

# Three dead in clash between Ukrainian regime and right-wing protesters

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At least three protesters died yesterday when police moved in with tear gas and clubs to clear hundreds of demonstrators lodged behind barricades close to Kiev's Independence Square.

One of the victims was a 30-year-old man who is alleged to have been shot four times by riot police. Medical staff also reported two other fatalities.

Following reports of the deaths, Ukrainian Prime Minister Mykola Azarov denounced the demonstrators as terrorists and provocateurs whose "criminal" actions would be punished.

One group particularly active in the street fighting around Independence Square is the ultra-right nationalist Right Sector, a coalition of right-wing organizations and supporters of local soccer clubs.

In a statement on Monday, the group claimed credit for the violent confrontations with police on Sunday and pledged to continue its activities until President Yanukovich resigned.

The police offensive against the demonstrators followed the mass demonstrations last weekend protesting against new laws imposing harsh restrictions on freedom of assembly, with jail terms of up to 15 years for "participation in mass riots."

On Wednesday morning, the police repeatedly told protesters through loudspeakers that their actions were "a grave violation of the law" and asked them to disperse. Mobile phone users in the protest zone received a threatening SMS saying: "Dear subscriber, you are registered as a participant in an unsanctioned rally."

The deaths are the first fatalities since protests began against the Ukrainian government just over two months ago. They came just one day after a warning by Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov that the intervention by European governments had aggravated tensions in

Ukraine, and that the situation was "spinning out of control."

Lavrov said, "We have information that much of this is being stimulated from abroad," adding that "members of several European governments rushed to the Maidan without any invitation and took part in anti-government demonstrations." Such behaviour, Lavrov said, was "simply indecent."

Lavrov was referring to the interventions in December by EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton and then-German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle who openly expressed their solidarity with demonstrators. EU incursions on behalf of the opposition were supported by Washington. US Senator John McCain addressed a mass rally in Independence Square and dined with leaders of the opposition parties, including Oleh Tyahnybok, the leader of the ultra-right and anti-Semitic Svoboda party.

Washington and Berlin have mobilized the most right-wing, reactionary forces in their campaign to overthrow Yanukovich and replace him with a regime who would break the country's longstanding ties with Russia and implement austerity through the EU.

At the start of December, Svoboda supporters tore down a statue of Vladimir Lenin in the city centre to the chants of "Hang the Commie!"

Svoboda organizes regular commemorations to the notorious Ukrainian collaborator with the Nazis, Stepan Bandera. The party is a member of the so-called Alliance of European National Movements, which includes the British National Party, National Demokraterna of Sweden, the Front National in France, Fiamma Tricolore in Italy, the Belgian National Front, and Jobbik in Hungary.

Drawing its forces from the same backward social layers as Right Sector, Svoboda has played a leading

role in the Kiev protests since they began in November. Party leader Tyahnybok regularly begins his demagogic speeches to the crowds with his rallying cry, “Glory to Ukraine!”

The same nationalist chant has been taken up at the mass rallies by the leaders of the two other main opposition parties, the Ukrainian Democratic Alliance led by boxer Vitali Klitschko and the nationalist Fatherland Party of Arseniy Yatsenyuk, who is allied to jailed oligarch and former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoschenko.

In an interview with the *Guardian* on Wednesday, Klitschko vehemently defended his collaboration with the neo-fascist Tyahnybok, declaring: “In order to land a punch, you need to bring your fingers together into a fist. We need to join all of our forces together. That is the only way that we can win.”

Klitschko’s UDA is sponsored by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation of the conservative Christian Democratic Union in Germany and supported by the conservative faction in the European parliament.

In addition to the support of the EU bureaucracy, the White House and the German government, the Ukrainian opposition has also received fulsome support from intellectuals from all over the globe. Their praise for the Ukrainian ultra-right forces speaks volumes on the corrupt and reactionary character of the social tendencies that dominate intellectual and university life today.

At the start of January, academics and publicists including Andrew Arato, Zygmunt Bauman, Seyla Benhabib, Richard J Bernstein, Claus Offe and Slavoj Žižek issued an appeal declaring: “The Ukrainian Maidan represents Europe at its best—what many thinkers in the past and present assume to be fundamental European values.”

They called “on our governments and international organisations to support Ukrainians in their efforts to put an end to a corrupt and brutal regime.”



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