

# Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/bulgaria-interview-with-genka-shikerova-on-02-10-2013,45271.html>

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Europe/Ex-USSR - Bulgaria

Arson attack

## Interview with Genka Shikerova on media freedom in Bulgaria

2 October 2013

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The car of Genka Shikerova, a journalist known for her incisive interviews of Bulgarian politicians, was set on fire outside her Sofia home on the night of 16 September, reviving concern about freedom of information and the safety of journalists in Bulgaria. Reporters Without Borders, which condemns this act of arson, is publishing an interview with Shikerova.

She was interviewed for Reporters Without Borders by Desislava Kyurkcheyeva on 23 September. The original version in bulgarian of this interview is attached at the bottom of this page.

### ***Any news about the investigation?***

Police probe into the case but it is impossible to complete the investigation within a week. I have already been interrogated once and it is quite a routine procedure. They are working on the case; however, I have no idea how far they have reached.

### ***In this case, have the police offered you protection? Yourself, have you requested protection?***

The procedure in this case is of a different kind and this is not on the agenda. This way or the other, I don't want any. I received full support from the TV channel: the News department director offered me to hire a guard but I refused because I do not plan to change my lifestyle because of what happened.

### ***Did you receive any calls, messages or threats in whatever form prior to or after the case? Can you relate them in any way to your work, be it such done now or in the past?***

No, not before that happened, nor thereafter have I received any threats or messages related to this incident, nor do I have any conflict to relate it with. I tried to recall any, since the police asked me the same questions but I cannot find any relation.

### ***Could you confirm the reports of several media that you associate the case with your journalistic work?***

I have definitively not made such a statement. I cannot find a connection between escalation of political tension and this arson. The only Bulgarian media I have spoken to is bTV. The materials are on the website and all the rest is far-fetched interpretation of my words. I cannot and do not want to jump into any conclusions.

### ***Are you fearful about your health and that of your relatives?***

I really want to believe that this is an act of vandalism. I try not to think about it, nor analyse it. This is why I do not let fear permeate my thoughts. This did happen and I hope that the probe will yield results but if that does not happen, I do not plan to become a victim of arson.

### ***I suppose you are aware about opinions that related what happened to your interviews with Lyutvi Mestan and Sergei Stanishev. Some qualified them as biting.***

In this case, I cannot have an opinion because I have no evidence and it would be absurd to lay the blame on anyone. I asked the adequate journalistic questions for this situation, questions which any colleague would have asked and to which he/she would have wanted to get an answer. This is why from a journalistic standpoint; I believe I have done my job.

***How would you evaluate your work in the morning show of bTV "This morning"? Have you ever felt any pressure? It is clear that the timing is very special in view of the political context in the country. You, personally, have you felt any difference in your work ever since you have been anchoring the morning show?***

Me, personally, no because I have always had the freedom to ask questions, both as a reporter and as an anchor. Many colleagues refuse to believe it but so far I have never been subject to any pressure. I have indeed not been object of any. I can definitively assert this.

***Due to the limited number of political shows, the morning show of bTV has an exceptional role in shaping public opinion in the country. It is often an object of criticism. How does this affect your work?***

This is why it is interesting because it offers a broad platform for comments, analyses and discussions. Anyone is entitled to personal opinion and new media give the opportunity for this opinion to reach out to more people. By now anyone is an expert and understands what journalism is about. For this reason, comments are rife and I find nothing bad about it.

***In the interview with the leader of the Socialist Party and the Party of European Socialists Sergei Stanishev, he asks you to draw a parallel with the attitude of the former Prime Minister Boiko Borissov to the media. You answered that PRs keep being insistent over the phone. What does this mean?***

Of course, they call, we hear them on a daily basis and this is normal. It is another issue how often and what we talk about but these are internal matters which are part of everyday life and are not an exception. If one says that pressure has changed since today and yesterday there was none, one will lie. This is an everyday struggle and this is part of the profession. It is another issue to what degree does the journalist succumb, to what degree the person wants to be objective...

***But if go back to investigative journalism: is it more difficult now to do investigative journalism in Bulgaria than it used to be five years ago?***

I can give you an answer to this question next year since I do a thesis on this topic. I make observations on all investigative journalism pieces done in recent years at bTV and Nova TV. I want to see what the trends are in terms of the number and type of investigations, as well as to see what was aired in the individual periods. I believe that the conclusions will be curious. This is very intensive work but it is only then when one can assert for sure... too many assertions have been circulated.

***If you allow me to be a bit more insistent: if you do such a study, this means that you start with some hypotheses. My hypothesis is that the number of journalists doing investigative journalism in Bulgaria is on the decline. Would you agree?***

Investigative journalism is difficult in its nature and it requires too much effort of a purely personal nature and the issue is whether we have enough journalists to devote their time and do the effort to achieve results. I doubt that there are many people willing and able to do it. I am not sure if it is the circumstances that put us in the situation of having fewer and fewer investigations. Of course, I do not rule out the effect of the market. Investigative journalism is expensive and time-consuming but it is the cherry on the pie.

***And is it more dangerous to do investigative journalism now?***

I do not know if it is dangerous. I do not feel threatened. I have not received any threats. All the more, it is necessary to look around and see what is going on in Bulgaria in terms of quality to have any grounds to claim that.

***Several days ago it emerged that two Bulgarian correspondents of Deutsche Welle, Emi Baruh and Ivan Bedrov, were fired on ethical grounds. In the public domain, this was again interpreted as them affecting certain political interests. What is your opinion about this?***

We invited them both in "This Morning" on September 25. I familiarised with the letter of the bank and the official statement of Deutsche Welle. The position of Deutsche Welle is not substantiated and adequate. How is it possible that the editorial department at Deutsche Welle claim that the allegations toward their colleagues are unjustified and at the same time terminate relations with them. Besides, the work of these authors has always been subject to editorial review. Where is his responsibility in this case? I also do not understand the analysis made by the representatives of the bank. My colleagues' articles are published as commentaries. This article type has its specificities which have not been taken in consideration. Ivan and Emi told me that Deutsche Welle's assertions that they have been familiarised with written standards and rules in the beginning of their collaboration, are not true. I have worked with Ivan Bedrov in bTV and he is an exceptional professional. I am convinced that he approached the matter professionally. To me, the attitude toward both journalists is a reason for concern and sends a bad signal.

***How do you expect that events unfold from here onwards in political terms, do you expect pressure to escalate?***

I have no idea where things will go but we as journalists have to first get our own things square and if we are to work professionally and in the public interest, we will be in the best position possible.

Photo credit: bTV

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  - Интервью Генка Шикерова, (PDF - 223.6 kb)
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