

# Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/ukraine-summary-of-attacks-on-media-12-05-2014,46265.html>

Europe/Ex-USSR - Ukraine

News feed

## Summary of attacks on media

10 June 2014

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

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### 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.

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### 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.

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### 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.

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### **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.”

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### **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.

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### **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.

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### **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.

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### **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.

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### **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.

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### **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.

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### **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.

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### **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.

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### **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.

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### **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.

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