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EU must press Ukraine at summit to stop police abuses

Endemic abuse by Ukraine's police force needs to be strongly challenged during the EU-Ukraine summit on 19 December, Amnesty International said today.

Monday's planned summit in Kyiv has been a source of diplomatic tension as the EU continues to criticise Ukraine's politically motivated prosecution of former Prime Minister Yuliya Tymoshenko.

"The EU has to keep human rights on the agenda, and pressure Ukraine to stop its epidemic of police criminality," said Heather McGill, Amnesty International's researcher on Ukraine.

"Ukraine's police continue to torture and extort money from victims with effective impunity. It is not uncommon for the victims to find that they are prosecuted in reprisal for their complaints about torture."

In a recent report, Amnesty International highlighted the Ukrainian police force's widespread criminal misconduct, and its frequent use of torture, beatings, and fabricated charges to boost crime solving statistics.

No evidence of a crime: Paying the price for police impunity in Ukraine, revealed how police are rarely punished for their crimes because of a system that relies on colleagues in the local prosecutor's office to investigate. The Ukrainian Ombudsperson's office stated that they received 5,000 complaints about police torture and other ill-treatment last year, but only 10 police officers were prosecuted.

One fresh case is that of lawyer Dmytro Karpenko, who faces trial on 29 December on charges of resisting arrest and assaulting police officers, after being detained, and beaten by police on 17 August in the town of Cherkasy. He could face up to 6 years in prison.

Police officers detained him while he was trying to see his client, and beat him in a police station corridor for about two hours. He spent more than a week in hospital with concussion, kidney damage and heavy bruising.

When Karpenko complained about his treatment, the local prosecutor's office charged him with assaulting the police officers who beat him. The Cherkasy Appeals Court threw out the charges after viewing CCTV evidence of the police officers aggressively seizing Karpenko, forcing him to the floor and dragging him into a police van.

However, the assault case against the lawyer was re-opened on 28 November in violation of Ukrainian law, by the prosecutor's office in Kirovograd, a town 100km away from Cherkasy.

"The Ukrainian authorities must stop the abuse of its citizens by the very people tasked to protect them. The best way to do this would be to establish an independent body for investigating crimes by police," said Heather McGill.