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Don't beat protesters EU countries warned

People demonstrating peacefully against austerity measures introduced in European Union (EU) countries have been beaten, kicked, shot at and wounded with rubber bullets and sprayed with tear gas as excessive use of force by police goes uninvestigated and unpunished.

Through personal stories from Greece, Spain and Romania, Amnesty International's briefing [*Policing demonstrations in the European Union*](#) exposes the excessive use of force against protesters and journalists, arbitrary detention and the obstruction of access to medical assistance and calls on governments to prevent and investigate these human rights violations.

"Yes, the police are responsible for the protection of public safety, law and order. However, they also have the responsibility to ensure that everyone within their territories can enjoy the right to peaceful assembly," said Fotis Filippou, Amnesty International's Regional Campaign Coordinator for Europe and Central Asia.

"Governments must spell out and reiterate that police officers may use force only when strictly necessary. They must introduce strict guidelines on the use of potentially lethal riot-control devices such as pepper spray and tear gas, water cannon and rubber bullets."

"As more demonstrations take place, governments must make it clear to their law enforcement forces that no abuses will be tolerated, that all complaints into police brutality will be properly investigated and those responsible held to account."

Yiannis Kafkas in May 2011 in Athens, Angela Jaramillo in August 2011 in Madrid, Andrei Ristache and his father, Augustin, in January 2012 in Bucharest were posing no apparent threat to the police or the public when they were severely beaten by police officers as a result of which they needed medical treatment.

Photographer Manolis Kypreos suffered total loss of hearing in both ears after police threw a stun grenade at him while he was covering a demonstration in Athens in June 2011. In August 2012 police used tear gas and fired rubber bullets and other impact rounds at peaceful protestors opposing gold mining operations in northern Greece.

Paloma, a journalist covering the miners' demonstration in Madrid in July 2012 was hit by a rubber bullet as police were trying to disperse the largely peaceful demonstration. The previous year she was beaten by a police officer with a baton during a demonstration against the Pope's visit in Madrid. She filed a complaint but the case was closed as the perpetrator could not be identified.

"The police – often the most visible arm of the state – have to walk a fine line between protecting the right to freedom of assembly and maintaining public order. They can do this successfully if they respect existing international standards and good practice guidelines when policing demonstrations," said Filippou.

Policing demonstrations:

DOs:

- Facilitate peaceful public assemblies avoiding the use of force and protect them against violent individuals or smaller groups.
- De-escalate tense or violent situations and communicate with organizers and demonstrators before and during the operation.
- Minimize damage, preserve and respect life and protect uninvolved people.
- Use police powers – arrests and detention - only for lawful aims.
- Use force only to the extent necessary, and only when non- or less-violent means have failed or are unlikely to achieve the legitimate objective.
- Consider carefully the policing and security equipment used for dispersing an assembly in-line with the principles of necessity, proportionality and lawfulness, as equipment such as rubber bullets, tear gas and stun grenades – often described as “less lethal” – can lead to serious injury and even death.
- Provide without delay medical assistance to anyone injured.
- Be identifiable especially during public order operations.
- Review any use of force during a public assembly, and, where appropriate, investigate and impose disciplinary or criminal sanctions.

DON'Ts:

- Firearms or shotguns should never be used for the purpose of dispersing a crowd.
- Batons and similar impact equipment should not be used on people who are unthreatening and non-aggressive.
- Chemical irritants, such as tear gas, should not be used where people are confined in an area and not in a way that can cause lasting harm.