

Peace Talks After Maidan Revolution For Dignity

Three activists from Maidan meeting three members of disbanded special police unit " Berkut" to talk about their experiences at Maidan (the square of Independence), the consequences, and a way forward in cooperation. 11th may, 2014, Ukraine.



The situation: in the period 30th November 2013 to 20th February 2014 activists and riot police Berkut had several clashes and fights. The events culminated 18th-20th February before Yanukovich finally fled from office as president. During this time over 110 activists and 16 policemen were killed.

The response: on initiative of Carl Plesner and Olena Hantsyak-Kaskiv, former activists and members of Berkut were invited for a meeting aiming at supporting mutual understanding, dialogue and reconciliation. During the months following the revolution Carl and Olena did the initial groundwork to prepare this meeting.

The perspective: Carl and Olena works from a belief that when people in violent conflict meet each others and receive support to see and listen to each others, then something important happens: they start to develop mutual understanding and empathy.

And no violence can grow from mutual empathic connection, but only compassion and will to cooperate.

From left: Carl Plesner, Volodymyr Biloshkursky, Olena Hantsyak-Kaskiv, Bohdana Babych, Yanek Falkevych, Elena Chereshnivska, Boris Yeghiazaryan and Slava (Slava wish to be anonymous in this document).

In the text below you can read their own thoughts, experiences and conclusions about the meeting:

Volodymyr Biloshkursky | 34 years old | Berkut officer

Before the meeting with the Maidan activists I felt uncertain whether they would understand and apprehend what I had seen. But I was ready to talk and I understood that they were not enemies. During our communication there was no feeling of aggression. Moreover, I even noticed that they not merely wanted, they were striving and trying to hear us. They also needed help and we were ready to help them. We were heard. We found a common denominator.

Perhaps in some cases we do not agree with each other, our views can differ on some issues, but we are on the same road. One could feel a shift toward a shared vision of Ukraine, in relation to the authorities, and we can act together now.

Bohdana Babych | 34 years old | political psychologist, co-founder SpilnoTV | wounded at Maidan

I have a lot of personal grudge against Berkut policemen. My eleven colleagues from SpilnoTV and I were wounded at Hrushevskoho street, and Berkut burned down our studio in the dome together with all the equipment.

However, this meeting allowed me to see the complete picture and my attitude towards Berkut changed a lot. I realized that I had had a rather one-sided understanding of the processes which took place on the other side of the barricades. Back then, I tried to take comments of Berkut officers, but they were stubbornly silent.

From psychologist Elena I learned that Berkut did not have a press secretary and there was no one to communicate with reporters. The lack of information created a distorted view which, combined with the emotional replicas of wounded journalists, provoked us in a very short period to create an image of Berkut as monsters who ought to be destroyed.

An aggression breeds another aggression. Emotions turn off your mind and we have a confrontation.

In order to speak justice, we must understand the different sides of the process. For that, we need to communicate with each other.

I am very grateful to Carl for this opportunity. We can not change the past, but we can model our future. And I think this meeting will help us to understand each other, to reconcile the parties and work together for the development of our country.



Yanek Falkevych | 40 years old electrician, volunteer journalist for SpilnoTV | wounded at Maidan

The meeting was very important for me as I met particular people: Slava, Volodymyr and Elena. They are unique and they are my brothers and sisters in Christ, with their particular characters, facial expressions, smile and anger, with their different emotions, aspirations,

mentality, values, and they are not blurred images of mythical Berkut police wearing masks.

In a dialogue one could see their hearts, their endless and eternal peace, founded by the Father God and their limitations inherent to a sinful human nature. When seeing a particular person one can feel specific emotions toward her and to love her in a special way with a brotherly love, given by the Holy Spirit.

Elena Chereshnivska | 25 years old | psychologist for Berkut

There was some worries and tension prior to the meeting. I was thinking how communication would go on and what we would say. The first thing that removed the fears was that Bohdana and I pulled toward the piece of paper with the word "Trust" on it and Slava and Boris reached for the word "cooperation". It was an eye opening moment.

The meeting planned to last for 1.5-2 hours lasted 5 hours. And we did not finish with it. We started to talk and agreed on common steps for the future.

Overall, we talked for 8 hours. So long! We had been keeping silence with each other for a long time.

I thank Carl Plesner for this experience and opportunity.



Slava | 23 years old | Berkut sergeant

It was precious that I was heard and that I could say what disturbed me and that our interlocutors understood it. I wanted to support the Maidan representatives in recognizing some of their errors.

I was struck by the fact that they offered further assistance to our wounded guys. I was pleasantly surprised! Thank you for this experience.

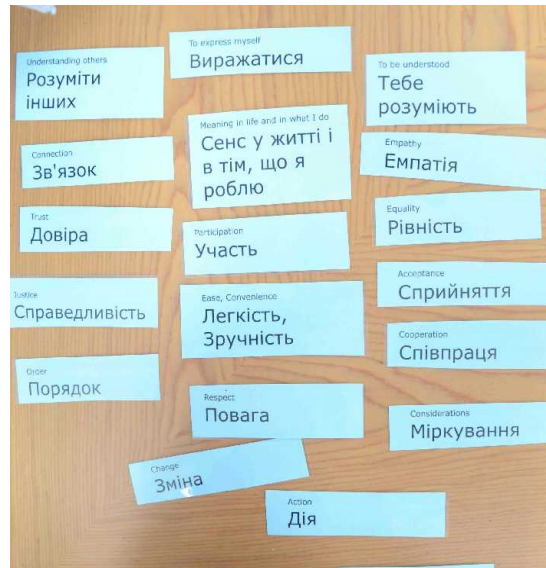
Boris Yeghiazaryan | 57 years old | artist and activist | wounded at Maidan

It was a very important meeting. We, three persons from Maidan, and three people from Berkut met. I was surprised that Slava and Volodymyr did not feel free citizens of a free Ukraine. Volodymyr was convinced that he defended the order in the state of Ukraine. Slava was looking for understanding, why he was treated that unhumane way by activists and what we together have to do next.

My conclusion after talking to three Berkut representatives is that the authorities used them to restore order, while they were denied the full truth. All three of them do not see that they were not just a part of the state system, they were a part of the regime. They do not fully realize that the regime used them. They fairly feel injustice toward them in that situation, but this injustice is most likely perceived by them as injustice done to them by the Maidan activists.

They no longer have this big stimulus which we call Patriotism. Thus, as a result, they are patriots of their team, they are ready to protect each other paying with their lives (it is a kind of corporate patriotism). This all is due to the fact that they suffered a big injustice from the previous authorities.

My impression from all this is that all three of them is a person with sense of dignity, they are professionals capable of



The participants reported these values being met by this meeting: Understanding others, to express myself, to be understood, connection, meaning in life, empathy, trust, participation, equality, justice, ease, acceptance, order, respect, consideration, change, action and love

helping their country and serve their society.

It was a meeting of three people with other three people. We shock hands, one by one, all of us.

But what about other thousands and thousands of people?

In my opinion this is a serious problem, not only for each of these personalities whom I see as very dignified people after talking to them. It is a serious psychological problem of our society and our country. And it should be solved by our society embedded in the state, the society that won at the Maidan.

My conclusion is that we have to expand and deepen the process of understanding. Every person is very precious and it should be among the priority tasks for our country to nurture respect for a person, his dignity and to consolidate the society on this basis.

P.S. I believe that Carl and Olena should continue this important work and new people should be invited to take part in such meetings, even those more radical and those who have more pain.

If you wish to support the continuation of this work you are invited to contact Olena or Carl:

Carl Plesner | restorative justice mediator and certified trainer in Nonviolent Communication | from Denmark | carlssav@yahoo.dk | Carl at LinkedIn: [Click here.](#)

Olena Hantsyak-Kaskiv | management and translation | MBA | olehant@gmail.com | Olena at LinkedIn: [Click here.](#)