

Ukraine Opposition Fears Provocation to Justify Crackdown

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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A pro-European Union demonstrator at an opposition rally in Kiev presenting a riot police officer with a cut-out paper heart on Sunday. Thousands turned out for the rally, but not everyone was as kind as this protester: one group toppled a statue of Vladimir Lenin and attacked it with hammers. **Efrem Lukatsky**

A Ukrainian opposition party said late Saturday that it feared the authorities may deploy provocateurs in order to precipitate violence at a major ongoing anti-government protest rally in the capital and justify a robust crackdown.

The warning comes as opposition forces have called for one million people to come onto Kiev's streets on Sunday in a show of defiance, aimed at forcing the government to yield to demands to resign. Conditions for defusing the current crisis outlined by a coalition of opposition politicians Saturday include the formation of a technical government.

Batkivshchyna (Fatherland), led in parliament by Arseniy Yatsenyuk, said in a statement that it believes about 1,000 people have been enlisted to provoke clashes on Independence Square,

which is currently cordoned off and occupied by pro-EU demonstrators.

"We warn the government that we know about these plans. We appeal to people on Independence Square to be vigilant," the statement said. "We urge law enforcement officers to prevent clashes and not be complicit in acts of provocation."

The protest movement appeared to be losing momentum until Nov. 30, when police aggressively cleared the square, sparking outrage and prompting hundreds of thousands to rally on the spot the following day. The square has been occupied and closed off to authorities ever since.

It is unclear to what extent the opposition parties most actively engaged in the protest — Batkivshchyna, the Udar (Punch) party of heavyweight boxer Vitali Klitschko, and Svoboda (Freedom) — have control over this wave of discontent, but they have served as its public face.

Thousands are occupying the square on a round-the-clock basis, huddling around wood-fueled fires in metal barrels to keep warm as temperatures hover around freezing point. Speeches to the assembled have alternated with musical acts, creating a festive mood among the determinedly peaceful crowd.

Police presence has been virtually negligible around the area, but security is tight near the presidential administration and the parliament, which have both also been targeted by rallies.

On Independence Square, volunteers clad in protective gear stand sentry at gaps in the cordon to check for suspicious elements among the many thousands constantly pouring in and out of the area. Dozens of tents, many of them equipped with heating stoves, have been installed as sleeping quarters and feeding points.

Last Sunday, groups of masked men faced off in violent clashes with riot police as they sought to occupy the presidential administration building in a confrontation that authorities seized upon as evidence of the protest's potential for violence. Opposition forces decried the violence and accused those responsible of mounting a provocation to smear the broader pro-European integration movement.

The rallies in Kiev and in other cities across Ukraine erupted late last month in reaction to the government's decision to back away from a deal to sign an association agreement and free-trade deals with the European Union.

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