

Impunity: Ukraine state of play

Report from the National Union of Journalists of Ukraine (NUJU).

On October 4, 2017 the NUJU presented the Physical Security of Journalists in Ukraine index.

In the first nine months of 2017, we registered 75 cases of physical aggression against journalists - attacks, beatings and unjustified use of force by the police, officials and politicians. In 2017, weapons were used three times against Ukrainian journalists. Unfortunately, no one took responsibility for the aggression against journalists.

The NUJU considers the level of aggression against journalists high. The main reason is the lack of proper response from the authorities and law enforcement agencies. There is no effective investigation into attacks on journalists. We cannot boast of any success in cases when an attacker was brought to responsibility justly.

This summer, the NUJU appealed to the Parliament with a proposal to hold parliamentary hearings on freedom of speech and journalists' safety on November 1, before the international day of impunity. We found support in the Committee on Freedom of Speech. But, unfortunately, the Parliament did not even put this issue to the vote. Therefore, we will hold hearings without support of the authorities at the NUJU to discuss what other steps journalists can take to fight with impunity and improve the professional security.

On October 24, 2017 three Ukrainian journalists suffered as a result of police actions. It happened when police forces stormed into a courtroom where defendants barricaded themselves. Physical force was illegally applied to the journalists who covered the trial: they were knocked to the ground and beaten with feet. For some time journalists were illegally detained by the police and their equipment was damaged. No one has ever been punished for using force against journalists. We have no information whether the authorities are investigating the use of force against journalists.

This latest case illustrates the ineffectiveness of trainings of police forces on interaction with journalists. Such seminars have been held by non-governmental organizations with the support of international institutions and donor organizations for the last three years. However, journalists continue to suffer from police actions. Investigations into infringement of journalists' rights are not conducted effectively. And those who commit crimes against journalists remain unpunished.

The Kyiv office of the Council of Europe held the last conference on safety of journalists with the participation of police officers on October 19, 2017 - five days before the mass beating of journalists by the police at court.

There is no sign of progress in the investigation for the murdered journalist Pavel Sheremet. Police have classified all the investigation materials. Four months ago, President Poroshenko promised a public report of law enforcers on this case, but it never took place.

Background Information (cases of impunity towards Ukrainian journalists)

Arson of Editor Serhii Huz (Kamianske, Dnipropetrovsk region)'s car

The arson of the car of the editor-in-chief of the 5692.com.ua<<http://5692.com.ua>> site and the Gorod 5692 newspaper (Kamianske, Dnipropetrovsk region), which took place in February 2017, has

not yet been investigated. First, the police did not qualify the crime as work-related but following a number of statements from media organisations at national and international levels, the case was re-qualified. The victim notes that the investigative actions were not carried out properly, he was periodically summoned for interrogation, as well as members of the family and colleagues, but no changes occurred.

Four more case of destruction of journalists' cars followed. But the police have not yet investigated any of the incidents.

Beating Of Photoreporter Ihor Yefimov

The photoreporter of the Vechirni Cherkasy newspaper was beaten by policemen on February 20, 2014 during the events of EuroMaidan in Cherkasy. He was seriously injured. But the prosecutor's office improperly filed the case with a conclusion of a private law firm that conducted an expert examination commissioned by the National Union of Journalists of Ukraine. As a result, out of 10 of policemen involved in beating of the journalist, only one was recognized as a suspect - then acting head of the battalion. Because of the unwillingness of the prosecutor's office to carry out effective pre-trial investigation (which is proved by examination), the suspect was acquitted in the court of appeal.

The NUJU held a national action of solidarity with the photographer. The names of the law enforcers who beat Yefimov or did not prevent him from being beaten were made public.

The case is going to cassation.

Unsolved Crimes Against Journalists In Times Of EuroMaidan

271 domestic and foreign journalists were beaten during EuroMaidan demonstration in Ukraine (November 2013-February 2014). Besides Kyiv, most of the attacks took place in Kharkiv, Dnipro, Cherkasy, Zaporizhia, Odesa and Crimea.

In most situations, where journalists have become victims of violence during the performance of their professional duties and coverage of protests in Kyiv and regions, the offenders were representatives of law enforcement agencies.

During November 2013 - February 2014, nine arrests and detentions of media officers were carried out, 14 cases of attacks were carried out on media editorial offices and 31 acts of threats of physical harm to journalists took place.

Two journalists lost their life in Kyiv in February 2014: journalist of *Vesti* newspaper Viacheslav Veremii was killed by "titushky," and on Maidan - a student and journalist Ihor Kostenko was killed too.

The case of Viacheslav Veremii has not yet been brought to an end. The court systematically releases the suspect implicated in the crime from custody.