

Riot Police in Lviv Beg People's Forgiveness on Bended Knee

By [Matthew Bodner](#)

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Ukrainian riot police in Lviv addressing members of the local community. (YouTube / Timothy Aleksandronets)

About 100 riot police officers in Lviv in western Ukraine got down on their knees on stage on Monday and asked the city's residents to forgive them for their role in the attempts to suppress recent anti-government protests.

The riot police, or Berkut, promised to take the side of the people in future and assured the crowd that they weren't involved in the violence in Kiev.

Many of the protesters were not satisfied, however, shouting "shame!" and throwing small objects at them, UNIAN reported Tuesday.

A priest who was also on stage appealed for calm and activists helped to hold the crowd back.

There is no shortage of ill-feeling between the riot police and members of the street protest movement in Ukraine.

Protesters have accused the Berkut of using cruel tactics to clamp down on Euromaidan protesters, including the use live rounds and the humiliation of detainees.

In one such instance, riot police in Kiev were filmed making an example of protester Mikhailo Gavrilyuk, forcing him to pose for photographs while standing naked in the cold.

For its part, the Berkut said that its officers were only issued gas canisters, stun grenades and rubber bullets and had acted within the law.

They also said that a number of their officers were killed in the riots as a result of knife wounds and gunshots.

On Thursday, during one of the most bloody days of fighting, former Interior Minister Vitali Zakharchenko said that he had authorized law enforcement officials to use live rounds after they had come under fire.

With a new Ukrainian government set to be formed this week, it is not yet clear what the future holds for the Berkut, though many officers fear severe reprimands.

Settling in Russia could become an option.

Sergei Mironov, leader of the A Just Russia Party, on Tuesday proposed employing Berkut officers in Russia's Interior Ministry and giving them Russian citizenship after six months of service, RIA Novosti reported.

Mironov also backed a suggestion put forward earlier by Liberal Democratic Party leader Vladimir Zhirinovsky, who said that the process of becoming a Russian citizenship should be made easier for all Ukrainians, not just the riot police.

Furthermore, the Governor of the Russian region of Astrakhan, Alexander Zhilkin, has said that he is ready to let riot police and their families live there.

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