

Speech by Tanya Mazur, director of Amnesty International Ukraine

European Parliament, Committee for Human Rights (DROI)

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Since the beginning of the Euromaydan protest on 21 November 2013, Amnesty International has documented numerous cases of human rights abuses, including violations of the right to peaceful assembly, repeated excessive use of force by law enforcement officers, harassment of those who dared to complain, torture, abductions, unfair trials, and finally shooting at unarmed protesters.

To put this in context, allow me tell you a story; the story of 55 year old Iryna Rabchenyuk

On 1 December, Iryna with her husband and son were amongst the many peaceful protesters at Maydan. She told us how as she and her family moved through the surrounding streets, the air began to fill with thick smoke, shielding the onslaught of the numerous armed riot police. One officer in protective clothing struck a clearly unarmed Iryna in the face with his baton. A blow so severe that it caused facial fractures. These included a complex fracture of her nose, the skull, damage to her right eye, and concussion. Iryna Rabchenyuk currently has no sight in her right eye. It remains unclear whether she will ever regain sight in that eye.

Let me also tell you the story of Vladyslav Tsilytskiy, a 23 year-old computer programmer from Kyiv.

On 20 January during clashes at Grushevskiy street, Vladyslav, was detained by a riot police officer at around 9 pm. He was among a group of protesters at the top of the colonnade above the entrance to the Dynamo football stadium. Some of the group in fact had been throwing Molotov cocktails at the riot police. But, according to his lawyer, Vladyslav was not amongst them. Vladyslav was however beaten at the top of the 13 metre high colonnade, and then dragged to the police vehicles. Vladyslav told us that he was dragged by his own scarf wound tightly around his neck, and then by also his lip, cutting and filling his mouth with blood. Once detained, police officers sprayed him with pepper gas, including inside his trousers. Vladyslav was taken to hospital around 1 am on 21 January. Medical reports which were provided by his lawyer confirm that he suffered skull and facial fractures including damage to his eye socket, concussion, and severe bruising including around his neck.

These are just two of many victim testimonies we at Amnesty International have heard during the last three months. Thousands of people were injured during the protests. To date, at least 116 people, including 17 police officers have died.

And all of these victims and their families are demanding and deserve justice.

We should also remember that hundreds of thousands joined the EuroMaydan protest *after* the crackdown of the protest on the 30 November. They had the courage, and risked everything to stay there for three months. They stood up and called to end the regime, and to end police impunity. Theirs was a call for justice.

These people are still hoping that the new government will answer to their questions, will respect their human rights, and will make justice possible at home, in Ukraine.

Internal and external challenges remain – we are aware of this. But despite these, Ukraine has the opportunity to turn a chapter in its history. As such, impartial and independent investigation of all human rights violations that occurred ahead of, during and following the EuroMaydan protest should be one of the highest priorities of the new Ukrainian authorities. Any police officer or official found guilty of abuses or who condoned actions that led to human rights violations must face the necessary criminal and disciplinary proceedings.

We realise that there are lots of concerns and issues around the lack of capacity and expertise in support of such investigations. To this end, last week we had a meeting with representatives from the General Prosecutor's office, and we were told that any assistance with such investigation would be appreciated.

This is a key area where the EU can help. How? By supporting the Council of Europe initiative to assist and investigate all allegations of human rights violations committed during the past four months; and also by providing its own experts in this field. We are urging the EU, in close co-operation with other international and regional organisations, to support and facilitate independent investigations into all allegations of violence, such as arbitrary and abusive use of force, including killings.

But in order to truly move forwards, investigating human rights violations and prosecuting those found guilty will not be enough.

The recent shocking events in Ukraine and horrific footage broadcast around the world from Kyiv showed protestors being stripped, humiliated and beaten by law enforcement officers. This brought attention to the grave issue of torture and ill – treatment and the long standing problem of police impunity in Ukraine.

This cannot be ignored any more. These events have clearly demonstrated the fundamental need for far-reaching, complex and systematic reforms of law enforcement bodies. Amnesty International believes that these reforms need to begin by creating an independent police complaints mechanism to investigate police abuses. This is the only viable, long-term solution to address and end the use of torture and impunity.

Also, successive rulings by the European Court of Human Rights have criticized investigation procedures into allegations of torture and other ill-treatment in Ukraine. And they recommend the establishment of a new system for investigating human rights violations by Ukraine.

Now is the time to introduce such a system and demonstrate strong political will to bring police to account. This should increase the dramatically low level of trust in law enforcement bodies in Ukraine. The new Ukrainian authorities must not repeat the mistakes of the past, such as the failure to address the problem of police impunity. The EU also has a crucial role to play through its relations with Ukraine and should insist on structural changes for all Ukrainian people. The EU must ensure a human rights-based approach in all of its dealings with Ukraine.

I would urge you, Members of the European Parliament, to take also this message to other European decision makers. Human rights cannot be compromised, especially now, after the struggle of so many Ukrainians

Thank you.