZPR, the Odesa Republic, and some other republic—all of them doubtless the “people’s” republics. Donetsk, Luhansk, Kharkiv, and Crimea, and at the same time Bessarabia was “sailing away”; in Mykolaiv there took place some very rough collisions and developments; Mariupol, Berdyansk; the situation in Kherson was neither easy...

After all, when the first provocations and collisions began in Sloviansk—it was a small episode. We did not even immediately respond to it against the background of simultaneous turbulent developments in Donetsk.

We reacted when a message arrived from Sloviansk: some group of people entered the city and allegedly with guns. But this reaction was a bit late, not just due to fatigue—fatigue was a common background at that time—but a barrage of messages in the information system. We had to evaluate the accuracy and adequacy of this information flow separately. It was difficult to understand on the fly where was truth and where was intentional distortion, what was essential or not so. With limited resources and time, it was necessary to figure out and make quick decisions about where to react first of all.

There was a lack of resources, people, or forces loyal to the nation. There were many confused people, traitors, and agents of the Russian Federation in the Ukrainian law enforcement system, while those forces that enabled us to withstand were just beginning to crystallize.

Well, what was the meaning of “lack” at the time? There were only several loyal units in the whole country that we could rely on. We had to figure out in what place the real threat would “shoot”. And we had to loiter, look for options—places where we really need the toughest reaction, where to direct the forces, and what threats to omit for now...

One characteristic episode of that time.

When we realized that an armed group operates in Sloviansk, we decided to storm its positions impromptu together with the military to clear the city of bandits.

Omega, the National Guard’s Special Forces unit, landed by helicopters on the city’s outskirts. Simultaneously, several armored personnel carriers of the Ukrainian Army were moving along the main road to Sloviansk from Izyum; they were to form a single assault armored group together with the Omega unit. Covered by the armored vehicles, the Special Forces would have to conduct a mop-up operation. At first, everything was going well. We were happy that the Omega landing was successful, our boys were on site, everything was fine. And suddenly, we were told by the radio set that the Army APCs had stopped.

- Why have the APCs stopped?
- There are barricades ahead of us...
- Well, tear them down!
- We can’t—there are civilians...
- Well, talk to them!

— But we started to talk with them—a car came up and turned its side, revealing the machine gun that shot several strings of bursts on us...

— And you?

— We will not run into civilians!

Civilians, do you understand?!

The separatists were hiding behind the local people, who were so fooled by Russian propaganda that they agreed to stand against APCs! It was the first such episode at the beginning of the war, later called a “hybrid” war.

Then we started thinking, how does it happen? How did it happen in other countries? I read about Croatia’s experience, where there was a similar hybrid situation, where exalted civilian women also had been climbing the tanks. It turns out that there they found a method: a couple or three times these women were shot down, and then a rule was established—first we shoot in the air, and if you do not listen, then we shoot to kill.

Were we ready to behave in this way? At that time—no. Three months later—yes, now—yes, but not at that moment. And the Russian saboteurs were actively using our state of unpreparedness and confusion at that time.

In such an atmosphere, solutions had to be found—how to protect cities, how to liberate buildings, how to stop the seizure of our territory, how to behave towards protesters—civilians, as well as local and specially brought provocateurs...

At that time, in the spring of 2014, I didn't think we would get stuck. I was hoping that this would be a blitzkrieg—we quickly sort things out and adequately balance the situation.

We considered it a clash initiated from the outside, which we would be able to quickly overcome by throwing outsiders out of the country and then having it out with internal troublemakers, cut off from puppeteers and funding.

I understood that it would not work when we began to lose control over small towns in eastern Ukraine one after another. It became clear that the groups attacking the Ukrainian Statehood are multiplying, that they are helped and they communicate with a specific center.

A little later, when our intelligence began to work—we already started to receive phone intercepts.¹ We began to see those “girkins”², those Russian militaries. We began to catch their communication with the GRU and FSB officers in Moscow, how they communicated, how they made arrangements, and how they planned their actions. And it became clear that this was a purposeful,

¹ Some of them I publish in the Annexes section, having received special permission of the investigation officials to make public materials from the criminal case because they have significant socio-political importance. Using QR codes, the reader can hear the unedited audio recording. Attention! Recordings contain a lot of obscene vocabulary!

² Girkin (Strelkov)—a former colonel of the Russian Secret Service (FSB), who took part in the armed annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in February-April 2014. In May 2014, he was sent to Donbas to organize military operations to separate it from Ukraine.

thoughtfully designed operation. We also had to respond according to some plan, and, unfortunately, there would be no quick solution.

The people in Oblasts were confused, disoriented by the spate of Russian propaganda. Everywhere there took place both objective difficulties, simply confusion and also processes, which were exacerbated by the troublemakers, infiltrated from the Russian Federation, by the “ikhtamnets”¹, who were performing special tasks. And it was tough to explain to people, for example, in Ternopil, why we can’t pay enough attention to their local organizational difficulties right now. We had to say:

“You, dear friend, wait with your questions for now because your problems do not threaten the state. Be patient, do not distract our attention, allow us to focus on vital directions.” Such words were tough to say, and they were badly perceived—people thought it was unfair, but we couldn’t do otherwise at that time...

We were able to defend Kharkiv but not Donetsk and Luhansk. As to Dnipro (then Dnipropetrovsk)—I pay

¹ “Ikhtamnet” is a meme that refers to Russia’s denial to admit its military presence during the annexation of Crimea and armed aggression in eastern Ukraine. The expression “ikhtamnet” was first used by Russian President Putin at a press conference on 4 March 2014 in response to a question about the participation of the Russian military in the annexation of the Crimea (in Russian, “ikh tam net” means “no, they are not there”). Subsequently, the meme has been extended to all Russian military personnel without military insignia participating in military conflicts (in Ukraine, Syria, Sudan, Lebanon, etc.). Such unidentified Russian soldiers are often called “ikhtamnets”.

tribute to Igor Kolomoiskiy, Slava Oleinik, Gennady Korban, Boris Filatov, Yuri Bereza; they mobilized the elite and did not permit to rock the situation.

I am grateful to all those who took responsibility for their country: starting with guys who marched to the volunteer battalions right from Maidan and ending with those who took the helm in a sick country that had been devastated by Yanukovych's regime.

We withstood because we fought and worked together.

Many things were happening outright, and all issues were either very urgent or extraordinary—there were no others. And everything—at the same time. Someday, maybe, I will tell you all the things which are still premature to talk about now...

In this book I will focus only on a few moments, several troubled spring days of this war imposed on us—an unprecedented hybrid war in which the aggressor uses not only weapons but also cyber attacks, propaganda campaigns, information fakes, economic subversions, manipulation of mass consciousness.

Ukraine, unfortunately, was the first victim where Putin's Russia practiced its dirty methods. This is why our first victory is so important—on the night of April 7-8, 2014. That night we were able for the first time to stop the advance of the "Russian world", to prevent the creation of another pseudo-republic, to protect Kharkiv from devastation and misfortune, which that same spring befell Donetsk and Luhansk.

I will tell my story of the battle for Kharkiv.

I perceived those events through the lens of the situation throughout the country, within the framework of all the complicated and terrible processes that took place in all corners of Ukraine at that time.

It is important to remember this to understand the events of those hours, days, months that co-occurred, shouted over each other, crowded in my consciousness...

Therefore, my story cannot be complete without the experience of other people who saw everything happening with their own eyes—people who lived day after day in Kharkiv, who watched and participated in those developments.

I asked those people to share their memories who, by their occupation and civic viewpoint, every day were at the very epicenter of events, went out to the square, participated in rallies, and often were in direct physical danger. This is a direct speech, they are real emotions, this is a picture of life in Kharkiv in the spring of 2014 at first hand.

Another “co-author” of my book and very important, in my opinion, is a “Plan for Kharkiv and the Oblast”—the plan to seize Kharkiv and the Kharkiv Oblast intercepted by our experts. It was an interactive electronic document, to which evidently several people added clarifications and suggestions during a long time (we preserved the color marking of different authors—as it was in the original).

The document defines exhaustively clear the objectives of the Russian regime's invasion in Ukraine, its plans, and methods. It contains 28 pages, on which precisely, step by step, "Russian curators" and ideologists of the "Russian world" plan to capture Kharkiv and Kharkiv Oblast, the introduction and deployment of troops, the destruction of the media, the shooting of journalists and civil servants.

In the text, I bring some quotations from this "Plan"—further in the text called "Plan to capture Kharkiv and Kharkiv Oblast". At the end of the book, I publish the whole document preserving the spelling of the original. Read these terrible 28 pages and remember: this fate Putin's regime was preparing for us then, in the hard spring of 2014.

Note also: in some places, we are talking about events that happened later, sometimes a few months after April 8, 2014. And yes, it shows that the plan to capture Kharkiv and Kharkiv Oblast by pro-Russian forces remained relevant to the curators of the "Russian world" even after the failure of their first attempt to seize Kharkiv. Or perhaps it still remains relevant today. After all, the Russian aggression continues...

UKRAINE. FEBRUARY—APRIL 2014. HEADLINES ONLY

Today—even today, in the seventh year of the war!—it isn't easy to imagine the density and intensity of those first months! Hour by hour, day by day, we continuously received a flow of information, which required an urgent reaction, help, intervention.

You surely remember this, but if by any chance the events of that time are shrouded in haze, erasing details, then it's essential to recall and understand the circumstances and time pressure under which we worked in those days, in what kind of conditions the decisions were made, how it all was back then...

To restore the information picture of those days in the reader's memory, I decided to give here a chronicle of events in the spring of 2014. This section includes only the headlines and a summary of the news, mostly from the central media. It is an illustration of the pace at which the country and we lived in those troubled days. The Russian media's information is highlighted **in red**—pay attention to the way they present the news.

A QR code¹ accompanies each headline, so with a smartphone, it is possible to open the news, immerse into the atmosphere, and clarify your memories.

¹ A QR code (Quick Response Code) consists of black squares situated in the square grid on white background.

To read a QR code, turn on the camera on your smartphone and place the image into the frame. There is no need to take a photo; your phone will offer to go to the encoded Internet link to the site's page with the news.

February 24

Viktor Yanukovych vanished in an unknown direction and was put on the wanted list.



<https://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/news/2014/02/24/7016020/>

Acting Minister of Internal Affairs Arsen Avakov disbanded Police (Militsiya) Special Force unit “Berkut”.



<https://tsn.ua/ru/politika/avakov-likvidiroval-berkut-351475.html>

The Ministry of Finance and the National Bank have been working around the clock in recent days. The press service of the Ministry of Finance: “Today we cooperate

with the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine and the government coordinator Alexander Turchinov. We are working together to ensure the stable operation of the financial system of Ukraine. The situation in the financial area, in general, is complex but controlled”.



https://rus.lb.ua/economics/2014/02/24/256886_natsbank_minfin_pereshli.html

More than 3.5 thousand ordinary citizens of Ukraine came to assist the Ministry of Internal Affairs. As of the morning of February 24, according to the MIA (Ministry of Internal Affairs), law and order in all Oblasts of Ukraine was provided by almost 7500 militsiyamen and more than 4800 ordinary citizens who control the work of the Militsiya. According to the MIA, 1600 public activists patrol the streets of their cities independently.



<https://glavnoe.ua/news/n166729>