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Ukraine Authorities Unfazed by Toppling of Lenin Statue in Kharkiv

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People surround a statue of Soviet state founder Vladimir Lenin (C), which was toppled by protesters during a rally organized by pro-Ukraine supporters in the center of the eastern Ukrainian town of Kharkiv September 28, 2014.

Police in eastern Ukraine's Kharkiv have dropped an investigation against protesters who toppled a statue of Bolshevik revolutionary Vladimir Lenin in the center of the city, after the region's governor scrapped the sculpture's status as a historical monument.

As protesters in the predominantly Russian-speaking city in eastern Ukraine gathered for a rally on Sunday night around the Lenin statue, apparently intending to tear it down, the region's Governor Ihor Baluta published an order ruling the sculpture was no longer considered a historical monument and was slated for demolition, Russian and Ukrainian media reported.

Ukraine's Interior Minister Arsen Avakov said in a Facebook post he had ordered his troops to ensure the demonstrators, but not necessarily the Communist-era statue under attack, stayed in one piece.

"Lenin? Let him fall. As long as people don't get hurt," Avakov said.

The statue crashed down in front of a cheering crowd after demonstrators labored for about four hours sawing at its feet and pulling at it with metal cables, according to media reports and videos posted online.

Police did not interfere with the protest, but initially opened an investigation into "hooliganism," only to dismiss the case shortly afterward, Russian and Ukrainian media reported.

Avakov warned his forces were ready to reign in "provocateurs" who might seek to use the incident to stoke unrest in the region — possibly by appealing to Soviet sympathizers.

"Don't even try," Avakov said in his post.

Baluta, the governor, said he would have preferred the monument to have been demolished more securely and professionally, but added he was glad to see the toppling did not cause any injuries or damage to the city's infrastructure, Interfax reported.

"We have checked communications, everything is in order, there are no cracks in the subways," Baluta was quoted as saying. "The fall of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin has caused no damage."

A number of Lenin statues around Ukraine were toppled at the hands of demonstrators during protests against the country's previous, Moscow-backed administration, and a few more succumbed following an outpouring of Ukrainian outrage at Russia's annexation of Crimea earlier this year.

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