

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

11 July 2014

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.

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 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 possibly. 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 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 Sloviansk 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.
