

# Protest at Ukrainian's 'violent' arrest

STEPAN KHMARA, the radical Ukrainian pro-independence leader, was arrested in brutal circumstances late on Thursday night in a move that seems certain to provoke opposition. The bloody nature of the arrest will surely worry President Mikhail Gorbachev, leave him wondering whether Ukraine's opposition will pull the carpet from under his feet, and persuade the already ambivalent Ukraine to say no to a new union treaty.

"The violence was shocking. It was totally unnecessary and will cause problems for Mr Gorbachev," said Peter Marutsenko, a Ukrainian journalist standing next to Mr Khmara when special Omon riot police — responsible for the pro-Kremlin violence in the Baltic in January — broke into his hotel room and dragged him away.

Hours after the arrest, the stairways were

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From Susan Viets  
in Kiev

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still littered with broken glass. Eyewitnesses reported that the riot squad smashed bottles on the railings to arm themselves with jagged weapons. A home-made sign saying "Khmara for President" leaned against the lobby television set, surrounded by a pool of blood. More was splattered on both stairways leading from Mr Khmara's room.

The demolished and splintered wooden front door was stashed in a room near by. Riot police leaned against the inner door, barricading 20 people inside into the early hours yesterday. The lavatory was smashed and no drinking water was available.

"We knew something was up when military vans and a fire truck arrived. The fire-

men stretched a safety net out under the window. I guess they were expecting someone to be thrown off the balcony," said Mr Marutsenko. "They called Khmara out but didn't give him time to respond. They then threw tear gas under the door," he added.

People trapped inside used sheets soaked in water as masks against the gas. Oles Serhienko, Mr Khmara's colleague in the opposition Ukrainian Republican Party, was badly beaten and reported to have been rammed head-first through a car window. Nine people were detained and four needed hospital treatment, including Mr Serhienko, although he was discharged yesterday morning.

Mr Khmara's re-arrest is a tribute to his force as an opposition leader. He has been targeted by Communist Party hardliners as the republic's primary political irritant. He

was the first Ukrainian MP to support the demands of students on hunger strike, including the rejection of a new union treaty.

Mr Khmara was first arrested nine months ago following a scuffle with a plainclothes policeman, an incident which opposition members called a KGB set-up. Stripped of his parliamentary immunity in an illegal vote presided over by the parliamentary chairman, Leonid Kravchuk, Mr Khmara was held in Kiev's Lukyanivka prison for six months. His trial, in a tiny, sweltering courtroom now dubbed "the gas chamber", began in May but has been repeatedly recessed on technicalities.

On Wednesday, Mr Khmara told the judge: "I refuse to enter this hall until this farce by the Communist Party ceases." A warrant was issued. Mr Khmara is now back in prison. The trial resumes on Monday.

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