
CLASHES OVER BLOCKADE OF COAL FROM EASTERN UKRAINE

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Seven people have been arrested during a protest to support a blockade of coal from Russian-backed rebels in the east. Ukraine's leaders say the obstruction, which started in late January, could lead to more power cuts.

Clashes broke out between Ukrainian ultra-nationalist demonstrators and police in central Kyiv on Sunday evening, a correspondent with the Agence France-Presse (AFP) news agency said.

Security forces had escorted the protesters as they marched from the Ukrainian capital's Independence or Maidan square to the offices of the president.

"Shame on the corrupt government!," "The enemy is within!" many shouted, some hurling firecrackers before the clashes.

"Poroshenko benefits from this trade, that's why he is against the blockade," said 51-year-old protester Yevgen.

Several arrests

According to news agency AFP, at least seven protesters were detained during the demonstration by more than 1,000 people, many wearing camouflage and balaclavas.

Among those arrested was Mykola Kokhanivskyi, the head of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists.

Before the violence began, he told the crowd: "We once again warn the authorities who trade coal with the occupied territories, making cash from blood."

Sunday's protests started peacefully but later turned violent, leading to seven arrests.

Sunday's violence erupted over support for a rail blockade by nationalists who have blocked coal shipments from parts of eastern Ukraine held by Russian-backed separatists.

The blockade, which began in late January, has led to power shortages in government-held parts of the country, leading to officials declaring a state of emergency in the energy sector.

Power cut warning

Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko says a blockade is the last thing the cash-strapped former Soviet state needs at this time, warning that Kyiv and other cities could be left without heating.

Poroshenko has warned that up to 300,000 jobs could be lost as factories grind to a halt without power.

Ukrainian forces have been fighting separatist rebels in the east since April 2014, a conflict that had killed more than 9,800 people, and left Kyiv without full control of its vital industrial belt.

On Monday, a new ceasefire in eastern Ukraine is expected to come into effect, after a deal was brokered at the Munich Security Conference over the weekend.

The volatile region has seen a spike in violence in recent weeks despite an earlier truce agreement.

Kaynak/Source: