

KGB against the national democratic movement in Ukraine. 1986-1991

The second half of the 1980s in the Soviet Union was the beginning of the political crisis of communism. National-democratic opposition movements were on rise. The elements of this movement in Ukraine were the following:

- opposition political organization, created mostly by former political prisoners and dissidents
- organizations that fought for the revival of national culture, language, history
- religious organizations, including the movement for the revival of the forbidden by authorities Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church
- environmental organizations
- youth informal groups
- workers' organizations and strike committees.

Each of these movements had their own goals, and the obstacles to their implementation were the state authorities, That gradually brought them closer and eventually led to tight coordination and integration of efforts. The Communist regime saw a threat in these organizations, an attempt to overcome its monopoly on public and political life. That is why it so strongly held back their development. A special service - the KGB was instrumental in the fight with the opposition in the Soviet Union. But in the new political situation where the leadership has announced a "policy of perestroika and democratization," the KGB could not use conventional methods of repression and physical elimination of opponents and of intimidation the society.

So the last five years in the history of the Soviet security service its agents were forced to use new methods. On the basis of the KGB documents I will try to find out, how effective was their fight against the national democratic movement. Ukrainian archives have little materials left on the activities of the communist secret police in the late 1980s - early 1990's. Most of them (plans and reports of work, observation data, agent reports etc.) were destroyed by the order of the soviet KGB leadership J 1990. Only a few hundred informational KGB messages to the leadership of the Communist Party survived in the archive. They provide information on measures taken by special services.

Security authorities carefully gathered information about the moods in society. They monitored the trends dangerous for the authorities. The later particularly intensified after the proclamation by the Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev of the course of perestroika. Dissatisfaction with the regime increased after unsuccessful attempts to hide the scale of the Chernobyl accident. Therefore, it is the year 1986, when attempts to organize informal groups modeled after the Polish "Solidarity" were first mentioned in the documents.

During the following 1987 the number of public initiatives began to grow rapidly. The danger to the security forces was a return to active public life of political prisoners, who were released from prisons. To neutralize them they were asked to write the repentance letters. As a result 48 of the 72 former prisoners wrote them, the remaining 24 refused such offers. Therefore, they were intensively monitored, and the confirmation was obtained: they "express their intention to continue antisocial activity."

In order to facilitate its work in Ukraine, the KGB decided not to interfere with emigration of some former political prisoners. For mild influence on tough ones they planed to allow some former political prisoners to work in their field in groups that can reform their character.

Of course security authorities did not abandon the attempts to compromise the most influential persons. On September 27th, 1987 at the Kiev airport American journalist Martha Kolomiets was detained and in her luggage the KGB found hidden videotape with interviews of two prominent Ukrainian dissidents Chornovil and Bohdan Horyn. KGBprepared and placed in press the article

entitled "Interview from under the counter." In this paper they argued that in fact Vyacheslav Choronovil was convicted of attempted rape, that the book "Mein Kampf" was seized during the search and that the journalist purchased the car, four recorders and expensive clothes in the exchange store for the dissidents.

Opposition Democratic Movement was active not only in Ukraine but in other republics of the Soviet Union and communist Eastern Europe. Communist security service realized that they were dealing with large-scale international phenomenon. In its reports there is always concern that Ukrainian activists learn the experience of social movements of Baltic States and Poland. It was essential for the Security service to prevent the coordination and cooperation between various national democratic movements. Therefore, the activists of the Ukrainian national-democratic movement were detained at airport under various pretexts in order not to let them go outside the republic to participate in international actions.

The national democratic movement started to become younger in 1988. A lot of student social initiatives emerged, they rapidly got politicized and they posed another serious problem for the regime. Given this, **KGB** recommended that state agencies speed up the establishment of official youth organizations and clubs, which would divert young people from participating in opposition activities. Important attention should be given to propaganda, which would "expose the hostile intentions of the foreign subversive centers to influence the young people."

In their documents **KGB** very often explained the growth of the opposition movement by the influence of hostile foreign intelligence or expat nationalist centers. This thesis was well fit into the communist ideology, but was not able to find out the real motives that pushed people to join the fight against the government.

To help control the increasing activity of the national-democratic movement, the head of the **KGB** offered to adopt a law on public associations and their registration, which would stop the activities of informal opposition organizations. As of mid-1988, the **KGB** monitored 21 organizations, among the activists of which were former political prisoners. On July 7, 1988 they created one of the most famous Ukrainian opposition organizations of that period - Ukrainian Helsinki Union. Its goal was to become a political party in opposition to the communists.

The authorities knew well that the growth of the national democratic movement is not possible to stop, so it decided to divert it in the right direction. In July 1988 the **KGB** prepared recommendations which stipulated the need to create "social association struggling for perestroika" controlled by the government. The security service decided to use the attempts of social activists to unite in a broad coalition of a kind of "Popular Front" in the Baltics. For a short period of time the government managed to establish a control over the initiative. That is why the published program of "People's Movement of Ukraine for Perestroika" (or Rukh in Ukrainian) did not contain the harsh opposition slogans. Struggle about the new organization continued. In some areas, especially in Western Ukraine where national-democratic movement was the strongest, radical dissidents have established control over it.

KGB did not disdain to organize small provocations against the activists as well. In particular, the Department to Counter the Stealing of Socialist Property was recommended to deal with the distribution of samizdat magazine "Ukrainian Herald" (Ukrajins'kyi Visnyk) in order to bring his publishers to account for speculation. Police was instructed to look for citizens at homes by which meetings were held and ask them to complains on the organizers for creating noise. The certain activists were to be tried in a court and detained for a few days for organizing unsanctioned rallies. Later, the **KGB** reported that due to its involvement, during 1989, there were 28 criminal cases in Ukraine, 1125 individuals were brought to an administrative court.

However, none of the methods did work and the national democratic movement in Ukraine continued to grow. According to KGB there were 1565 mass events including 732 which were unauthorized in Ukraine in 1989. More than 2 million people participated in them.

In the summer of that year a miners strike movement claimed its importance. KGB has focused its efforts on not allowing the influence of political activists of on the strikers. Moreover security service recommended the government to indoctrinate them ideologically and nominate them as candidates in the elections. Therefore, the authorities tried to convert their politically unprepared opponents into their allies.

A special meeting of the Board of the USSR KGB was held on August 18, 1989. It discussed the the political situation in Ukraine and formulated new objectives for security service. It is revealing that the first and foremost task in the future was fighting the foreign centers, which have a negative impact on the society. Security service still considered the activity of foreign centers and intelligence as the main source of pro-democratic social activity growth. Only in the guidelines that followed it was said about the need to get agents in public organizations to maintain control over them.

In September 1989 the KGB had to acknowledge that in newly created People's Movement of Ukraine (Rukh) the balance between the true opposition activists (first of all members of the Ukrainian Helsinki Group) and controlled by the government activists is not to the advantage of government. Confrontation between them took place at the congress during 8-10 September 1989. After it ended, the KGB reported that attempts of "Helsinki" leaders to convert the new association into a political party and to proclaim the struggle for independence as its program goal were thwarted.

In the next 1990, the government lost control over the organization that became one of the major opposition forces in Ukraine. People's movement took part in the elections, won a convincing victory in Western Ukraine. Overall this year was a time of victory for the democratic opposition. They got parliamentary representation, formed quite a large and active opposition parliamentary fraction (125 out of 450 MPs), They managed to proclaim the sovereignty of Ukraine, and sacked the cabinet as a result of mass student protest. The victory of "velvet revolutions" in Eastern Europe intensified confusion of communist regime in the USSR in 1990. They still tried to stop the democratic movement by the usual methods. In particular, the leadership of KGB, the Ministry of Interior and Prosecutor's Office proposed in July 1990 to introduce a moratorium on mass rallies in Ukraine.

The Communists managed to overcome own confusion and organize resistance to the opposition only in the end of 1990. In November, the special service staged a successful provocation against one of the most active opposition Member of Parliament Stepan Khmara, who was arrested for the alleged attack on a policeman. In December, the KGB reported about confusion in the democratic forces. In January 1991 there were well-known events in Vilnius, which, according to the KGB, had a deterrent effect on the activity of the Ukrainian opposition. They feared the violent scenario in Ukraine. Another effective counterattack of the communists was referendum held in March, which ended to their advantage - the majority of the population supported the preservation of the USSR. In the summer Soviet leadership got support from the leading Western powers, who urged the Ukrainian opposition to abandon the idea of independence.

However, the coup attempt, made in August 1991 by conservative forces in the Communist Party, put an end to the USSR. The last days of Soviet power in Ukraine, by the way, have shown that the degradation did not omit even the special service. On August 20 security agency reported that the KGB, Interior Ministry and military took the situation in Ukraine under control, ahead of

possible anti-authority strikes by discontented nationalistic forces. They claimed that, in general, (citation here)"the document's content of the GKCHP leadership and their actions are basically perceived as positive in different segments of the population". A few days the opposition led by Boris Yeltsin wins in Moscow. Ukraine starts rallies demanding getting out of the USSR. The tone of the **KGB** information changes. The report of August 22 writes that "the population of the republic follows the situation in the country with great anxiety and concern, condemns the adventurous group of state officials who tried to make a coup".

However, an attempt by the **KGB** to adapt to the changing political situation ended in collapse. On Aug. 24 the Communists, saving themselves from a possible trial for participation in the coup, voted for Declaration of Independence of Ukraine proposed by the Democrats. Thus the Soviet Union ceased to exist, and with it the once powerful **KGB**.