

# The CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR

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By Sabra Ayres, Contributor

## In Ukraine's political deadlock, rumors fly fast and furious

According to word on the street, antigovernment protesters are gay US contractors, communists are stealing statues of Lenin, and Russian stormtroopers are about to deploy.

*У політичному тупику України чутки літають швидше і лютіше  
За вуличними чутками, антиурядові протестувальники – оплачені США геї,  
комуністи крадуть статуї Леніна, а російські штурмовики готові  
втрутися.*

*Висвітлювати мінливі громадські заворушення в Україні ніколи не було легким. Ускладнює справу тут, на вулицях Києва, ще й всюдисущі чутки, що можуть запалити обурення в секунду, перш ніж будуть перевірені, пише журналістка. Вони варіюються від безглуздих - таких, як "Люди на Майдані всі геї і щодня отримують плату в 200 доларів в з боку Сполучених Штатів" - до тривожних – "За межами Києва чекають автобуси російського спецназу переодягнених в форму українських офіцерів, щоб очистити Майдан за наказом Путіна".*

[www.csmonitor.com/World/Europe/2014/0207/In-Ukraine-s-political-deadlock-rumors-fly-fast-and-furious](http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Europe/2014/0207/In-Ukraine-s-political-deadlock-rumors-fly-fast-and-furious)



*Men dressed as cartoon characters play table tennis while waiting for paid photographs with tourists, in Kiev, Ukraine. As Ukraine's political deadlock continues, Kiev's streets are full of rumors about both sides of the standoff – and who is pulling their strings.*

*Gleb Garanich/Reuters*

*In Pictures The return of Ukraine's 'Orange Revolution'?*

*Kiev, Ukraine*

Reporting on a fast-moving civil unrest like the one here in Ukraine is never easy. There are many moving parts, which sometimes are at a standstill and sometimes advance at breakneck speed.

Complicating the matter here on the streets of Kiev, where antigovernment demonstrations are now in their third month, are the ever-present rumors that can fuel outrage in seconds before they can be verified.

They range from the ludicrous – such as “The people on the Maidan [Kiev's occupied Independence Square] are all gay and paid \$200 a day to be there by the United States” – to the worrying – “There are busloads of Russian special agents dressed in Ukrainian police officer uniforms just outside of Kiev, waiting to clear the Maidan at [Russian President Vladimir] Putin’s orders.”

My personal favorite this week: “Yulia Tymoshenko is not really in jail. She’s in Europe but has a studio set up that looks like a jail, where she has photographers take her photo.” Ms. Tymoshenko, a political rival of President Viktor Yanukovich and former prime minister, has been in jail for more than two years on charges of abuse of power and corruption.

And this one: “Communists are themselves stealing the Lenin statues to save them from being destroyed by the Maidan protestors.”

To be sure, the violence that has occurred here is no rumor. So far, at least four protestors have been killed and there are daily, verified reports of beatings of demonstrators. Just who is doing the attacking is where the speculation starts.

Earlier this week, Dmytro Bulatov, a protester being treated at a Lithuanian hospital, said that he had been abducted, beaten, and had part of his ear cut off. He blamed thugs “with a Russian accent” who beat him and demanded to know if the US was behind the protests.

And therein lies one of the biggest rumor themes here, both during these protests and the ones I witnessed during the 2004 Orange Revolution: The Russians are coming.

As a foreign correspondent covering the chaos, I try my best to verify such rumors. The trouble is, there is no way to answer many of them, particularly the accusations about Russian operatives milling about, waiting to pounce.

As helpful as Twitter can be to a journalist as a tip sheet, it can also be a huge distraction. Every five minutes, there’s a new rumor that comes across my feed, and suddenly, I find myself Googling the source, wasting precious time that could be spent tracking down real leads in the political crisis here.

That is not to disparage the game-changing role social media has played in this protest movement. This week, accusations that former Prime Minister Mykola Azarov had an Austrian passport were rolling on Twitter feeds on Tuesday morning. By the afternoon, the Austrian Embassy in Kiev was responding to questions about the alleged passport. Azarov himself later denied on his Facebook page that he had ever even requested a European passport.

The most frustrating rumors in Ukraine usually involved the word *provokatsiya*, or provocation. Everything, it seems, is a provocation.

On Thursday, when explosives went off in the protestor-occupied Trade Union building on the Maidan, wounding two protestors, some government supporters told me it was probably a *provokatsiya* designed by the antigovernment side to make it look like it had been planted by those supporting President Viktor Yanukovich. The *provokatsiya* was intended to incite those on the Maidan to take radical action against the regime.

Confusing? Yes, indeed.

Every once in a while, the media feeds the rumor mill too. This week, *Kommersant* newspaper’s Ukrainian edition ran an interview with Sergei Glaziev, advisor to Russian President Vladimir Putin on Ukraine, quoting him as saying the US embassy in Kiev was training and arming protestors, and funding them at the cost of \$20 million a week.

In Kiev on Friday, US Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland dismissed the allegations with a chuckle, calling them “complete fantasy.”

“Mr. Glaziev would be an excellent science fiction writer,” she said in the press conference.

On the other hand, Ms. Nuland was still setting the record straight on her own recent social media scandal, which featured her in a candid telephone conversation with US Ambassador to Ukraine Geoffrey Pyatt, using an expletive. The leaked conversation, which was posted on YouTube and allegedly recorded by Russian security services, was tweeted by a Kremlin insider.

At least for this rumor, we got confirmation, if not entirely direct: “I’m not going to comment on a private diplomatic conversation, but it’s impressive tradecraft. The audio was extremely clear,” she said.

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