

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/ukraine-summary-of-attacks-on-media-11-09-2014,46265.html>

Europe/Ex-USSR - Ukraine

News feed

Summary of attacks on media

28 January 2015

Besides its [regular press releases](#), Reporters Without Borders is maintaining a Ukraine news feed in order to summarize the violations of freedom of information constantly taking place in Ukraine.

26.01.2015 - Heavy-handed raid on Tatar TV station in Crimea

Armed and masked members of the Russian interior ministry's OMON special forces and government investigators [raided](#) the independent TV station *ATR* in the Crimean capital of Simferopol on 26 January, interrupting its programming for much of the day while they carried out a search. Run by Crimea's Tatar ethnic minority, *ATR* was able to [resume broadcasting](#) in the evening, after they had left.

The investigators seized *ATR*'s servers and [disconnected](#) Internet access throughout the building to prevent live coverage of the raid. The station's staff had to spend the entire day in the building without being able to work. The Investigative Committee (Russia's FBI equivalent) [said](#) the aim of the raid was to find video recordings of [clashes](#) between pro- and anti-annexation demonstrators on 26 February 2014 in which two demonstrators were killed.

Around 100 people [gathered](#) outside *ATR* headquarters in the afternoon in protest against this heavy-handed attempt to intimidate the station's staff. Reporters Without Borders condemns this new attack on one of Crimea's last remaining independent news outlets. The Tatar community's representatives continue to support the Ukrainian government in Kiev and its media [have been singled out for harassment](#) since Russia's annexation of Crimea.

05.01.2015 - Luhansk rebels free website editor after five months

The self-proclaimed Luhansk People's Republic (LPR) [freed Serhiy Sakadinsky](#), the editor of the *Politika 2.0* news website on 5 January, after holding him for five months. His wife, **Mariya Havak**, said it is not yet known why he was released.

Members of the LPR's Batman battalion arrested Sakadinsky and his wife near Hostra Mohyla, a village in the Luhansk region, on 2 August 2014 on the grounds that they had "suspicious" documents and photos of the centre of Luhansk that Sakadinsky had taken as part of his work. They were taken away and interrogated, and Sakadinsky was so badly beaten that one of his hands was broken. When released on 1 October, Havak was able to see her husband while he was being held in the basement of the University of Luhansk's lobby, which the Batman battalion was using at its headquarters.

The interior ministry subsequently took charge of Sakadinsky and, on 30 December, the PRL prosecutor's office [began](#) investigating allegations that members of the battalion tortured many of the hostages they had held in cellars from July to October 2014.

This was not Sakadinsky's first run-in with PRL rebels. Gunmen kidnapped him for 24 hours after his Luhansk office was ransacked on 6 July 2014.

03.01.2015 - Masked men attack TV station's headquarters in Kiev

Around 20 masked men [attacked](#) *Inter* TV's Kiev headquarters on 3 January, breaking windows and

daubing its walls with graffiti. Several people were arrested on hooliganism charges but were quickly released.

The attack came three days after National Security and Defence Council secretary Aleksandr Turshinov called for *Inter* TV to be stripped of its licence for retransmitting a Russian TV station's New Year's Eve programme. After being criticized, the station cancelled several other Russian entertainment programmes that would traditionally have been broadcast during the holiday.

National Broadcasting Council chief Yuri Artemenko [said](#) that *Inter* TV's broadcasting of the Russian TV programme would be examined by the council on 15 January, but that only a court would withdraw *Inter* TV's licence.

1.1.2015 - TV station threatened with loss of licence

National Security and Defence Council secretary Aleksandr Turshinov [called on](#) 1 January for *Inter* TV to be stripped of its broadcasting licence for siding with Russia in its information war with Ukraine. The call came after *Inter* TV retransmitted a Russian TV station's New Year programme that included performers who support Russia's policies towards Ukraine.

In a [reaction on Facebook](#), information minister Yuriy Stets undertook to [present a bill](#) that would force the media to respect Ukraine's list of personae non gratae. *Inter* TV [insisted](#) that it had complied with Ukraine's laws and [regarded](#) Turshinov's comments as unprecedented pressure on the media.

Reporters Without Borders reminds the information minister of his duty to respect media pluralism and asks him to refrain from any act of censorship that would jeopardize freedom of information in Ukraine.

27.12.2014 - Journalist freed after being held in Luhansk for 135 days

Roman Cheremski, a journalist with the [Ukraynski Prostir](#) news website and member of the Union of Ukrainian Youth, was released on 27 December and was reunited with his family in Kharkiv after reportedly being held for 135 days by a unit under the command of the self-proclaimed People's Republic of Luhansk (PRL).

*He was arrested on 15 August with two 112 Ukraine TV journalists, **Hanna Ivanenko** and **Nazar Zotsenko**, while they were on their way to interview separatists. They were detained at a checkpoint near Rovenki, where the PRL's military command is based. The two 112 Ukraine TV journalists were freed on 3 September (see 5 September entry) but Cheremski was held for 49 days in Rovenki and then transferred to Luhansk. He said he was interrogated for five days and was beaten, and that he experienced psychologically difficult moments.*

*Reporters Without Borders is relieved to learn of Cheremski's release but points out that **Serhiy Sakadynski**, the editor of the Luhansk-based news website Politika 2.0, has been denied his freedom since 2 August (see 21 November entry). His wife and fellow journalist **Mariya Havak** said he is no longer a hostage but "under the control of the PRL interior ministry," which is investigating his illegal detention by a rebel battalion. Havak has not been told where he is currently held or how long this investigation will last. Reporters Without Borders reiterates its call for his immediate and unconditional release.*

18.09.2014 - FSB warns Tatar newspaper editor in Crimea

Shevket Kaybullayev, the editor of the Tatar newspaper [Avdet](#), [was summoned](#) to the headquarters of the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) in the Crimean capital of Simferopol on 17 September and was warned that he should put an end to his "activities that create conditions encouraging the committing of crimes."

Avdet supports the Mejlis, the body which represents Crimea's Tatar population and which has been critical of Russia's annexation of Crimea. According to the FSB, the newspaper published a report on 23 June that "contained veiled incitement to boycott elections," thereby trying to obstruct the working of Crimea's institutions and constituting an "incitement to extremism."

Masked men previously stormed into Avdet's offices, located in the Mejlis building, on 15 September. This was followed by an FSB search of the newspaper the next day. All of the building's occupants – Avdet, the Mejlis and the Kryma Foundation (an NGO) – were notified on 17 September of a court

order giving them 24 hours to vacate the building or face arrest and seizure of their belongings.

16.09.2014 - Journalist missing in Luhansk

Aleksandr Belokobylski, a journalist with the local newspaper [Realnaya Gazeta](#) and the news website [Obozrevatel](#), went missing in Luhansk on 13 September, his editor, Andrei Dikhtiarenko, [reported](#) three days later. Belokobylski, who recently moved to an area controlled by government forces, went to Luhansk to take food, money and medicine to family members but never arrived at their home. He had also planned to cover the 13 September "City Day" festivities in Luhansk.

Belokobylski's wife received an SMS from him on the evening of 16 September in which he said he was alive but could not leave Luhansk for the time being. Reporters Without Borders urges anyone potentially holding him to make this known and to release him without delay.

15.09.2014 - Photographer held for seven hours at Ukrainian checkpoint

It was reported on 15 September that freelance photographer **Maksim Voytenko** [was arrested](#) at a Ukrainian checkpoint in Mariupol, in the Donetsk region, on 9 September because he had no accreditation and was suspected of spying. He was released after being questioned for seven hours.

15.09.2014 - TV reporter held since 30 August

Ehor Vorobyev, an Espresso TV reporter who was captured by rebel forces after the siege of Ilovaisk, in the Donetsk region, on 30 August, is still being held, his wife, Olena Solodovnikova, has confirmed. She said her last telephone contact with him was a week ago. Vorobyev was captured at the same time as two other Espresso TV journalists, **Rostyslav Shaposhnikov** and **Taras Chkan**, but was separated from them after saying he headed the crew. His two colleagues were released on 2 September (see the 06/09 entry).

12.09.2014 - Rebels hold young female blogger in Donetsk

Rebels with the People's Republic of Donetsk [arrested](#) 22-year-old blogger **Valeria Olifiruk** at her home in the Donetsk suburb of Khartsyzk on 1 September and took her to PRD military headquarters three days later. Her parents told the media on 12 September that the rebels accused her of posting photos of the recent destruction in Khartsyzk on social networks and expressing pro-Kiev views. She is suspected of spying on behalf of the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU).

11.09.2014 - 35 Russian journalists banned from visiting Ukraine

The head of the National Council for TV and Radio, Yuri Artemenko, announced on 11 September that 35 Russian journalists and media executives who support the Kremlin have been formally banned from entering Ukraine. Their names were not released but they were taken from a list of [49 journalists](#) that the council released at the end of August. This list included **Dmitry Kiselev**, the editor in chief of the state news agency Rossiya Sevodnya, reporter **Vladimir Solobev** and the actor, director and screenwriter **Ivan Okhlobystin**.

Issued by the Security Service of Ukraine, prohibitions on entering Ukraine are effective for three to five years. As well as these symbolic bans, many Russian journalists have been denied entry at the border in recent months.

09.09.2014 - 15 Russian TV stations formally banned

On 9 September, the National Council for TV and Radio and a Kiev administrative court issued a list of 15 Russian TV stations whose retransmission is forbidden in Ukraine. With the exception of Istorija, retransmission of all of these stations had already been suspended pending the outcome of judicial investigations into various allegations such as inciting hatred, threatening national security and supporting separatism. No decision has so far been taken on the substance of any of these allegations.

11.09.2014 - Raid on Ukraine's leading Russian language daily

Members of the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) raided the Kiev headquarters of Ukraine's leading

Russian-language daily Vesti on 11 September and confiscated all of its servers, downing its website, Vesti.ua. Editor **Igor Guzhva** said the newspaper was being investigated under article 110.2 of the penal code on suspicion of "attacking Ukraine's territorial integrity." The premises of Mega-Poligraf, the printing company that handles part of Vesti's print run, was also raided.

Reporters Without Borders condemns these raids as disproportionate and calls on the authorities to return Vesti's servers so that it can resume normal activity and restore its website.

08.09.2014 - Luhansk rebels holding at least four journalists

The Ukrainian National Union of Journalists [reported](#) on 8 September that two journalists, **Roman Cheremski** and **Valery Makeyev**, are still being held by a unit of the self-proclaimed People's Republic of Luhansk near Rovenki. Roman Cheremski and Valery Makeyev, who are from Kharkiv, were captured on 17 August while on their way to cover the fighting. Two other journalists arrested at the same time, **Hanna Ivanenko** and **Nazar Zotsenko**, were released on 3 September. The union quoted witnesses as saying Cheremski and Makeyev are all right, but are accused of spying.

Reporters Without Borders calls for their immediate release. Luhansk-based separatists are currently holding at least two other journalists – **Yuri Leliavski**, arrested near Luhansk on 24 July, and **Yevgen Timofeyev**, arrested in Stakhanov on 31 July.

08.09.2014 – Blogger flees Crimea after heavy-handed raid

Investigators with Crimea's anti-extremism department [raided](#) blogger and activist **Elizaveta Bogutskaya's** home in Simferopol at dawn on 8 September, confiscating computers, USB flash drives, notebooks and other equipment. They said they were looking for drugs, firearms and extremist literature but she was not asked about drugs or firearms during the six hours that she was interrogated. She was mainly questioned about her blogging and political views.

Known for being critical of Crimea's annexation by the Russian Federation, Bogutskaya works for Krym.Realii, the local service of Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty. She fled Crimea after being released.

06.09.2014 - Journalists trapped in Ilovaisk are safe, one still detained

Rostyslav Shaposhnikov and **Taras Chkan**, two of the three Ukrainian journalists working for Espresso TV who were trapped in Ilovaisk, in the Donetsk region, in late August (see 28/08 entry), [are back in Kiev](#). They were covering the fighting when the town was surrounded by rebels who, according to the Ukrainian government, were backed by regular Russian units. The ensuing battle was the deadliest so far in this war.

After being captured on 30 August, they were handed over to the Red Cross along with many Ukrainian prisoners of war, and were released on 2 September but the third Espresso TV journalist, **Ehor Vorobyev**, was separated from his two colleagues after saying he headed the crew and is apparently still being held.

05.09.2014 – Rebels free two Ukrainian journalists

Hanna Ivanenko, a reporter for the national TV channel 112 Ukraina, and her cameraman, **Nazar Zotsenko**, [were freed](#) on 3 September after being held for two and a half weeks by a unit of the self-proclaimed People's Republic of Luhansk. They were arrested at a checkpoint near Rovenki, in the Luhansk region, while on their way to cover the fighting. Their TV station did not report their abduction in order not to jeopardize negotiations for their release.

Held in a rebel barracks, they were freed as a result of mediation by the Russian TV station LifeNews. They said they were subjected to psychological pressure but not physically tortured. There is not as yet any word about **Roman Cheremski**, a journalist and Ukrainian Youth Union activist, who was arrested at the same time.

28.08.2014 - Six Ukrainian journalists trapped in combat zone

Ukrainian TV reporters **Rostyslav Shaposhnikov** and **Egor Vorobyev** and cameraman Taras Chkan are [trapped in a combat zone](#) after a grenade damaged their car on 24 August. Like the 39th

and 93rd battalions of the Ukrainian army, they are surrounded by rebel forces near Ilovaik, south of Donetsk, and are unable to leave the combat zone safely.

They had gone to eastern Ukraine to report for Espresso TV. Shaposhnikov, who also works for [Dorojny Kontrol](#), called his editors on 26 August and told them that he and his two colleagues were all right.

Two other Ukrainian journalists, who are covering the fighting for German TV broadcaster ARD, **Ivan Lyubish-Kirday** and **Georgi Tikhy**, [are also surrounded](#). So too is [Levy Bereg](#) correspondent **Max Levin**, who [has been](#) in Ilovaik for several days covering the Ukrainian army's operations. Levin recently reported that freelancer **Oleksander Gladelov** was [wounded](#) there on 21 August and was taken to Dnipropetrovsk, where his life was said to be not in danger.

26.08.2014 - Six journalists threatened in Russia after paratroopers buried

Two men [attacked the car](#) of Russian reporters **Ilya Vasyunin** of the independent news website [Russkaya Planeta](#) and **Vladimir Romensky** of the independent TV station [Dozhd](#) in the Russian village of Vybuty, near the northwestern city Pskov, on 26 August. The journalists investigated the burial of two Russian paratroopers suspected of having died fighting alongside the rebels in eastern Ukraine.

Romensky said their unidentified assailants knew they were journalists even if they did not know the names of their news media. The previous day, while visiting the parents of one of the deceased paratroopers, they were [threatened](#) by two men who told them to leave Pskov at once.

As the tyres of their car were slashed in the attack, Vasyunin and Romensky eventually left in the car of two other journalists who had also been threatened while investigating the burial – **Nina Petlyanova** of Novaya Gazeta and **Irina Tumakova** of Fontanka.ru.

When **Sergei Kovalchenko**, the editor-in-chief of the Telegraph news agency, and photographer **Sergei Zorin** meanwhile went to Pskov cemetery on 26 August and took photos of the graves of paratroopers secretly buried the previous day, they were [threatened](#) by two men, who erased the memory cards of their cameras. The two journalists filed a complaint.

26.08.2014 - Two Crimea-based journalists held for two days in Ukraine

Two journalists with the pro-Russian weekly Telegraph of Crimea, **Yevgenya Korolyova** and **Maxim Vasilenko**, were detained in Zaporozhye, in southeastern Ukraine, on the evening of 24 August as they were about to catch a bus back to Crimea. After their release two days later, [Korolyova said](#) they had been held by members of Right Sector, a Ukrainian ultra-nationalist group. After an initial denial, Right Sector confirmed this.

Korolyova and Vasilenko had gone to Donetsk on 24 August to cover a rebel parade in which Ukrainian army prisoners were displayed in a humiliating manner. The two journalists returned to Crimea after being freed. Vasilenko also works for the French news agency AFP and the Russian news agency RIA Novosti.

14.08.2014 - Ukraine regulator wants to ban 38 Russian TV journalists

The National Council for TV and Radio, Ukraine's broadcasting regulatory authority, has released a [list of 38 Russian journalists](#) that it wants banned from entering Ukraine.

The head of the council, Yuri Artemenko, said at a news conference on 14 August that the list has been passed to the interior and justice ministries.

Reporters Without Borders points out that each case should be the subject of impartial judicial proceedings, based on concrete facts and respecting defence rights.

The 38 journalists on the list are mostly the CEOs or editors in chief of Russian pro-government TV stations whose broadcasts are banned from retransmission in Ukraine. They include Pervy Kanal, Rossya 1, Rossya 24, Russia Today, VGTRK, NTV and Lifenews. "These persons must be personae non gratae," Artemenko said.

The turmoil in eastern Ukraine, which began in March and began degenerating into armed conflict at the start of the summer, has been accompanied by an intense information war between the various

parties involved, which have often suspended retransmission of TV signals and denied entry to certain journalists. The temptation to keep resorting to such measures continues to be strong.

A draft law that would have allowed the government to close any media and block any website without a court's permission was [approved](#) by the Ukrainian parliament on first reading on 12 August but, following an outcry from civil society and media defence groups, the offending provisions were [dropped on second reading](#) on 14 August.

11.08.2014 - Russian news agency photographer missing for past week

Reporters Without Borders is very concerned about **Andrei Stenin**, an experienced war photographer working for the past few months in eastern Ukraine for Rossiya Segodnya, a Russian news agency formed in 2013 from the merger of several state-owned news outlets. Stenin has been missing since 5 August, when Rossiya Segodnya [reported](#) his disappearance. Reporters Without Borders urges anyone holding him to make it known, and to release him at once.

A RIA Novosti source [said](#) on 8 August that the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) was holding him near the southwestern city of Zaporozhye but a local SBU spokesman [denied](#) this and the Ukrainian government has yet to respond to requests by Rossiya Segodnya and local NGOs such as IMI for information. Representatives of the self-proclaimed People's Republic of Donetsk said Stenin may have gone to Shakhtarsk, in the Donetsk region, where all communications are cut.

Russian presidential spokesman Dmitri Peskov [has said](#) the Russian authorities are pursuing the matter, while Rossiya Segodnya [has launched](#) an online campaign in support of Stenin, especially on Twitter.

11.08.2014 - Online information war intensifies

After censoring most Ukrainian TV stations in Crimea when it was annexed in March, the Russian authorities are now restricting access to Ukrainian news websites. Most Crimean Internet Service Providers [are blocking Glavnoe](#), [Cenzor.net.ua](#) and [Novy Region](#), it was reported on 11 August.

Meanwhile, the Ukrainian authorities, who already blocked the retransmission of several Russian TV news channels in Ukraine, are also threatening to censor the Internet. On 5 August, the UNIAN news agency published [a letter](#) that the SBU sent to the Ukraine Internet Association in late July asking it to block [around 60 websites and web resources](#) "promoting war, racial hatred or the overthrow of the constitutional order, or attacking territorial integrity."

They include not only separatist sites but also Ukrainian news sites, YouTube videos, blogs hosted on the LiveJournal platform and video games. Some are hosted in Ukraine, others abroad. The Ukraine Internet Association has not as yet taken any action, but it could eventually [ask](#) Internet Service Providers to block them.

Reporters Without Borders condemns Internet censorship and reminds the Ukrainian and Russian authorities that Frank La Rue, the UN special rapporteur on the right to freedom of opinion and expression, [has said](#) that any blocking or withdrawal of online content should be kept to the minimum and judicial permission should be obtained.

06.08.2014 - Rebels free TV cameramen after holding him for four days

The self-proclaimed People's Republic of Donetsk [released](#) NTN cameraman **Alexander Osadchy** on the evening of 6 August after holding him for four days in the basement of one of its buildings in Donetsk. His place of detention was not known until his release.

Suspecting him of being an "informer," anti-Kiev rebels [had kidnapped](#) Osadchy as he left his Donetsk home on 2 August. When they went back to his home on 4 August to get his phone charger, they told his wife not to worry, that he was fine and would be "back home within a week."

06.08.2014 - Three journalists freed after being held by Ukrainian soldiers for five days

Three journalists working for Ukrainian TV station 112 Ukraina – **Roman Gnatiuk, Sergei Belous** and **Sergei Boiko** – [were released](#) on 6 August, five days after being arrested by Ukrainian army soldiers near Amvrosiivka, a town in the Donetsk region.

Ukraina 112 [had voiced concern about Gnatiuk](#) on 1 August but had not mentioned the disappearance of its other two employees. It was the Serb weekly [Pecat](#), for which Belous also works, that sounded the alarm. A Kharkov native, Belous moved to Serbia a year ago but returned to cover the conflict in eastern Ukraine. Boiko is a freelancer from the Luhansk region. Ukraina 112's editor in chief had asked the three of them to do a report on the Malaysian Airline's crash.

They were arrested near Amvrosiivka while on their way to the crash site and [were taken](#) blindfolded to an unknown location where masked soldiers used violence to interrogate them. They were then taken to "anti-terrorist operations" headquarters near Mariupol and put in a cell. A few days later, after another interrogation, they were released in three different places in the countryside at night. Gnatiuk said he was made to lie face down on the ground, blindfolded with one of his own garments, and that his abductors fired two shots in the air before leaving. Belous [said](#) they took equipment and money from him.

For a long time it was unclear who had abducted them. Pecat said it knew that the Ukrainian National Guard had arrested Belous but the National Guard [denied](#) holding the three journalists on 5 August, as did "anti-terrorist operations" headquarters. The Ukrainian news agency UNN and the news website Espresso.tv meanwhile [reported](#) that they had been kidnapped by anti-Kiev rebels. It was Gnatiuk who finally said they had been held by Ukrainian army soldiers although he had been [unable to identify](#) their battalion. An investigation [has been launched](#) to identify the circumstances of their abduction and those responsible.

04.08.2014 - Crimea's last independent media censored

Around 20 court bailiffs and policemen [confiscated](#) all of the property of Chernomorka, an independent TV station based in the Crimean capital of Simferopol, on 1 August, and then police and "self-defence militias" began [blocking access](#) to its headquarters on 4 August, preventing its journalists from working.

Two other independent Crimean information sources have been affected: the Press and Information Centre and the [Centre for Journalistic Investigation](#), which rent their offices from Chernomorka. Their equipment has also been seized and their staff is also being denied access.

In a suit brought by the Autonomous Republic of Crimea's Broadcast Transmission Centre for payment of 1 million hryvnia (60,000 euros) in arrears, a court ordered the pre-emptive seizure of Chernomorka's assets before the first hearing in the case. If Chernomorka loses the case and cannot pay its debts, its seized assets worth 4 million hryvnia (240,000 euros) will be [auctioned off](#).

Reporters Without Borders condemns this politically-motivated and disproportionate decision, which is designed to silence the last critical media in Crimea. When Russia annexed the peninsula in March, Chernomorka's signal [was arbitrarily cut](#) and replaced by that of the Russian station Rossiya 24. In June, most cable TV operators dropped it from the channels they provide. Chernomorka filed a complaint with the Broadcast Transmission Centre in late June about the "illegal occupation" of the frequencies and transmitters it had been assigned, but so far no action has been taken.

01.08.2014 - Rebels holding three journalists in Luhansk region

Journalists **Yevgen Shlyakhtin** and **Yevgen Timofeyev** were [arrested](#) arbitrarily by separatists in Stakhanov, in the Luhansk region, on 31 July. Representatives of the self-proclaimed People's Republic of Luhansk (PRL) told Timofeyev's parents they were being held for "supporting the Kiev junta" and were being given several days of "reeducation" through work. The two journalists work for various Ukrainian media and had already been repeatedly threatened.

Shlyakhtin, who also works for the Stakhanov department of internal politics and information, was arrested at his workplace. He managed to send friends an SMS in which he said he was being taken to a local police building. Thereafter he could not be reached. A colleague who is a lawyer and who tried to defend him at the moment of his arrest was also taken away. Timofeyev, who works for local newspaper Futbolny Ohlyad, among other news outlets, was arrested at his home. His parents, who went to see the separatists that evening, said they saw him being forced to wash cars.

Yuri Lelyavski, a reporter for the Ukrainian TV station ZIK, [is still held arbitrarily](#) by the PRL in Luhansk. He was arrested at a rebel checkpoint on 24 July along with members of a group of priests of various religious denominations whose attempt to bring "God's word" to the war zone he was covering. He was taken to Perevalsk and from there on 30 July to Luhansk, where he is being held in the regional government's building. His family has yet to receive any additional information about

his state of health or the reason he is still being held. He was previously held [hostage](#) by rebels in Sloviansk from 25 April to 12 May.

Reporters Without Borders calls for the immediate release of these three journalists and all the other news providers currently detained in Ukraine.

01.08.2014 - Constant danger around MH17 crash site

The Malaysian Airlines flight MH17 crash site is very dangerous and hard to access for journalists and other observers. Fighting has intensified between the rebels, who control part of the site, and the Ukrainian army, which continues to advance into this strategic area. Anyone trying to approach the site has to [negotiate](#) control posts and mines, and may be exposed to mortar fire.

Nick Lazaredes, a journalist with Australian TV station SBS, [reported](#) that his car came under repeated fire on 1 August. Discouraged by the constant mortar shelling nearby and fellow journalists' stories of rebel threats, the SBS crew were trying to pull out when they came under very intense fire, without knowing if they were deliberately targeted or caught in crossfire. A shell exploded about 150 metres from an AFP vehicle the previous day.

Damian Ryan, a reporter for Australia's Channel 9, had a gun aimed at him on 1 August by a young rebel who had just been bombarded and thought Ryan's crew were Ukrainian soldiers. After realizing they were journalists trying to get to the Malaysian Airlines crash site, the rebel ordered them to leave.

Roman Gnatyuk, a journalist with the Ukrainian TV station 112 Ukraina, [went missing](#) while heading to the crash site to cover a visit by experts with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. When last in contact with his editors, he was leaving the village of Uspenka, in the Luhansk region, heading for Donetsk. Aleksei Dmitrashkivski, the spokesman of Kiev's "anti-terrorist" operations in the region, said Gnatyuk did not cross any Ukrainian checkpoint. Gnatyuk is one of the few Ukrainian journalists to be accredited with the self-proclaimed People's Republic of Donetsk. Reporters Without Borders urges anyone holding him to release him at once.

28.07.2014 - Polish journalist badly injured near Luhansk

Polish journalist **Bianka Zalewska**, a reporter for Ukraine's EspressoTV, was [badly wounded](#) while accompanying a column of Ukrainian soldiers in the Luhansk region on 27 July. She sustained a spinal column fracture and injuries to her lower back and collarbone when shots were fired at her vehicle, causing it to overturn.

After a quick examination in the nearest hospital, Zalewska was helicoptered to Kharkov, where she underwent an operation to her collarbone. At midday on 28 July, doctors described her condition as "[grave but stable](#)." The Polish ambassador to Ukraine said she would be transferred to Kiev for a more detailed examination.

27.07.2014 - Two journalists released, others arrested

Reporters Without Borders is very relieved by the release of **Anton Skiba**, a Ukrainian journalist who is a CNN fixer, and **Graham Phillips**, a British blogger who often works for Russia Today. Skiba was freed at around 4 p.m. on 26 July by the anti-Kiev rebels who [had been holding him](#) since the evening of 22 July. He said he was forced to make false statements on camera.

Phillips, who [disappeared](#) while covering fierce fighting at Donetsk airport on the evening of 22 July, was finally taken to the Polish border and expelled by the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) on the evening of 25 July. Until that moment, the Ukrainian authorities had denied holding him. Phillips was banned from reentering Ukraine for three years. He said he was threatened while held.

More journalists are being arrested as the fighting intensifies in eastern Ukraine. **Stepan Kravchenko**, a Russian reporter for the Bloomberg news agency, was about to return to Russia from Donetsk on 25 July when he [was arrested](#) and given a heavy-handed interrogation by Ukrainian soldiers with the Dniepr battalion. He was moved from one place to another and was finally escorted to the Russian border and released after Bloomberg interceded.

Jan Hunin, a Belgian journalist who reports for the Dutch newspaper De Volkskrant, was held at a rebel checkpoint near Donetsk for four hours on 27 July and then released. Reporters Without Borders condemns these arbitrary arrests and again calls on all parties to the conflict to respect the

work of journalists.

Reporters Without Borders is also very concerned about **Yuri Lelyavski**, a journalist with the Ukrainian TV station ZIK, who [was arrested](#) at a rebel checkpoint near Luhansk on 23 July. There has been no news of him since then. RWB calls for his immediate and unconditional release.

See [our 24 July press release](#) for more information about the abductions of Skiba, Phillips and Lelyavski.

21.07.2014 - Ukrainian journalist to spend 10 days in solitary in Russia

Yevgeny Agarkov, a Ukrainian reporter for "Spetskor," a programme broadcast by Ukrainian channel 2+2, was [arrested](#) by Russian immigration officials near Voronezh, in southwestern Russia, on 18 July for not being accredited with the Russian foreign ministry. Later the same day, an administrative court convicted him of "working illegally as a journalist" and [sentenced](#) him to a fine of 2,000 roubles (40 euros), expulsion from Russia and a five-year ban on reentering the country.

The court stipulated that his [expulsion](#) would take effect on 28 July, pending which he was to be detained. He was transferred to a detention centre 160 km from the city of Voronezh and was placed in solitary confinement.

"Agarkov's prolonged detention is disproportionate, especially as he is being held in an isolation cell," said Johann Bühr, the head of the Reporters Without Borders Eastern Europe and Central Asia desk. "This journalist is being treated like a criminal although all he did was contravene the administrative code. We urge the Russian authorities to free him and return him to Ukraine without delay."

Agarkov went to Voronezh to [cover](#) the case of Nadezhda Savchenko, a Ukrainian pilot who is being held there for alleged complicity in the deaths of Russian journalists **Igor Kornelyuk** and **Anton Voloshin**, who [were killed](#) by mortar fire in the Luhansk region (in eastern Ukraine) on 17 June.

20.07.2014 - Rebels arrest ten journalists outside Donetsk morgue

Around ten journalists were arrested by the security services of the self-proclaimed People's Republic of Donetsk (PRD) when they tried to enter the morgue in Donetsk on 19 and 20 July as part of their coverage of the downing of the Malaysia Airlines Boeing 777 on 17 July, in which 298 people died.

Those arrested outside the morgue on 20 July included [Kevin Bishop](#), a British reporter for the BBC, [Anna Nemtsova](#), a Russian reporter for The Daily Beast, **Simon Shuster**, a US reporter for Time Magazine, Italian journalist [Lucia Squeglia](#), and [two reporters](#) for the Swedish daily Dagens Nyheter, **Paul Hansen** and **Jan Lewenhagen**. They were all taken to the local headquarters of the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU), where they were questioned and then released a few hours later. A Russian TV crew with Russia Today that was arrested in similar circumstances on 19 July was held overnight before being released.

Nemtsova said the rebels posted outside the morgue had been given orders to arrest all journalists trying to go inside. When a Russia Today cameraman asked PRD Prime Minister Alexander Borodai at a news conference why he had spent a night in detention, Borodai responded with a joke: "You're not a real journalist if you haven't spent a night in the SBU."

17.07.2014 - Bomb hoaxes at two national TV stations

The Kiev police [received](#) an anonymous message on 17 July warning that a bomb had been left inside the premises of Inter, a national TV channel owned by [oligarch Dmitri Firtash](#). A search of Inter revealed nothing suspicious. The police are trying to identify the source of the anonymous call.

Earlier in the day, an anonymous message [reported](#) that a bomb had been left at 5 Kanal, a national TV station owned by President Petro Poroshenko. Its offices were evacuated and searched but no trace of explosives was found. It was the third false bomb alert at 5 Kanal this month. The previous ones were on [4](#) and [15](#) July. Each time 5 Kanal was forced to interrupt programming.

16.07.2014 - Rebels seize Luhansk news site's computer equipment

Serhiy Sakadynski, the editor of the Luhansk-based news website Politika 2.0, [revealed](#) on 16 July that anti-Kiev rebels removed all of its computer equipment, cameras and video cameras during

a raid on its offices on 10 July. The raid took place after they caught a Politika 2.0 reporter taking photos of Luhansk railway station, accused her of spying, and decided that Politika 2.0 was "gathering information about the rebels." They gave Sakadynski a beating during the raid and took him with them when they left, releasing him the next day after influential persons intervened. The equipment has not been returned.

11.07.2014 - Heavy toll on journalists in first half of 2014

The Institute of Mass Information (IMI), a Ukrainian NGO partnered with Reporters Without Borders, has released figures for media freedom violations during the first half of 2014. According to IMI's tally, six journalists were killed in connection with their work, 249 were injured or attacked, and at least 55 were taken hostage or detained arbitrarily. The toll was much higher than in 2013, when a total of 101 attacks on journalists were registered during the entire year, half of them in connection with the Maidan Square protests in November and December.

"Physical attacks against journalists and other media workers currently pose one of the main challenges for the media profession," said IMI director Oksana Romanyuk. "The authorities also face the challenge of investigating all these [attacks] and punishing those responsible. Ending impunity [...] and defending the public's right to information should be one of the main items on the new president's agenda."

[Read](#) the IMI report (in Ukrainian).

10.07.2014 - Luhansk TV channel suspends broadcasting

A Luhansk-based TV station called Luhansk Cable Television (LKT) has [suspended](#) broadcasting because of the ongoing fighting in the city. The station's CEO told employees on 10 July he could no longer guarantee their safety and was putting them all on leave until further notice. The wife of LKT's legal adviser, **Igor Zazimnik**, was [killed](#) by a stray bullet on the balcony of her apartment the same day. Two other local TV broadcasters, IRTA and LOT, have also had to suspend operations.

08.07.2014 - Ukrainian TV crew under mortar fire near Luhansk

Roman Bochkala, a reporter for the Ukrainian national TV channel Inter, and his cameraman, **Vasyl Menovshchikov**, [found themselves](#) under mortar fire near Metallist, a village ten kilometres outside Luhansk, on 8 July while covering operations by the Ukrainian army's 30th regiment.

Bochkala broke an arm and tore tendons while scrambling over a 5 or 6 metre embankment in search of shelter. After being treated in a field hospital, he was transferred by helicopter to a hospital in Kharkov. Two soldiers were killed during the mortar bombardment.

05.07.2014 - Masked men attack national daily in Kiev

Around 50 masked men [attacked](#) the Kiev headquarters of the Russian-language newspaper Vesti on 5 July, pelting it with stones and setting off teargas before dispersing quickly. Some of them injured a security guard while trying to enter the building. The stones they threw [broke](#) windows and damaged computers.

The attack was [claimed](#) by Oles Vakhni, an ultra-nationalist who served a six-year jail term on charges of armed robbery and violence. The police said they were treating it as a case of "vandalism." Vesti owner Igor Guzhva linked it to the demonstration that parliamentarian Igor Lutsenko staged outside the newspaper the week before with the declared aim of "ending the dissemination of anti-Ukrainian propaganda." Lutsenko said the protest would be "the last peaceful action" against Vesti.

04.07.2014 - Rebels take control of Luhansk regional state broadcaster

Armed rebels in combat fatigues representing the self-proclaimed People's Republic of Luhansk [stormed into](#) the headquarters of the Luhansk region's state radio and TV broadcaster on 4 July. After they had [taken control](#) of the premises and negotiated with the CEO, **Rodyon Miroshnik**, all the employees were allowed to leave. One of the rebels said the regional broadcaster's various channels were now "closed" and would remain so until they resumed "under a different format."

The previous week, local cable TV operators LKT and Triolan [dropped](#) most of the Ukrainian TV news channels from what they offer, replacing them with Russian news channels.

02.07.2014 - Two journalists held for two days in Luhansk

Ukrainian citizen TV station Hromadske's well-known reporter, **Anastasia Stanko**, and her cameraman, **Ilya Beskorovayny**, were [released](#) by representatives of the self-proclaimed People's Republic of Luhansk (PRL) on 2 July after being held for two days in Luhansk.

After trying for a long time to obtain PRL accreditation without success, they arrived in Luhansk on 30 June hoping to obtain permission on the spot to do a report there. They were put in touch with a security unit, which promised to protect them in return for financial compensation. But they were [arrested](#) by another unit, the NKVD, and were held in the basement of a downtown building. PRL Prime Minister Vasil Nikitin said he suspected them of spying for the Ukrainian army.

Their detention prompted a great deal of concern in both Ukraine and Russia. Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko [asked](#) the relevant authorities to do everything they could to obtain their release as quickly as possible. But it was thanks to the intercession of the heads of Russia's three leading pro-government broadcasters – Pervy Kanal, VGTRK and NTV – that the PRL finally decided to free them. Stanko [said](#) that, on the whole, they were treated properly aside from being threatened with decapitation.

01.07.2014 - Two Russian journalists injured in Luhansk region

Denis Kulaga, a staff reporter with Russia's REN-TV, and his cameraman, **Vadim Yudin**, were [treated for shock](#) in a Luhansk region hospital on 1 July after a mortar shell exploded close to them when they were about one kilometre from the Russian border, near the Izvarino border post.

27.06.2014 - Anti-Kiev netizen freed after being held for two days

The young netizen **Vlad Alexandrovich** was [released](#) in Zaporozhye on 27 June, two days after being kidnapped in the city of his birth, Mariupol (in the Donetsk region), where he has been working for Anna News and Southeast Front, two news agencies allied with the anti-Kiev rebels. He is said to have been the author of reports about the Ukrainian army intervention in Mariupol on 9 May. His abductors are thought to have been Ukrainian security officials.

26.06.2014 - Gunmen ransack local newspaper in Torez

Gunmen [stormed](#) into the offices of the local newspaper Pro Gorod, in Torez (in the eastern Donetsk region), on 26 June, threatening the journalists present and seizing computers, cameras and other equipment, as well as personal effects and passports. Before leaving, the gunmen warned the journalists of worse reprisals if they continued to distribute the newspaper and post news reports on its website.

Editor **Igor Abyzov**, who was absent during the raid, said the assailants were clearly familiar with the premises and knew who worked there, looking for some of them in person. He also said the assailants wore St. George ribbons, which the anti-Kiev forces often use to identify themselves.

This was not the first time that Pro Gorod has been targeted. Molotov Cocktails were used to [start a fire](#) at the newspaper on 18 April, and Abyzov was physically attacked by two unidentified men on 31 January.

23.06.2014 - Mariupol editor held at anti-terrorism centre for past five days

Reporters Without Borders is concerned about **Serhiy Dolgov**, the editor of the newspapers Vestnik Pryazovya and Khochu v SSSR ("I want to go to the USSR"), who was [abducted](#) from his office in the southeastern city of Mariupol on 18 June. After saying nothing for five days, Sergei Spasitel, the head of the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) in Mariupol, [announced](#) that Dolgov was "alive and in good health" and was being held at an anti-terrorism centre in Zaporozhye.

Dolgov was abducted from the Vestnik Pryazovya office on the afternoon of 18 June by six masked men in civilian dress with automatic weapons, who took all the computers and beat Dolgov before taking him away with his hands tied. His whereabouts and the identity and motive of his abductors

remained unknown for five days.

"We firmly condemn the brutality of Dolgov's arrest, which had all the hallmarks of an outright abduction," said Johann Bihl, the head of the Reporters Without Borders Eastern Europe and Central Asia desk. "We urge the Ukrainian authorities to clarify the situation without delay, to follow legal procedures, and to respect this journalist's rights regardless of his media's editorial policies."

Dolgov's colleagues think his abduction was linked to his editing of Khochu v SSSR, which mainly publishes historical articles about the Soviet era and which other newspapers in the region recently labelled as a "rebel" publication.

22.06.2014 - Two TV journalists briefly detained in Crimea

Two journalists with Ukraine's Hromadske.TV – reporter **Tatyana Kozyreva** and camera operator **Karen Arzumanyan** – were [detained](#) for about an hour after trying to do a live report in Nakhimov Square in the Crimean city of Sebastopol on 22 June.

While doing their report in the square, where retirees were staging a demonstration, they were accosted by some of the retirees, who insulted them and accused them of distorting what is going on in Crimea. The police came and took them to a nearby police station in the Lenin district, where they were questioned about their activities and possible links to "extremist groups" and were then released. Kozyreva said the police were reasonable and returned their equipment.

The situation has been particularly difficult for independent and Ukrainian journalists in Crimea since the peninsula's incorporation into Russia. The Russian authorities obstruct their news gathering by, for example, not allowing them to attend press conference. Three TV stations – 5 Kanal, Kanal 24 and Novyi Kanal – [have stopped](#) operating in Crimea because of the threats to their reporters.

18.06.2014 - Journalist held overnight by rebels in Donetsk

Aleksandr Peremot, a journalist with the [URA-Inform.Donbass](#) news website, [was abducted](#) by rebels in Donetsk on the afternoon of 17 June and was [held overnight](#). When detained, he was outside the Donetsk public prosecutor's office, which is occupied by the self-proclaimed People's Republic of Donetsk (PRD). His news organization, which had difficulty communicating with the rebels because "it is not accredited with the PRD," has promised to reveal the details of Peremot's abduction shortly.

17.06.2014 - Pressure on local newspaper in Donetsk region

Maria Semenova, the editor of the [Vechnyaya Makeyevka](#) local newspaper, and **Larisa Butova**, the CEO of the Pressa Makeyevka printing press, [were kidnapped](#) by two men in battledress from the newspaper's office in Makeyevka, in the eastern Donetsk region, at around 10 a.m. on 17 June and were taken for a "conversation" with representatives of the PRD, the self-proclaimed People's Republic of Donetsk, who voiced their discontent with the newspaper's editorial policies. The two women were finally [released](#) at around 8 p.m. the same day. The newspaper has so far refused to make any comment but employees said they regarded the abduction as "very serious."

16.06.2014 - Russian TV journalists held for two days

Two journalists with Russian TV station Zvezda – reporter **Yevgeny Davydov** and soundman **Nikita Konashenkov** –, [were arrested](#) at a Ukrainian checkpoint on 14 June while on their way to Dnepropetrovsk airport to fly back to Moscow at the end of a reporting trip. Their station is a Russian defence ministry offshoot and they had "People's Republic of Donetsk" accreditation. After being taken to the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU), they were held for two days on suspicion of spying and then handed over to the Russian embassy's military attaché. Two other Zvezda journalists were arrested a week ago (see below).

16.06.2014 - Ukrainian journalist arrested on Russian border

Anastasia Stanko, a correspondent for the citizen TV station Hromadske, was about to report live from a small cross-border town called Milove (Ukraine) and Chertkovo (Russia) on 14 June when her phone connection was terminated and Russian border guards [arrested](#) her on a charge of crossing the border illegally. She was released later the same day.

13.06.2014 - Call for investigation into journalist's torture by soldiers

Reporters Without Borders learned on 13 June that Ukrainian soldiers [arrested Anton Vodian](#), a reporter for the Ukrainian news website [Insider](#), during an identity check in Dolgenkoe, a village in the Kharkov region, on 3 June. They said he was not on their list of "registered" journalists although he had the required accreditation and had notified the anti-terrorism operations press attaché about his trip in advance. The soldiers used torture to interrogate him, tying him up, beating him for four hours and threatening to kill him. On his release the next day, a senior commander said he had been held for "security reasons" during an important phase of an anti-terrorist operation. The head of Insider wrote to the defence ministry demanding an internal investigation into the incident.

09.06.2014 - Two Russian journalists arrested in Donetsk region

Two Russian journalists with "People's Republic of Donetsk" accreditation – Zvezda cameraman **Andrei Sushenkov** and soundman **Anton Malyshev** – [were arrested](#) at a Ukrainian National Guard checkpoint near the city of Sloviansk on the evening of 6 June. Zvezda is a Russian defence ministry offshoot.

They were hand over to the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) for questioning on suspicion of "collecting information on Ukrainian checkpoints." Released on the night of 8 June and put on a flight to Moscow, they [said](#) they were held for two days in a cramped and overheated cell.

09.06.2014 - Constant harassment of local media

Vasyl Serdyukov, a reporter for the local newspaper Serditaya Gazeta, and his photographer son **Yevhen Serdyukov** [were kidnapped and beaten](#) by militiamen in Rubizhne, a city in the Luhansk region, on 8 June. After being taken to the regional government headquarters in Luhansk, they were freed the next day at dawn.

The militia accused them of covering local news in a way that was one-sided and hostile to the separatists. The newspaper's editor denied this categorically. Yevhen Serdyukov had to be hospitalized with concussion and bruising all over his body. The militiamen also confiscated a computer, a (legally registered) hunting rifle and a car from the Serditaya Gazeta office.

The offices of the newspaper Horniak [were set on fire](#) at dawn on 6 June in Torez, in the Donetsk region. They [had already been ransacked](#) a month ago after the editor refused to comply with "People's Republic of Donetsk" orders.

The newspaper Donetskije Novosti [announced](#) on 6 June that it is temporarily suspending operations because of the "tense situation" in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. Like Vecherny Donetsk, which suspended activities on 2 June following [its editor's abduction](#), Donetskije Novosti is owned by Rinat Akhmetov, an oligarch who recently announced his support for the central Ukrainian government.

28.05.2014 - Rebels hold two Ukrainian journalists for three days

Two Ukrainian journalists who [had been kidnapped](#) by anti-Kiev rebels on 25 May at a checkpoint near Shchastye (in the Luhansk region) – **Vyacheslav Bondarenko** of the Obzor news website and freelance video reporter **Maksim Osovski** – were finally released on 28 May after being held and mistreated for three days.

The two journalists had been on their way to cover the presidential election in the east of the country for the Ukrainian TV station ZIK. After the rebels found a Ukrainian flag and TV equipment in their car, they were accused of spying and were taken to the SBU building in Luhansk.

While held, they were badly [beaten, tortured and threatened](#) with being killed. After their release, they were hospitalized in Kiev with bruises all over their bodies. Bondarenko also had significant lesions. There was little media coverage of their abduction and their release was prematurely reported.

25.05.2014 - Two Russian journalists working for LifeNews freed

Marat Saychenko and **Oleg Sidyakin**, two journalists working for the Russian pro-government TV station LifeNews, were released on 25 May in Kiev and immediately boarded a flight for Grozny, the

capital of the Russian republic of Chechnya.

Viktor Yagun, the deputy head of the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU), [said](#) at a news conference that they had been freed at the request of the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

In an [interview](#) for the Russian newspaper Izvestia, Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov said he has sent representatives to Kiev after Russian President Vladimir Putin requested the two journalists' release. The ensuing negotiations are said to have been kept secret for [security reasons](#).

Members of the Ukrainian armed forces [arrested](#) Saychenko and Sidiyakin – along with the rebels they were filming – near Kramatorsk on 18 May. They were subsequently taken to Kiev, interrogated by the SBU and accused of "providing assistance to terrorism."

24.05.2014 - Russian journalists denied entry

More Russian journalists were refused entry to Ukraine in the run-up to the 25 May presidential election, although they had all the necessary papers. The reason often given was lack of funds or inability to confirm the reason for the visit. The Ukrainian authorities have imposed drastic restrictions on Russian males entering Ukraine.

According to [the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe](#), at least five TV crews and five individual journalists were denied entry from 20 to 24 May.

"Like the Russian authorities in Crimea, the Ukrainian authorities have often used this prior censorship method in the information war exacerbated by the different parties since the start of the conflict in eastern Ukraine," said Johann Bihl, the head of the Reporters Without Borders Eastern European and Central Asia desk.

"Journalists must be able to have access to the events they want to cover as part of their work, regardless of their nationality or the editorial line of the media they work for," Bihl added.

Those denied entry have included [Ilya Varlamov](#), a blogger, and **Ilya Azar** of the independent radio station Echo of Moscow, although both are well known for providing coverage of the "Euromaidan" protests that had nothing in common with the Kremlin's propaganda.

They were turned back on landing in Kiev on 23 May on the grounds of "unconfirmed reason for the visit." **Natalia Suvorova**, a reporter for the Russian radio station Kommersant FM, was also recently refused entry.

21.05.2014 - Ukrainian authorities release Russia Today journalist

Graham Phillips, a British journalist who works for the Russian pro-government TV station Russia Today, [was released](#) on the evening of 21 May after being arrested the previous day by the National Guard at a border post on the outskirts of Mariupol, in the Donetsk region, and being taken immediately to the headquarters of the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) in Kiev for interrogation.

Phillips [said](#) he was arrested for having a bulletproof vest. The statements by the Ukrainian authorities were contradictory during his detention. Russia Today [reported](#) his arrest immediately but the National Guard [initially denied](#) it, only to [acknowledge it later](#).

The various parties to the Ukrainian conflict are waging an all-out information war that has been exacerbated by the approach of the 25 May presidential election. The anti-Kiev rebels in eastern Ukraine have been targeting journalists since March. Now the [Ukrainian authorities](#) are [behaving with growing hostility](#) to journalists working for Russian media.

Two Russian journalists working for the Russian pro-government news website Life News are still being held by the SBU in Kiev. They and the rebel group they were accompanying [were arrested](#) by the Ukrainian armed forces on 18 May. The two journalists are accused of assisting the "terrorist" activities of the rebels.

18.05.2014 - Donetsk Republic frees two hostages held by militiamen

Reporters Without Borders is very relieved by the 18 May [release of Serhiy Shapoval](#), a journalist with the Volin'Post news website who was kidnapped in Sloviansk on 26 April and was held hostage

for three weeks by the rebels of the self-proclaimed Republic of Donetsk in one of the city's government buildings.

Shapoval was [interrogated and mistreated](#) while held. The rebels gave him electric shocks, lacerated the palms of his hands and forced him to say on camera that they were peaceful and had no weapons. The Anna News and Donbas Popular Militias TV stations broadcast the videos of his statements. While held, he contacted relatives several times to say he was in Sloviansk but could not leave for the time being.

Ukrainian photo-reporter **Milana Omelchuk** [was also freed](#) on 18 May after being held for nearly two weeks by the rebels of the self-proclaimed Republic of Donetsk, who demanded a ransom of 50,000 hryvnia (3,100 euros) for her release on 13 May. With the help of the Open Dialogue Foundation, an NGO, Omelchuk's sister managed to convince the rebels that the family was not able to pay such a large sum. After her release, Omelchuk was hospitalized in Kiev for malnutrition and because the rebels drugged her.

15.05.2014 - TV towers in east – targets and weapons of war

Ukraine's interior ministry [announced](#) on 15 May that national armed forces control the broadcasting tower at Kramatorsk (which is 12 km south of Sloviansk, one of the rebel strongholds in the Donetsk region) and denied a local news site's [claim](#) that anti-Kiev militiamen seized the tower on 14 May, when retransmission of all TV stations was interrupted.

Ukrainian special forces did however [regain control](#) of the television tower at Sloviansk on 14 May. It had been controlled for some time by anti-Kiev rebels, who had interrupted the broadcasting of Ukrainian programmes and replaced them by Russian TV stations.

Control of the region's main broadcast retransmission centres switches between the Ukrainian army and rebel forces in accordance with the success of their operations, resulting in frequent cuts and alternation between Russian and Ukrainian stations. Aside from their strategic importance in the information war, these centres allow the warring parties to mark their territory and project their authority over the local population.

13.05.2014 - Journalist freed after two weeks as hostage in Sloviansk

Reporters Without Borders is very relieved to learn that **Yuri Leliavski**, a reporter for the Ukrainian TV station ZIK, was released after being held hostage by pro-Russian militiamen for two weeks in Sloviansk, the stronghold of the pro-Russian rebels. Leliavski [revealed](#) at a news conference in the western city of Lviv on the evening of 12 May that he was freed on 9 May.

Militiamen [arrested](#) Leliavski barely an hour after he arrived in Sloviansk on 25 April, as soon as they realized he was from Lviv. He spent the entire two weeks in the basement of the building of the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU), now the headquarters of the pro-Russian militias.

12.05.2014 - Kidnapped journalist released

Reporters Without Borders is very relieved to learn that **Pavel Kanygin**, a reporter for the independent Russian newspaper Novaya Gazeta, was [freed](#) on the afternoon of 12 May after being [kidnapped](#) the previous night in Artemisk, in the Donetsk region. He had managed to send an SMS alert to colleagues during the night but thereafter remained unreachable until his release.

Pro-Russian rebels of the "People's Republic of Donetsk" had [confirmed](#) that they were holding Kanygin for spreading "negative" information and for not being accredited with them. In his coverage of the 11 May referendum on self-determination in the Donetsk region for his newspaper and on social networks, Kanygin reported a failure to respect electoral procedures. [He said](#) he was hit while being interrogated.

12.05.2014 - Journalist attacked in Kotovsk

Alexander Yaroshenko, a journalist who uses the pen-name of Sergei Levitanenko, was [attacked](#) in his home in Kotovsk, near Odessa, on the night of 11 May by masked intruders in camouflage dress, who hit him and throttled him, accusing him of "not liking Putin."

After escaping, Yaroshenko described the attack as a ["murder attempt."](#) When he subsequently

returned to his home, he found that the room containing his work material had been torched. An investigation is under way.

12.05.2014 - Russia Today employee injured

The security situation for journalists is worsening steadily in the east of the country amid an increase in Ukrainian army operations and the emergence of more and more militias. An employee of the Russian TV station Russia Today sustained [a gunshot injury](#) during street fighting in Mariupol on 9 May. Russia Today said [he was evacuated](#) to Moscow on 12 May in a serious condition.

08.05.2014 - TV crew held for several hours

A crew with the Ukrainian national TV station ICTV were [held](#) by pro-Russian rebels at a checkpoint near Slovianks on 8 May. They considered themselves lucky to be freed after being interrogated and threatened for several hours, and stripped of their equipment.

08.05.2014 - Airwaves war

A cable TV supplier was [forced to drop all the Ukrainian national TV channels](#) on 8 May at the behest of Valeri Bolotov, the self-proclaimed governor of Lugansk and commander of the pro-Russian "army of the southeast," who threatened to terminate its entire service if it did not comply.

After being threatened physically, the cable operator's employees told clients they had been temporarily forced to drop the Ukrainian channels but pointed out that these channels could still be viewed on its website. After [the fight for control of TV retransmission centres](#), this marks a new phase in the airwaves war being waged by the parties to the conflict in eastern Ukraine.
