

The Journey Out Of Ukraine

By Edge of Humanity Magazine (<https://edgeofhumanity.com/author/eoh2014/>), May 11, 2022

Protest meetings



Documentary Photographer Aydin Cetinbostanoğlu (<http://www.cetinbostanoglu.com/index.html>) is the Edge of Humanity Magazine contributor of this documentary photography. From the project “Is it hard to leave or stay?” Victoria’s Story (<http://www.cetinbostanoglu.com/victoria.html>). To see Aydin’s body of work, [click on any image](#).

“If not my pregnant friend, If not my husband, I would stay in Ukraine for sure.” – Victoria

It is difficult to understand what it means to leave the place where you live and set off without knowing how to reach a new country, and to step into a new life in another country without experiencing it. But your mind is on what you leave behind. Your family, loved ones and country. This drama experienced by millions of Ukrainians in today’s Europe is in front of everyone. After the Russian attack, many Ukrainian citizens fled to neighboring countries to avoid death. Some of them reached Turkey. Those who came to Istanbul organized themselves and gathered in Beyoglu every day at 15:00 and started their protest demonstrations. They are trying to make their voices heard from Istanbul, during the one-hour leave from the police. They collect aid and send it to their countries. For about two months, I watched their actions and made connections, and listened to their stories. I visited some of their homes. One of the stories that impressed me is Victoria’s story. Since her five-month pregnant friend cannot get health care in Kyiv, she and her husband run away to avoid dying. They left Kyiv first by evacuation train. Evacuation trains have only one purpose. To take the passengers to a safe place. It’s not clear where it is. There is a danger of being bombed by the Russians on the way. There are hundreds of people who lost their lives on the trains that could not reach their destination. We met and talked with Victoria at the cafe across from the protest area. Later, when I visited their home, I also interviewed her husband Sasha and her pregnant friend Anna, and completed the family’s story. Since Sasha is a Russian citizen, she did not want his face to appear in the photos. I also followed a different path.

Let’s hear their stories.



(<http://www.cetinbostanoglu.com/victoria.html>)

During the interview with Victoria



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Visiting them in their home (From left Anna, Victoria's mom Nelly, Victoria and her husband Sasha. Sasha didn't want to show his face, because he is Russian. May be dangerous at future in Russia.



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Victoria and her mom Nelly in the kitchen

Victoria – “My name is Victoria. I am 36 y.o. and came here on 13 of March. Sometimes I feel like a very, very long period passed by. Sometimes I think that only two days. Now we count days, like 31 days of the war, I don’t know which day, which day of the week. After nearly three weeks in Kyiv, we decided to leave after the railway station in Kyiv was tried to be bombed. We were living near the railway station and we decided that we should go because we started to be afraid that the railway station will be bombed, and we would not have the opportunity to leave Kyiv. First, we went to Kamyianets-Podolski and Chernivtsi on the Moldovan border on the western side of Ukraine. We slept in the church. Yes, we slept in a gym at schools, in a gym on the floor. Ukrainian volunteers helped us stay in very good conditions at night, helped us with hot food and we had our own beds. And then we decided that we should go. Because it was a problem to find a flat to stay in this region, the western region of Ukraine. And we decided to try to go to Romania. First in Suceava, then with helping us volunteers we went to Bucharest and then we went to Constanza. We never thought that we will be in Romania, but life is very interesting. Because of our documents, we are three of us and we decided that we should go to a Neutral country like Turkey. The closest city was Istanbul. Three of us, it’s me, my husband Sasha my friend Anna. She is pregnant in the fifth month now. That’s why we decided to leave Kyiv because she needs medical support for pregnancy and in Kyiv, it was now difficult to find. And my husband is a citizen of Russia. He is living in Ukraine with me for six years. He has permanent registration in Ukraine. But his Russian passport for him, was very uncomfortable, not because he was afraid that someone will kill him. Because he was very depressed and we decided that we should leave. And Istanbul is a place where three of us don’t have problems staying for three months. So now we are here. And after this, I started to find some volunteer programs for Ukraine in Turkey. First I found a telegram channel like Ukrainians in Istanbul and start to write them. What could I do? I don’t work, I have a lot of free time and I want to do something to support my country they advise me about these everyday protests, information, and some volunteer center where they collect food, and money. They need some help for our people in Ukraine, for the army. And I’ve started to do this every day. My road here takes two hours, and after 2 hours back. So, almost the whole day. But in the evening when I come back home, I write a lot of letters to people in Europe, and the USA. Japan, for example, or in Chinese. Telling about the war in Ukraine. But anyway. I’m trying to spend all my days doing something useful, not doing nothing. Also, now three or five days ago, my mom came from Ukraine also. Because my father went to the army and she was in her house alone. So we decided to bring here. Thanks to volunteers. My husband Sasha, now is the only person who earns money for us. It’s for me, for my pregnant friend Anna, and for my mother. All these three ladies are now on his shoulders. Thank God he didn’t lose his job. My grandmother and grandfather are from the Soviet Union and for these eight years, they were watching only Russian TV because they don’t know the Ukrainian language. They are in Ukraine now and because of this propaganda, they are fighting with us under the bombs. They’re telling us that it’s Ukraine bombing ourselves because Russia told these. Could you imagine they’re sitting under the bombs, their families dying and they are telling us that you are doing it by yourself?. The power of Russian propaganda is so huge there. From TV it was eight years preparation of for this war. So people even wait for this. In Russia, 70% of people support this war. Yes, and my fear is that Ukraine is only beginning, that If they will take Ukraine and they then will go further.”



(<http://www.cetinbostanoglu.com/victoria.html>)

Sasha – “Unfortunately, the position of Russia on the part of its leadership is not open to negotiations aimed at a peaceful settlement. They change their agenda every time and distort the negotiation process through their media in order to discredit the negotiation process itself. The surprising fact about the negotiations is that the center of decision-making in Russia is the president and absolutely all decisions are taken by him, sometimes without consulting the negotiating team. As a consequence, the negotiations get bogged down. Russia lives in the past and cannot give up its imperial ambitions to expand its territories and influence over it. The huge social gulf between the country’s leaders and citizens, the corruption, the lack of reforms, and finally, the irremovability of power and its vertical, have led to the disastrous consequences that we are now witnessing. I pray that this terrible war will end. Unfortunately, it will not happen for a very long time. Why did we decide to just leave our city and leave our country? We had two very good reasons. First, our friend is a pregnant woman. And once we realized that in case we needed medical support, and medical advice, we would not be able to get it because of the critical situation in the city due to military conditions. The Russians are bombing from the air, including with heavy artillery. We made the decision that we had to move and leave the capital. The second reason was my citizenship, because I’m a resident of Russia. And, unfortunately, at the beginning of the war, I couldn’t go to the territorial defense, or to volunteer organizations, all because of my passport. I really hope that I along with my family, will return to Ukraine.”



(<http://www.cetinbostanoglu.com/victoria.html>)

Before the protest, Anna styles Victoria’s hair into a traditional Ukrainian bride.



(<http://www.cetinbostanoglu.com/victoria.html>)

Anna – “My name is Anna. I’m 37 years old. Actually, I was born in the East of Ukraine, but for almost 11 years I’ve been living in Kyiv. We were escaping with friends. There were a lot of people at the railway station, on the train to West Ukraine either. We were barely seated on the train, heard explosions. That was a big stress, you didn’t even know if you were able to succeed with escaping, as we had fears that the train would be shelled. At the midnight we appeared in Kamenets-Podilskiy, that time was a curfew. Thank God there were volunteers and they picked us to stay up in a place of worship. We were fed, provided places to sleep (we were sleeping on the floor on the mattresses), and had even breakfast and the bus to Chernivtsi from where we were able to cross the border with Romania. Crossing the border took almost 4 hours in the cold, there was snowing as well, don’t even want to recognize how frozen we were. The Romanians welcomed us with food and someplace to sleep. We are very grateful, I will always remember all volunteers who helped us while our “journey”. Then from Suceava, we went to Bucharest, then to Constanta. From Constanta, we flew to Istanbul. I entered school in 1991, when Ukraine started to be like a sovereign country. It was the very first Ukrainian class, where all lessons were in Ukrainian. At that time parents didn’t really want to give their children Ukrainian classes because they were not sure if they were doing the right choice. You know, East Ukraine is close to Russia and many of us speak Russian but it was never a problem to understand both languages. Anyway, that time was very important for the country, that time changes were going to come. I was raised and taught that my country was sovereign and free with its great history. Generations after me entered schools without even knowing anything about the Soviet Union, they barely can understand the hate from a terroristic country that is telling “I am a big brother, bend your knees and I will force you to live like before in the union”. There will never be like before. We are free

people with our own history and ideas, and we are going in our direction, we are not slaves! For centuries, the Russians wanted to kill our culture, there were repressions, persecutions, and neglect, but we will stand like our ancestors and will never bend our knees.”



(<http://www.cetinbostanoglu.com/victoria.html>)

Memorial event for the dead in Ukraine



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See also:

Stories of the Mankind (<http://www.cetinbostanoglu.com/index.html>)

By Aydin Cetinbostanoğlu

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St. Stephen 'The Iron Church' (<https://edgeofhumanity.com/2021/12/29/st-stephen-the-iron-church/>)

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Village Life | Zagrazhden, Bulgaria (<https://edgeofhumanity.com/2021/04/12/village-life-zagrazhden-bulgaria/>)

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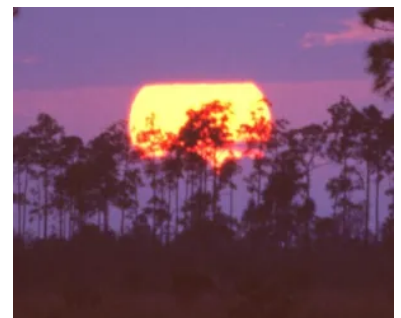


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