

ANDREY KURKOV

**UKRAINE
DIARIES**

DISPATCHES FROM KIEV



Contents

Cover

About the Book

About the Author

Also by Andrey Kurkov

Maps

Title Page

Publisher's Note

Preface

Thursday 21 November 2013

Friday 22 November

Monday 25 November

Tuesday 26 November

Wednesday 27 November

Thursday 28 November

Friday 29 November

Saturday 30 November

Sunday 1 December

Monday 2 December

Tuesday 3 December

Thursday 5 December

Friday 6 December

Saturday 7 December

Sunday 8 December

Monday 9 December

Wednesday 11 December

Friday 13 December

Saturday 14 December

Monday 16 December

Tuesday 17 December

Wednesday 18 December

Friday 20 December

Monday 23 December

Tuesday 24 December

Wednesday 25 December
Thursday 26 December
Friday 27 December
Monday 30 December
Wednesday 1 January 2014
Thursday 2 January.
Friday 3 January.
Monday 6 January.
Wednesday 8 January.
Thursday 9 January.
Friday 10 January.
Saturday 11 January.
Sunday 12 January.
Monday 13 January.
Tuesday 14 January.
Wednesday 15 January.
Thursday 16 January.
Friday 17 January.
Sunday 19 January – Day of Christ's baptism
Tuesday 21 January.
Wednesday 22 January.
Thursday 23 January.
Sunday 26 January.
Monday 27 January.
Friday 31 January.
Monday 3 February.
Tuesday 4 February.
Wednesday 5 February.
Thursday 6 February.
Friday 7 February.
Sunday 9 February.
Tuesday 11 February.
Thursday 13 February.
Saturday 15 February.
Sunday 16 February.
Monday 17 February.

Tuesday 18 February
Wednesday 19 February
Thursday 20 February
Friday 21 February
Saturday 22 February
Monday 24 February
Tuesday 25 February
Wednesday 26 February
Thursday 27 February
Saturday 1 March
Sunday 2 March
Monday 3 March
Tuesday 4 March
Wednesday 5 March
Thursday 6 March
Sunday 9 March
Thursday 13 March
Friday 14 March
Saturday 15 March
Monday 17 March
Tuesday 18 March
Wednesday 19 March
Thursday 20 March
Friday 21 March
Saturday 22 March
Monday 24 March
Wednesday 26 March
Thursday 27 March
Friday 28 March
Saturday 29 March
Monday 31 March
Tuesday 1 April
Wednesday 2 April
Thursday 3 April
Friday 4 April
Saturday 5 April

Sunday 6 April
Monday 7 April
Tuesday 8 April
Wednesday 9 April
Thursday 10 April
Sunday 13 April
Monday 14 April
Tuesday 15 April
Wednesday 16 April
Thursday 17 April
Sunday 20 April
Monday 21 April
Tuesday 22 April
Thursday 24 April

Afterword
Notes
Copyright

About the Book

-16°C, sunlight, silence. I drove the children to school, then went to see the revolution. I walked between the tents. Talked with revolutionaries. They were weary today. The air was thick with the smell of old campfires.

Ukraine Diaries is acclaimed writer Andrey Kurkov's first-hand account of the ongoing crisis in his country. From his flat in Kiev, just five hundred yards from Independence Square, Kurkov can smell the burning barricades and hear the sounds of grenades and gunshot.

Kurkov's diaries begin on the first day of the pro-European protests in November, and describe the violent clashes in the Maidan, the impeachment of Yanukovych, Russia's annexation of Crimea and the separatist uprisings in the east of Ukraine. Going beyond the headlines, they give vivid insight into what it's like to live through – and try to make sense of – times of intense political unrest.

About the Author

Andrey Kurkov was born in St Petersburg in 1961. Having graduated from the Kiev Foreign Languages Institute, he worked for some time as a journalist, did his military service as a prison warder in Odessa, then became a writer of screenplays and author of critically acclaimed and popular novels, including the bestselling *Death and the Penguin*. Kurkov has long been a respected commentator on Ukraine for the world's media, notably in the UK, France, Germany and the States.

Also by Andrey Kurkov

Death and the Penguin

The Case of the General's Thumb

Penguin Lost

A Matter of Death and Life

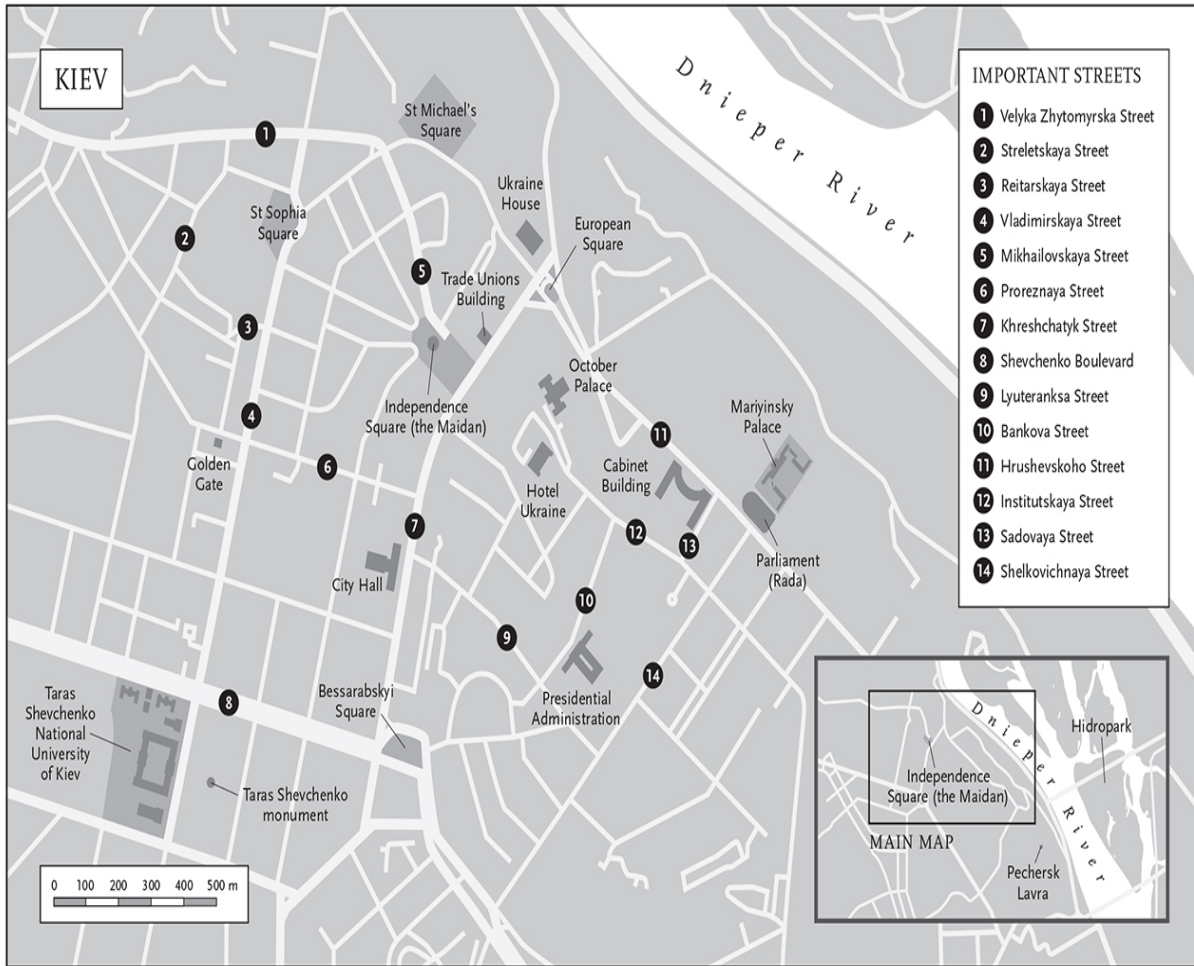
The President's Last Love

The Good Angel of Death

The Milkman in the Night

The Gardener from Ochakov





Andrey Kurkov

UKRAINE DIARIES

Dispatches from Kiev

*Translated by Sam Taylor with an afterword
translated by Amanda Love Darragh*



Harvill Secker
LONDON

Publisher's Note

Ukraine became independent from the USSR in August 1991. Reports of vote-rigging in the 2004 presidential election, allegedly won by Viktor Yanukovych, led to the Orange Revolution, and Viktor Yushchenko became president. Yanukovych was, however, victorious in the 2010 elections. Owing to a lack of growth mired by corruption in Ukraine, Yanukovych sought economic ties with both Russia and the European Union.

On 21 November 2013, the Ukrainian government suspended negotiations on the EU Association Agreement. This agreement called for closer trade links, political and economic reform, and the release of ex-Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko, who was imprisoned in 2011 on charges believed to be politically biased. Russia opposed the agreement, and threatened to impose harsh trade restrictions on Ukraine and to increase gas prices if it were signed.

Kiev, central and western Ukraine are more pro-European; the east is predominantly pro-Russian. The south is a mix of pro-European and pro-Russian. The Maidan protests, described in these pages, involve a diverse group of anti-government protesters; political parties of the opposition; and later self-defence groups set up to protect protesters from pro-government mercenaries. The main opposition parties are Batkivshchyna (centre-right; Tymoshenko's party, led by Arseniy Yatsenyuk); UDAR (centrist, led by Vitaliy Klichko); Svoboda (right-wing, led by Oleh Tyahnybok); and groups which emerged during the

revolution, such as Pravy Sektor (far-right nationalist, led by Dmytro Yarosh).

Yanukovych's party, the Party of Regions – the ruling party as these diaries begin – is made up of various groups with different ideological and political views, ranging from centrist to pro-Russian.

Preface

When nothing in particular happens in the life of a man and his country, the man might believe his existence to be stable and eternal. In fact, that life – where time is measured in career changes, in the purchases of new houses or cars, in family gatherings, in weddings and divorces – truly is stable. The man who lives in one of the world's 'hot spots', or who simply lives next to an active volcano, has a different view of time. The worth of each day, each hour experienced, proves infinitely greater than that of a peaceful week. When you live next to a volcano, real or metaphorical, the day is filled with so many events that it proves physically impossible to remember them all. These events inevitably end up in the history books, sometimes comprising only a few lines, sometimes one or two pages.

I now understand why, when I was at school, I much preferred reading the private diaries of writers or politicians who had witnessed history to reading actual history books. I remember the diary of the great Russian poet Alexander Blok, covering the years 1917–18. I remember Franz Kafka's diary, and I remember in particular the diary – which I read recently in its complete version – of the famous Ukrainian film-maker Alexander Dovzhenko, in which he would sing the praises of Stalin or revile the Jews and the Ukrainians, just in case he was arrested and the KGB read his notebooks, so he would be able to point out these passages as proof of his loyalty to the Soviet regime.

I have kept diaries for more than thirty years. Several times, my Ukrainian editors have asked to publish them, even if only fragments of them, but until now I have never been able to force myself to extract from these private writings anything I was ready to share with readers.

And then, having been led on more than one occasion into the path of a whirlwind of history, I found myself the witness to the dramatic events that arose in November 2013 in Ukraine, events of which we have not yet seen the end. I do not know what will happen next, or what lies in store for me and my family. I only hope that everything will be all right.

I am not leaving. I am not shying away from reality. I live each day in the very centre of reality. All five of us – myself, my wife Elizabeth, and our children Gabriela, Theo and Anton – continue to live in the same apartment, in the heart of Kiev, five hundred yards from the Maidan Nezalezhnosti, Ukraine's Independence Square. From our balcony we have seen smoke rise from blazing barricades, we have heard the explosions of grenades and gunshots. Life goes on, throughout all of this; not once has it stopped. And I have recorded this life almost every day, so that I can attempt, now, to recount it to you in detail. A life in times of revolution, a life spent waiting for war. A war that, as I write these words, seems terribly close, closer than ever.

Thursday 21 November 2013

Tonight, around midnight, a meteorite fell on Sevastopol. Why there in particular? Pure chance, probably. But still, that it should choose to land on the most Russian city in Ukraine, whose picturesque bays are home to Russia's Black Sea Fleet!

I would not have paid any attention to this nocturnal event, had there not appeared today a declaration by the prime minister, Mykola Azarov, announcing the suspension of preparations to sign the Association Agreement with the European Union. In one of my novels I described a secret factory, hidden away in the Ural Mountains, which produced artificial meteorites. The dream of the Soviet military's high command: bombarding the United States with artificial meteorites, while making people believe they were real ones. So I wondered if this meteorite was really a natural event, or if it had not been a way of proclaiming to the most Russian city in Ukraine that negotiations between Viktor Yanukovych and Vladimir Putin over the renunciation of our country's Association Agreement with Europe had ended successfully (for Putin).

Closer ties with Europe have been abandoned. Now, we are going to love Russia again.

Europe is apparently in a state of shock. Me too. Did Yanukovych really have to spend six months announcing that 'we are walking towards Europe'? Did he really have to gather his parliamentary group in September at the regional party headquarters, traditionally installed in the Zoryany cinema, to ask each person there to walk with him, in an orderly fashion, carefully keeping pace, and to

suggest to all those who refused to follow him that they should leave the group and the party?

We did not have to wait long for the people's reaction to Azarov's announcement. This evening a crowd began to gather in the Maidan.^{fn1} In the meantime, there had been more news: the Foreign Ministry joyously declared that it was no longer dangerous for Ukrainians to go on holiday in Egypt. In other words, any of you who were thinking of going to Europe, catch a plane to Egypt instead, and who cares if you get massacred, accidentally or on purpose, by local Islamists or other revolutionaries. This makes me feel sick.

That said, the way this is being staged is absolutely classic: Azarov announces the decision not to sign the treaty on a day when Yanukovych is out of the country. He is in Austria, where he is already busy reassuring Europe: 'We'll sign the agreement with you, just not right now.' And he adds that he has no intention of liberating Yulia Tymoshenko.¹ If Yanukovych were a three-headed dragon, at this moment each of the three heads would be travelling separately but acting in perfect sync. If one of them were in Moscow, the Muscovite Yanukovych head would be giving a completely different speech, one that did not even mention Europe.

This afternoon, abandoning the next chapter of my Lithuanian novel, I went to the Yaroslavna and ordered a coffee. Five or six minutes later, I added 50ml of Zakarpatsky cognac to it. It didn't make me feel any better. There was no one in the cafe I recognised. Customers came in, looking gloomy, and I was tempted to think that they too knew that Europe was now no longer going to enlighten Ukraine. But maybe they were worried by altogether different problems, their own private problems, of far less importance.

Back at home, I went on Facebook. People were calling for a gathering in the Maidan to demand that the treaty be signed. They advised to take warm clothes, rugs, a flask of tea and a supply of food for the night. I simply didn't have the strength to go. I didn't feel like it either. I don't feel like anything any more. Not only that, but the television screen showed Putin grinning from ear to ear while the speaker declared in a somewhat strange voice that Russia is delighted to develop its collaboration with Ukraine. What collaboration? A three-year trade war, with embargoes on the export of, first, cheese, then meat, then Ukrainian beer, and so on? Not to mention the constantly postponed co-production of Antonov aeroplanes.

The world seems to have gone mad this morning. In Alchevsk, blue water ran from the taps. A Swiss tourist entered Georgia, perched atop a camel, an animal from which he has not been separated for more than thirty years. His name is Roland Veron, and in Tbilisi he was given an award for the most original traveller. I wonder if they gave the camel anything.

Here, everything is simpler and sadder. We have, once again, had our future taken away from us.

fn1 The Maidan, a word of Persian origin, was originally the square in eastern cities where the market was held. In Kiev it was renamed Independence Square in 1991, after the fall of the Soviet Union.

Friday 22 November

Vilnius. The temperature here is no more wintry than it is in Kiev. The conference on Ukraine and its European future was not cancelled, in spite of the Ukrainian prime minister's declaration. Though it's true that the Polish president, Bronisław Komorowski, and the Lithuanian president, Dalia Grybauskaitė, have pulled out, along with a few other top-level European politicians. As for me, I have to talk about the country's future after the treaty.

This evening, a gala dinner was organised at the Kempinski Hotel restaurant, but it didn't improve the morale of those of us from Ukraine. At the next table sat the first president of Lithuania, Vytautas Landsbergis, the former Ukrainian president, Viktor Yushchenko,² and his brother Pyotr, a former member of Parliament. While Landsbergis talked about European values, Yushchenko used his speech to criticise Yulia Tymoshenko again. After which he gave a little pot of honey to everyone at his table.

While this was happening, people were spontaneously gathering in Kiev for a protest in the Maidan, in spite of the rain. Someone had brought a large tarpaulin to make a shelter for the protesters. Straight away, the police turned up and confiscated the tarpaulin. A man in plain clothes read out a court decree banning the erection of any tents, kiosks or other 'small architectural forms' during the period from 22 November to 7 January. At the same time, the city police representative announced that the protesters would not be removed.

Viktor Yanukovych still intends to come here, to the Vilnius European summit. The Polish and Lithuanian

politicians at the conference cautiously hypothesise that the Association Agreement will be signed in spite of everything. They think Azarov's declaration is motivated by excessive EU pressure regarding the Tymoshenko affair.

Well, I agree on that point. For Yanukovych, Yulia Tymoshenko is the principal – and most dangerous – enemy. If she were liberated, her popularity would soar again and she would become the sole leader of the opposition, relegating the three white knights of today – Oleh Tyahnybok, Vitaliy Klichko and Arseniy Yatsenyuk – to the background.

Azarov intervened again today, this time with a supposedly reassuring speech in which he claimed the refusal to sign the Association Agreement did not mean he would instead be signing a treaty with Russia about Ukraine's entry into the Customs Union. In fact, the majority of our country's inhabitants know nothing about these two unsigned treaties and simply believe that an Association Agreement with the EU would lead Ukraine into Europe, while a treaty joining the Eurasian Economic Community Customs Union would place us once again under the economic and political influence of the Russian Federation.

Today, in Kiev, the second European Cup for knife fighting began. Teams from Russia, Ukraine, Lithuania and Italy took part. I didn't even know that knife fighting was a sport!

Monday 25 November

Vilnius, 1.40 a.m. It's raining. According to my taxi driver, it is supposed to start snowing around 3 a.m.

After midnight, European diplomats asked me the question: 'What should we do with your country?' I replied: 'What should you do with it? Take it! And take me too, along with all its other inhabitants. Ukraine has already had new masters. The important thing is that the new rules should be comprehensible and easy to implement. That's what everybody wants. And that each of those rules should be one line long, forming a single and unique proposal. Like the Ten Commandments: You shall not kill, full stop. You shall not steal, full stop. Etc. So the Ukrainian citizen will lift his hands to the sky and say: "Oh, how simple this is! How easy it is to live in a civilised manner!" And then, just in case, the citizen will ask: "But will the local police officer also have to obey these rules?"'

If everyone accepts the rules, the poor police officer will find himself bound by them as well. If we don't accept them, he will maintain the right to take ice creams for his children from the local kiosk without paying for them. And so the kiosk owner's children will grow up hating the police officer.

Goodnight to all the local police officers, to all the businessmen, to everyone who takes part in this life!

Yesterday, there was the biggest mass protest the Maidan has known since Yanukovich became president. The procession of people in favour of closer European ties left the monument to the poet Taras Shevchenko at noon and walked to European Square. The police counted 20,000

protesters. In Russia, the television news talked of 'several thousands', but the opposition claimed that more than 100,000 people came together to protest against the government. During the rally, speakers called for the president's resignation and a government reshuffle.

After two hours of successive speeches, one of the orators suggested they stop talking and start acting – by setting up camp outside the Cabinet. On the way, the protesters split into three groups. The biggest headed for the Cabinet building, the two others for Parliament and the presidential administration building. Clashes immediately occurred between the protesters and the *titushky*,³ who, along with the men of the Berkut – the special police of the Ministry of Internal Affairs – surrounded the ministerial building to protect it. The procession's belligerent vanguard was composed of members of the Svoboda Party and aggressive young people who, having smashed open the entrance barrier, attempted to breach the line of defence. Truncheons and flagpoles entered the fray. The Berkut began throwing stun grenades. The Svoboda activists constantly shouted nationalist slogans that had nothing to do with the cause of these protests. Yuriy Lutsenko, the former Minister of Internal Affairs in Viktor Yushchenko's government, was trying hard to stop the fighting, inviting everyone to return to the Maidan and then to come back to the Cabinet the next day. Finally, the Svoboda activists agreed and returned to European Square, where the party members began putting up tents to create a protest village.

The Party of Regions was not inactive either. During Saturday night and Sunday morning, they constructed a stage on Mikhailovskaya Square for a rally and installed a row of dry toilets. They were preparing to make the square a base for their supporters.

On Sunday night, students put up ten tents in the centre of Lviv and raised the flag of the European Union. In Cherkasy, the police prevented them. The police are now guarding the central squares of many cities in Ukraine. An opposition speaker called on the protesters not to disperse before 29 November, the date when the European summit in Vilnius is due to end.

Because of the protests, the day to commemorate the victims of Holodomor⁴ went unmarked. It was the governor of the Donetsk region who suddenly remembered it. In his brief speech, he acknowledged that the great famine was entirely planned, because during that period, in the parts of Ukraine that belonged to Romania and Poland in 1932 and 1933, no one went hungry. One wonders if he will now suffer the wrath of the Party of Regions, to which he belongs, and who deny any responsibility on the part of Stalin and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in the famine that caused the deaths in Ukraine of between three and five million people.

Tuesday 26 November

Today, at 2 a.m., the administrative court of Odessa issued a decree prohibiting the organisation of all rallies and protests on twenty-five squares and streets in Odessa, as well as on 'all adjoining land'. In other words, the entire city is now forbidden to protesters! At 5 a.m., court bailiffs arrived, holding this decree in their hands, at the base of the Richelieu monument, and began knocking over the tents that the Euromaidan supporters had erected there. These tents sheltered a total of twenty-four people. Three of them, including Odessa's Euromaidan leader, Alexei Chorny, were sentenced to five days in prison for 'uncivil acts' and resisting law enforcement officers. The court that gave Chorny five days banned journalists from attending the trial, and sentencing took place in camera.

I am increasingly convinced that the entire Ukrainian legal system has not only entered the shadowlands, like the country's economy, but has sunk into a deeper darkness. There are more and more legal judgments made in the middle of the night, when the country is supposed to be asleep. If the judges who are working nights are sleeping during the day, we can be somewhat reassured as to their mental health. But if they are working twenty-four hours a day, it has to be doubted whether they can even remember the judgments they made one hour earlier. And anyway, as has been proved on several occasions by journalists, judges have been handed judgments written in advance without their agreement, already unsealed and signed. This is, in any case, how they deal with opposition representatives –

and, indeed, with anyone who is unhappy with the authorities and does not conceal their feelings.

In Kharkiv today, almost two hundred people gathered in the central square. They were here the night before, with gauze strips on their mouths like gags. The local authorities immediately banned all mass protests and rallies, justifying this measure by claiming it was taken against the risk of an epidemic of flu or other contagious diseases. The city truly is sick: in 2004, at the time of the Orange Revolution, its inhabitants were much more active.

Putin's statements on Ukraine keep coming. In the latest, he said that Ukraine owed Russia \$30 billion. Last week, the debt was, I believe, only \$18 billion.

Today in Kiev, students declared a general strike. Those from the city's university gathered around the monument to Taras Shevchenko, and from there marched towards the Maidan. Almost two thousand others joined protesters in the square.

In the evening, in European Square, *berkutovtsy* – Berkut agents – attacked three opposition deputies with truncheons and tear gas, even after they showed identification. So it looks as though the police have already taken away the immunity from arrest guaranteed to members of Parliament by the constitution – or at least to those who support the opposition.

Protesters who had come from Lviv to take part in the rally in the Maidan complained on the Internet that there had been too few European symbols and flags. There were not many Ukrainian flags either. Most of the flags on display were those of the opposition parties. While writers and journalists were speaking, the public listened attentively. But as soon as they were succeeded by opposition politicians, who clearly did not agree on a joint plan or message, the rally was transformed into a sort of dry run for future presidential elections. It is true that the appearance of Yuriy Lutsenko, who spent a year in prison

on the official orders of Yanukovych, did arouse the crowd's interest and attention. But he was talking about himself, not about any particular party. At one stage, the supporters of Yulia Tymoshenko invited protesters to march on the Cabinet building. Result: those who responded to this radical call found themselves clashing with the police who surrounded said building and tested the effects of rubber truncheons on the protesters' bodies.

The previous night, in Dnipropetrovsk, *titushky* destroyed the tents erected in the local European Square by protesters. Everyone found inside them was beaten up. The leader of the local Euromaidan was evacuated in an ambulance, suffering from traumatic brain injury and multiple contusions. Euromaidan organisers in the city banned the flags of political parties from rallies – only European flags would be accepted.

In Donetsk and Luhansk, it appears that nothing is happening. In Crimea too, all is as calm as a graveyard.

'Protesters' kits' have gone on sale on the Internet. One of the ads reads: *For sale, complete equipment for protesters. Includes everything required by a person preparing to defend his interests and opinions during the cold season. The kit contains a half-litre Thermos flask, a cooler bag, an umbrella, a floor mat, a waterproof poncho, a sleeping bag, a portable phone charger, a water canteen, a small gas camping stove, food rations for three days, four thermochemical hot-water bottles, and a protester's guide with summaries of relevant articles of law in the event of a conflict with police. Total price: about 1,000 hryvnas.*

Recently, an instruction manual for drivers has become very popular: *How to Behave with Transport Police Officers*. It also contains many reminders of the laws and regulations that policemen routinely break when arresting drivers on the road.

Sinister weather today. Not a single ray of sunlight the whole day. Sometimes rain, sometimes sleet. In conditions

such as these, there is nothing like a sauna to perk you up. Perhaps I will have that pleasure tomorrow, if all goes as planned.

Wednesday 27 November

It's freezing. Yesterday, I finally put winter tyres on my car. I bought a meat pie from a nearby bakery run by Uzbeks and I went to see my mother in hospital. I stayed in her room for half an hour. She showed me photographs of Murka, her cat, who's in the house with my father. She had forgotten that I was the one who went to their house especially to photograph Murka, whom she misses so much. Back at the apartment, I made pumpkin soup and meat for dinner.

Putin is waiting for Ukraine to collapse. Yanukovych says he won't turn the country away from the path leading to the European dream, and at the same time he will refurbish secondary roads. Out of the blue, he declared that these minor roads are more important for Ukrainians than major roads. He probably means that their refurbishment is more important than closer ties to Europe. In principle, this is logical: if we take the wrong road, we will never reach Europe. We will break down on the way.

From the hospital ward of the prison where she is being held, Yulia Tymoshenko called for all the parties to unite in the struggle against Yanukovych. But the Maidanistas, meanwhile, are continuing to ban politicians and their flags. In Lviv, protesting students chased the Svoboda Party deputy Yuriy Mikhalchishin off the stage at a rally, after he invited them to remember the 1918 Battle of Kruty - when a detachment of Ukrainian students fought a division of the Red Army - and to march boldly to their deaths in the name of Ukrainian ideals. Once he understood that the students did not want to hear him, he declared that these protests