

Internal Affairs Ministry claims tearing down tent city required for public safety

Ukraine

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Analyst: "The crackdown only heightens the tensions between the current government and the pro-Western opposition, which will only intensify as elections draw nearer. The conflict has the potential to destabilize the situation in the country further."

KYIV, Mar 5, 2018 - Hundreds of armed police officers were dispatched the early morning of March 3 to tear down the tent city that had been pitched in October on the street in front of Ukraine's parliament building, Concorde Capital informed its clients in an online advisory today. The protest included as many as 100 tents at its peak, but was reduced to a few dozens on March 2 after parliament approved the first reading of the bill creating the Anti-Corruption Court, thereby satisfying one of its demands. Interior Minister Arsen Avakov decided to take advantage of the gesture to make the street open to traffic after being closed for months. In the process of the removal, protestors clashed with police, resulting in the detentions of at least 100 activists, 11 of whom were hospitalized and most of the rest released later that day. Police said they found grenades and Molotov cocktails in the tents. Tires were burned during the clashes as a form of protest. Avakov took responsibility for the decision, while the Kyiv city government denied any involvement. Six pro-Western parties condemned the crackdown as a crime and vowed to prosecute those who ordered it. Speaking from his exile abroad, protest leader Mikheil Saakashvili, who spent numerous nights in the tent city, called the crackdown "the final elimination of the right to a civil position and any protest activity." Concorde analyst Zenon Zawada added: "The Interior Ministry insisted that its goal was to make the street in front of parliament clear for traffic and didn't target those tents in the adjacent park. It's reasonable for the government to want to clear a major thoroughfare, especially after it was blocked for more than four months. At the same time, the protest emerged out of desperation regarding the government's stalling of reforms, a concern that has even been shared by top Western officials. The crackdown only heightens the tensions between the current government and the pro-Western opposition, which will only intensify as elections draw nearer. The conflict has the potential to destabilize the situation in the country further.

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