

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/ukraine-summary-of-attacks-on-media-06-08-2014,46265.html>

Europe/Ex-USSR - Ukraine

News feed

Summary of attacks on media

6 August 2014

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.

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 not 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 Miroschnik**, 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 [Vechernyaya 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 *Donetskie 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](#), *Donetskie 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 Sidyakin – 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 Bihir, 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," Bihir 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.
