

Don't beat protesters EU countries warned

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People demonstrating peacefully in European Union (EU) countries have been beaten, kicked, shot at and wounded with rubber bullets and sprayed with tear gas yet 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* [1] 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 against austerity measures introduced in EU countries, 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.

Journalist 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 reportedly fired rubber bullets and other impact rounds at peaceful protestors opposing gold mining operations in northern Greece.

On 21 October 2012 riot police reportedly chased and beat protesters of all ages gathered peacefully outside the area where gold mining operations are planned.

According to testimonies received, police threw chemical irritants inside protesters' cars as they tried to flee. A 63-year old woman told Amnesty International how a riot police officer dragged her out of her car, made her kneel and trampled on her left ankle with his boot causing a nerve injury in her leg.

Paloma, a journalist covering a miners' demonstration in Madrid in July 2012 was hit by a rubber bullet as police were trying to disperse the largely peaceful protest.

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.

On 9 October 2012, in a letter to Spain's Minister of Interior, Jorge Fernández, Amnesty International raised its concerns in relation with the use of force and riot-control devices by police including on 25 September when unidentified police beat peaceful demonstrators with batons, fired rubber bullets at them, and threatened journalists covering the events.

"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.

Amnesty International

P.S.

* 25 October 2012, 11:01AM

<http://www.amnesty.org.au/news/comments/30086/>

Footnotes

[1] <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/EUR01/022/2012/en/1e06df7d-6878-40e0-8e82-d07605e9a6e9/eur010222012en.pdf>