Parliamentary Assembly
Assemblée parlementaire
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Doc. 16237
05 September 2025

Journalists matter: the need to step up efforts to liberate Ukrainian journalists held in captivity by the Russian Federation

Report[1]
Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media
Rapporteur: Ms Yevheniia KRAVCHUK, Ukraine, Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe

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1. Reference to committee: Doc. 16020. Reference 4822 of 28 June 2024.

A. Draft resolution[2]

1. The Parliamentary Assembly deplores the challenging conditions under which journalists and media professionals report during wartime. In all too many cases, these individuals must make significant sacrifices and take life-endangering actions to provide us with reliable information in times of conflict.

2. The ongoing war of aggression against Ukraine is a dramatic manifestation of both the importance and the difficulty of their mission.

3. Since the start of the full-scale war of aggression in February 2022, over 800 crimes against media and media personnel have been documented as committed by the Russian Federation. The Russian Federation has killed 108 media professionals since 24 February 2022: 12 died while reporting, 96 died as combatants or were killed by Russian shelling or torture. Despite displaying their "PRESS" identification, they are sometimes deliberately targeted by military fire. Investigative journalists are facing an increase in targeted attacks against them, both physical and online. Cyberattacks, breaches of source confidentiality and restrictions on access to information are further matters of concern.

4. The Russian Federation has targeted media facilities, hitting TV towers in at least nine Ukrainian regions, causing significant destruction to the editorial offices of Ukraine's State Foreign Broadcasting Enterprise, Channel 5 and other media outlets.

5. This situation is unsurprising, as the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine is also a war against truth, and as such free media and journalists are treated as enemies by the aggressor State, which does not want the world to know about the atrocities it has committed.

6. At least 26 media professionals and journalists are unlawfully deprived of their liberty and held as civilian detainees in the Russian Federation and in the temporarily occupied areas of Ukraine, facing fabricated criminal charges, violation of basic rights, torture, and even death. The whereabouts of several Ukrainian journalists remain unknown, which – depending on their situation – could constitute cases of enforced disappearances under international law. It is deeply concerning that the number of victims among journalists is growing.

7. The systematic abduction and mistreatment of professional and citizen journalists started with the occupation of Crimea by the Russian Federation in 2014, and some of these journalists have been in Russian captivity for almost ten years.

8. The Assembly recalls that the Russian Federation is bound by its obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law. Journalists working in areas of armed conflict are civilians and are protected as such under international humanitarian law, provided that they do nothing to adversely affect their legal status.

9. The Assembly underlines that the process of establishing a sustainable and just peace in Ukraine must encompass a humanitarian component, including the unconditional release of all civilian captives.

10. Given the current Russian regime's disregard for international law, the only means at present to ensure the release and return to Ukraine of unlawfully detained journalists is exerting every available political, economic and diplomatic pressure on the Russian Federation.

11. This is an essential role that all member States of the Council of Europe can and must play. Moreover, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and international organisations of which the Russian Federation is a member, in particular the UN and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), can play an important role in this regard.

12. The Council of Europe's Campaign for the Safety of Journalists entitled "Journalists Matter" should highlight the situation of Ukrainian journalists illegally detained by the Russian Federation, and this awareness-raising effort could be amplified by international and local journalists' associations. Moreover, the Platform to promote the protection of journalism and safety of journalists could put pressure on the Russian authorities by collecting and verifying alerts on serious threats, demanding official replies, and reporting them to the public.

13. Individuals responsible for crimes against journalists must be held accountable. The Assembly particularly abhors the fate of Victoria Roshchyna, a Ukrainian journalist who was tortured and died in unspeakable circumstances after spending over a year in Russian custody.

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2. Draft resolution unanimously adopted by the committee on 4 September 2025.

14. The Assembly welcomes the recent release of three Ukrainian journalists: Vladyslav Yesypenko, unlawfully detained by the Russian Federation since March 2021, after having been abducted in Crimea, Dmytro Khyliuk, arrested in Kozarovychi, Kyiv region in March 2022; and Mark Kaliush, arrested in Melitopol, Zaporizhzhia region in August 2023. Their return home serves as a powerful reminder of the importance of international efforts to put pressure on authoritarian regimes to respect the fundamental rights of civilians, including journalists. The Assembly expresses its heartfelt support to these journalists and to all other those journalists who continue to suffer under unlawful detention.

15. Finally, the Assembly stresses the necessity of providing reparations to victims of Russia's crimes, particularly those affecting journalists and media infrastructure.

16. In light of these considerations, the Assembly calls on the Russian Federation to:

16.1. immediately cease all ongoing violations of international law concerning media personnel and media facilities;

16.2. release immediately all journalists detained in contravention of international law, including the following (name, place of arrest, date of arrest):

– Oleksii Bessarabov, Sevastopol, Crimea, 09/11/2016;

– Dmytro Shtyblikov, Sevastopol, Crimea, 09/11/2016;

– Ernes Ametov, Bakhchysarai, Crimea, 11/10/2017;

– Marlen Asanov, Bakhchysarai, Crimea, 11/10/2017;

– Tymur Ibrahimov, Bakhchysarai, Crimea, 11/10/2017;

– Seiran Saliev, Bakhchysarai, Crimea, 11/10/2017;

– Server Mustafaiev, Bakhchysarai, Crimea, 21/05/2018;

– Rustem Sheikhaliev, Simferopol, Crimea, 27/03/2019;

– Ruslan Suleimanov, Simferopol, Crimea, 27/03/2019;

– Osman Arifmemetov, Rostov-on-Don, Russia, 28/03/2019;

– Remzi Bekirov, Rostov-on-Don, Russia, 28/03/2019;

– Amet Suleimanov, Bakhchysarai, Crimea, 11/03/2020;

– Asan Akhtemov, Simferopol, Crimea, 04/09/2021;

– Iryna Danylovych, Koktebel, Crimea, 29/04/2022;

– Yevheniy Ilchenko, Melitopol, Zaporizhzhia region, 10/07/2022;

– Vilen Temerianov, Vil'ne, Crimea, 11/08/2022;

– Iryna Levchenko, Melitopol, Zaporizhzhia region, 06/05/2023;

– Vladyslav Hershon, Melitopol, Zaporizhzhia region, 20/08/2023;

– Anastasia Hlukhovska, Melitopol, Zaporizhzhia region, 20/08/2023;

– Heorhiy Levchenko, Melitopol, Zaporizhzhia region, 20/08/2023;

– Oleksandr Malyshev, Melitopol, Zaporizhzhia region, 20/08/2023;

– Maksym Rupchov, Melitopol, Zaporizhzhia region, 20/08/2023;

– Yana Suvorova, Melitopol, Zaporizhzhia region, 20/08/2023;

– Aziz Azizov, Bakhchysarai, Crimea, 05/03/2024;

– Rustem Osmanov, Bakhchysarai, Crimea, 05/03/2024;

– Hennadiy Osmak, Henichesk, Kherson region, 11/03/2024;

16.3. provide precise and updated information to international bodies and families on the location and health conditions of these detainees;

16.4. ensure unhindered access for the ICRC and/or other independent humanitarian organisations to all places of civilian detention in order to monitor the conditions of their detention and their state of health;

16.5. ensure unhindered access for the United Nations Monitoring Mission with regard to those prisoners held in detention in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine.

17. The Assembly calls on Council of Europe member States to support:

17.1. the operation of the Register of Damage for Ukraine,

17.2. the establishment of a Claims Commission for Ukraine,

17.3. the setting up and operation of the Special Tribunal for the Crime of Aggression against Ukraine,

17.4. the accountability mechanisms established under the auspices of the Council of Europe, with a focus on addressing the needs of victims and survivors, including journalists;

17.5. any actions which would ensure the enforcement of judgments of the European Court of Human Rights, notably those delivered in the inter-state cases of *Ukraine v. Russia*;

17.6. efforts towards the development of a new special protocol to the Fourth Geneva Convention and the promotion of a United Nations General Assembly resolution recognising the status of civilians unlawfully deprived of liberty, including professional and citizen journalists, establishing procedures for the verification, return, monitoring and release of such civilians during armed conflicts.

18. The Assembly calls on the International Criminal Court, or member States under the principle of universal jurisdiction, to prosecute and hold accountable the Russian Federation's officials involved in the unlawful detention, torture, ill-treatment, enforced disappearance or killing of Ukrainian journalists and destruction of media infrastructure.

19. The Assembly urges member States and the European Union to:

19.1. reinforce their sanctions regime and impose individual sanctions against those responsible for crimes against journalists and media infrastructure. Sanctions may include travel bans, financial sanctions, asset freezes, restrictions on participation in multilateral fora, as well as visa restrictions for immediate family members. Such sanctions should apply to senior military and security officials of the Russian Federation who, by virtue of their positions, had access to relevant information and decision-making powers, and who failed to prevent or stop such violations, but also to lower-ranking officials, including heads of detention facilities and guards involved in these violations. These include:

19.1.1. commanders of operational troop groups of the Russian Armed Forces involved in the aggression against Ukraine;

19.1.2. chiefs of staff and deputy chiefs within these groupings;

19.1.3. commanders of missile, drones (UAV), and artillery forces at the operational or district level;

19.1.4. fleet commanders (in particular, the Black Sea Fleet), operating in areas where strikes on civilian infrastructure were recorded;

19.1.5. officials of the General Staff and leadership of military intelligence (GRU) involved in operational planning and targeting;

19.1.6. heads of detention facilities where journalists and civilians were unlawfully held and tortured;

19.1.7. leadership of the Federal Penitentiary Service of the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation;

19.1.8. officials overseeing media control and propaganda in occupied territories;

19.2. support Ukrainian journalists and free media financially to help them survive in times of war and encourage the integration of journalists displaced externally into the operation of European media outlets and projects;

19.3. raise awareness of the plight of Ukrainian journalists, establish mentoring programmes for detainees and provide support by sending letters to their places of detention.

20. The Assembly calls on member States and the International Criminal Court to investigate and prosecute any incitement to commit war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide against the Ukrainian people, including hate speech, disinformation and propaganda, notably those aiming to justify the illegal aggression against Ukraine.

21. The Assembly calls on member States to support the work of national human rights institutions, including Ombudsman offices, in monitoring, documenting, and advocating for the rights and protection of journalists during armed conflict, including through technical, financial, and capacity-building assistance.

22. Finally, the Assembly hereby decides to establish an annual commemoration during its autumn part-session, honouring war correspondents and journalists who risk (and often lose) their lives in the line of duty while defending the right to information in conflict zones. This commemoration will be named “Victory for Victoria” in memory of Ukrainian journalist Victoria Roshchyna.

B. Explanatory memorandum by Ms Yevheniia Kravchuk, rapporteur[3]

1. Introduction

1. This report originated in the motion for a resolution entitled "Journalists matter: the need to step up efforts to liberate Ukrainian journalists held in captivity by the Russian Federation" (Doc. 16020). Its signatories are concerned by the fact that Ukrainian journalists are increasingly targeted by the Russian invaders for their professional activities.

2. Since the start of the full-scale war of aggression in February 2022, the Institute of Mass Information (IMI) a Ukrainian non-profit, non-governmental organisation that has been monitoring freedom of speech in Ukraine for over 20 years, has documented over 800 crimes committed by the Russian Federation against media and media professionals. Russia has killed 108 media professionals since 24 February 2022. 12 died while reporting, 96 died as combatants or were killed by Russian shelling or torture (data as of 9 May 2025).[4]

3. According to the Center for Civil Liberties (Kyiv), one of the most horrific aspects of this war is the enforced disappearance of tens of thousands of civilians during the Russian occupation. The Russian Federation is still bound by its obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law, including the duty to respect and protect civilian journalists who are not taking a direct part in hostilities. The systematic practice of enforced disappearances is of the nature of a crime against humanity as recognised by the UN General Assembly Resolution 47/133. And according to the UN Convention on the non-applicability of statutory limitations to war crimes and crimes against humanity, no statutory limitation applies to war crimes and crimes against humanity.

4. Journalists are civilians and should be treated as such. However, at least 26 media professionals and journalists are unlawfully deprived of their liberty and held as civilian detainees in the Russian Federation,[5] facing fabricated criminal charges, violation of basic rights, torture, and even death. The whereabouts of several Ukrainian journalists remain unknown. Unfortunately, the number of victims among journalists continues to grow.

5. Reporters without Borders (RSF) has recently filed its ninth complaint against Russia with the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the Ukrainian judiciary to fight against the impunity of those responsible for these war crimes. The previous RSF complaints triggered or contributed to 14 investigations by the Ukrainian Prosecutor's Office into crimes against journalists.

6. The European Court of Human Rights has recently found that many of the Russian Federation's administrative practices in the occupied territory of Ukraine have breached Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5), and that it "must without delay release or safely return all persons who were deprived of liberty on Ukrainian territory under occupation by the Russian and Russian-controlled forces in breach of Article 5 of the Convention before 16 September 2022 and who are still in the custody of the Russian authorities" (see chapter 5.1).

7. It is of the utmost importance that member States increase political and diplomatic pressure on the Russian Federation to ensure the release and return to Ukraine of the journalists who have been arrested and illegally detained. In this respect, most recently, on 9 July 2025, a Report by the Secretary General on the human rights situation in the territories of Ukraine temporarily controlled or occupied by the Russian Federation encouraged relevant human rights bodies, including the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, to prioritise victims and protect and promote their rights, compensation and rehabilitation. Such efforts could include actions through international organisations to which the Russian Federation is a member, including the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), and the International Committee of Red Cross could also play a role in this regard. Moreover, Journalists Matter, the Council of Europe Campaign for the Safety of Journalists, could be used more extensively to highlight the situation of Ukrainian journalists illegally detained in the Russian Federation, and this awareness-raising effort could be amplified through international and local journalists associations.

8. The aim of this report is to raise awareness about the plight of Ukrainian journalists held in captivity in the Russian Federation. To this end, I will analyse the existing Council of Europe instruments that could be helpful and explore the avenues for member States to increase political and diplomatic pressure on the

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3. The explanatory memorandum is drawn up under the responsibility of the rapporteur.
4. Institute of Mass Information (IMI), "3,5 years of the full-scale war: Russia commits 841 crimes against journalists and media in Ukraine", 24 August 2025.
5. IMI, "Ukrainian journalists detained by Russia: Up-to-date list", 11 October 2024.

Russian Federation to ensure the release and return of captured and illegally detained journalists to Ukraine. Such efforts could include actions through international organisations to which the Russian Federation is a member, including the UN and the OSCE. The potential involvement of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) will also be examined.

9. While focussing on the plight of journalists, this report should also serve the purpose of promoting measures in respect of all Ukrainian civilian detainees facing a similar situation to ensure that they are not forgotten and return to their families and loved ones.

10. I will consider the following issues:

– international humanitarian law regarding the protection of journalists at war, including the Council of Europe's soft law;

– concrete violations of International humanitarian law by the Russian Federation regarding Ukrainian journalists;

– legal actions brought before the ICC;

– investigations by the Ukrainian Prosecutor's Office into crimes against journalists;

– possible strategies to increase political and diplomatic pressure on the Russian Federation to ensure the release of detained journalists;

– the possible role of the Council of Europe, and in particular its Campaign for the Safety of Journalists: "Journalists Matter";

– the work of local journalists' associations.

11. The discussions at the joint hearing on 30 January 2025 on "Ukrainian prisoners of war, journalists and other civilians held in captivity by the Russian Federation"[6] and the hearings on 10 April 2025[7] and 3 June 2025[8] have enabled me to develop my proposals in further detail.

2. International humanitarian law regarding the protection of journalists

12. In accordance with international humanitarian law, there are two categories of journalists: 1) war correspondents and 2) all others, which are considered as civilians provided that they take no action adversely affecting this status.

13. According to Article 4 A (4) of the Geneva Convention relative to the treatment of prisoners of war, "war correspondents" are "persons who accompany the armed forces without actually being members thereof […] provided that they have received authorization from the armed forces which they accompany, who shall provide them for that purpose with an identity card similar to the annexed model."

14. Prisoners of war (POWs) cannot be prosecuted for taking a direct part in hostilities, and their detention aims to prevent further participation in the conflict. They must be released and repatriated without delay after the end of hostilities. The detaining power may prosecute them for possible war crimes, but not for acts of violence that are lawful under international humanitarian law. In any event, POWs must be treated humanely

6. On 30 January 2025, the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media held a joint hearing on "Ukrainian prisoners of war, journalists and other civilians held in captivity by the Russian Federation" with the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy, the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights and the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons, with the participation of Mr Maksym Butkevych, Human rights defender, officer of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, ex-POW, journalist; Ms Leniie Umerova – recently exchanged Crimean Tatar and civilian hostage (Ukrainian citizen); Mr Yulian Pylypei, Ukrainian marine, Mariupol defender, 2.5 years in Russian captivity; and Ms Nataliia Yashchuk, Senior War Consequences Officer, Center for Civil Liberties, Kyiv, followed by an exchange of views.

7. On 10 April 2025, the committee held a hearing with the participation of Mr Oleh Borysov, International Ukrainian TV channel FREEDOM, Ukraine; Ms Kateryna Dyachuk, Head of the Freedom of Speech Monitoring Department at the Institute of Mass Information (IMI), Ukraine; Mr Michael O'Flaherty, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights; and Ms Rodica Ciochina, Campaign for the Safety of Journalists, Freedom of Expression and Steering Committee on Media and Information Society (CDMSI), DGII: Directorate General of Democracy and Human Dignity, Council of Europe.

8. On 10 June 2025, the committee held a hearing with the participation of Ms Sevgil Musayeva, Ukrainian journalist, Chief-editor of Ukrainska Pravda (online); Mr Edouard Perrin, Editor, Forbidden Stories; Mr Dmytro Lubinets, Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights; and Mr Philippe Tremblay, Director, Office of the Representative on Freedom of the Media, OSCE, Vienna.

and are protected against any act of violence, as well as against intimidation, insults and public curiosity. There are further rules concerning the minimum acceptable conditions of detention, covering such issues as accommodation, food, clothing, hygiene and medical care.

15. The Convention relative to the protection of civilian persons in time of war and especially Article 79 of the Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol 1) extends the protection of humanitarian law to journalists engaged in dangerous professional missions in areas of armed conflict. These journalists are to be considered as civilians within the meaning of Article 50, paragraph 1, of Protocol 1. As such, journalists are to be protected under the Conventions and this Protocol, provided that they take no action adversely affecting their status as civilians, and without prejudice to the right of war correspondents accredited to the armed forces to the status provided for in Article 4 A (4) of the Third Convention. They may obtain an identity card that attests to his status as a journalist similar to the model in Annex II of this Protocol, which shall be issued by the government of the State of which the journalist is a national or in whose territory he resides or in which the news medium employing him is located. If justified by imperative security reasons, a party to the conflict may subject civilians to assigned residence or internment but these measures cannot be used as a form of punishment. Interned persons must be released as soon as the reasons that necessitated their internment no longer exist. Rules governing civilian internees' treatment and conditions of detention under international humanitarian law are very similar to those applicable to prisoners of war.

16. In non-international armed conflicts, Article 3 common to the 1949 Geneva Conventions and especially Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and Relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts (Protocol II) provide that individuals who have been detained for reasons related to the conflict must also be treated humanely at all times. Specifically, they are protected against murder, torture and cruel, humiliating and degrading treatment. Individuals detained for involvement in hostilities are not exempt from criminal prosecution under the relevant domestic law.

17. In the absence of a specific international convention that provides a definition of the concepts of freedom of information and the right of journalists, the implementation of these principles is subject to the constraints imposed by national laws, which are often guided by the principle of public order. Consequently, journalists and the media may be subject to various charges under national law, including threats to national security, enemy propaganda, incitement to violence, internal disturbances, hatred, separatism, defamation, and more.[9]

3. Measures for the protection of journalists at international level

3.1. United Nations

18. A number of initiatives have been implemented within the United Nations (UN) system with the aim of preventing acts of violence against journalists.[10]

19. UNESCO Resolution 29 (1997) "Condemnation of violence against journalists" invited the Director-General to condemn assassination and any physical violence against journalists as a crime against society and to urge that the competent authorities discharge their duty of preventing, investigating and punishing such crimes and remedying their consequences. Furthermore, it called upon member States to adopt the principle that there should be no statute of limitations for crimes against persons when these are perpetrated to prevent the exercise of freedom of information and expression or when their purpose is the obstruction of justice. Governments should make it possible to prosecute and sentence those who instigate the assassination of persons exercising the right to freedom of expression and that the persons responsible for offenses against journalists discharging their professional duties or the media are judged by civil and/or ordinary courts.

20. UN Security Council Resolution 1738 (2006) condemned intentional attacks against journalists, media professionals and associated personnel, as such, in situations of armed conflict, and called upon all parties to put an end to such practices. It reaffirmed its condemnation of all incitements to violence against civilians in situations of armed conflict, as well as the need to bring to justice, in accordance with applicable international law, individuals who incite such violence. Furthermore, it recalled its demand that all parties to an armed conflict comply fully with the obligations applicable to them under international law related to the protection of civilians in armed conflict, including journalists, media professionals and associated personnel. It urged States

9. See The Practical Guide to Humanitarian Law – Journalists.

10. A non-exhaustive list of texts, declarations, decisions, resolutions and conventions related to human rights and the safety of journalists is available at: www.unesco.org/en/safety-journalists/basic-texts.

and all other parties to an armed conflict to do their utmost to prevent violations of international humanitarian law against civilians, including journalists, media professionals and associated personnel. Moreover, it urged all parties involved in situations of armed conflict to respect the professional independence and rights of journalists, media professionals and associated personnel as civilians. Finally, it requested the Secretary-General to include as a sub-item in his next reports on the protection of civilians in armed conflict the issue of the safety and security of journalists, media professionals and associated personnel.

21. The Medellin Declaration on "Securing the Safety of Journalists and Combating Impunity" of 4 May 2007 encouraged member States to implement several measures to prevent and counteract violence against journalists such as the investigation of all such acts, the release of detained journalists, the signing and ratification of Additional Protocols I and II to the Geneva Conventions and the Rome Statute of the ICC, and the compliance with the commitments of UNESCO Resolution 29 (1997).

22. The UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity aims to create a free and safe environment for journalists and media professionals, thus strengthening peace, democracy and sustainable development worldwide. It addresses the fundamental aspects of prevention, protection, and prosecution. The UN Plan of Action calls for a coalition-based and holistic approach to its implementation including six areas:

– Raising awareness: UNESCO, in association with Member States and other UN agencies, organises International Days such as World Press Freedom Day on 3 May, the International Day for Universal Access to Information on 28 September, and the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists on 2 November; and awards the UNESCO/Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize.

– Standard Setting and Policy making: a fundamental aspect of the UN Plan of Action is the establishment of global standards upon which regional and national policies can draw inspiration from. At least 30 countries have created or strengthened National Safety Mechanisms for the protection of, prevention against, and prosecution of attacks against journalists, based on resolutions by the UN.

– Monitoring and Reporting: the UN have developed since 1993 various databases to monitor the state of press freedom both internationally and nationally, in particular the UNESCO Observatory on Killed Journalists.

– Capacity Building: this includes trainings for local actors, including journalists, security forces, and the judiciary. These efforts also involve assisting national governments in developing and enacting legal frameworks favourable to freedom of expression and freedom of information.

– Research: the UN Plan of Action commits to the area of academic research. For instance, UNESCO has been organising, since 2016, an annual academic conference on the safety of journalists, to actively promote further research in this area.

– Coalition Building: the UN joined forces with media, NGOs, academia and governments to develop the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity.

3.2. Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)

23. The OSCE, through its Representative on Freedom of the Media (OSCE RFoM), monitors the safety of journalists,[11] particularly in cases of physical attacks, incarceration and harassment. The RFoM responds with the participating States and other parties concerned through diplomatic channels and public statements. Moreover, the OSCE RFoM assists the participating States to further media freedom. In 2022, the Representative launched a new project that aims to take stock of existing policies and measures in OSCE participating States to promote and ensure the safety of journalists, to identify persisting gaps and to develop recommendations based on good practice examples. The project consists of seven roundtables, each covering another aspect of the topic of safety of journalists:

– data collection, analysis and reporting on attacks and violence against journalists and promotion of journalistic work;

– secure working conditions;

– safety of journalists in conflict situations;

– intersectional perspectives;

– digital safety;

11. OSCE: Safety of journalists.

– legal harassment;

– police prevention and fight against impunity.

3.3. Council of Europe

24. The protection of journalists has been dealt with by the Council of Europe in different occasions. The most important legal instrument in this regard is Recommendation CM/Rec(2016)4 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the protection of journalism and safety of journalists and other media actors, which condemned the alarming and unacceptable level of threats to journalists and media actors in Europe and provided specific Guidelines to member States to act in the areas of prevention, protection, prosecution, promotion of information, education and awareness rising.[12] Subsequently, the Resolution on the safety of journalists of the Conference of Ministers responsible for Media and Information Society of 11 June 2021 invited the Council of Europe to carry out a comprehensive campaign at European level to promote the protection of journalism and the safety of journalists and support corresponding campaigns at national level, leading to the launch, in 2023, of Journalists Matter, the Council of Europe campaign for the safety of journalists.

25. This campaign is an initiative aiming to promote press freedom and protect journalists from violence, threats, and harassment while performing their duties.

26. The objectives of the campaign are the following:

– promoting the development of corresponding campaigns at national level;

– encouraging States to take measures towards the adoption of national action plans for the safety of journalists;

– providing help to the development of appropriate legal and institutional frameworks at national level;

– changing the situation effectively and significantly in practice.

27. At the heart of the campaign lies the recognition that journalists not only report events, but are often themselves caught in the crossfire of those they sought to cover. Ukrainian journalists have been targeted in ways that severely undermine their ability to report freely. Many have been killed and many are still unlawfully detained. In addition, many journalists have disappeared, their families were left in the dark, and the international community often struggled to mount an effective response.

28. The campaign has consistently placed a spotlight on the situation of the Ukrainian journalists at multiple levels, including conferences and debates, as well as major events and activities. One example was the 2024 Annual Conference, which addressed the situation of journalists in Ukraine and organised a photo exhibition with the National Union of the Ukrainian. The campaign also brought international attention to the issue through the screening of several films, including Twenty Days in Mariupol, which chronicled the risks journalists take to inform the public during war times, and by having Ukrainian journalists give a direct testimony to those present.

29. In 2025, the campaign is focusing on prosecution and combating impunity for crimes against journalists with representatives of the Ukrainian prosecutors' office among the participants, journalists, and the Ukrainian focal points of the campaign. Such activities usually include the presence and participation of other international organisations, which widen their audience and put the Ukrainian journalist situation on a global scene. Further media groups and international associations of journalists take part in such events, echoing further the situation. Such partnerships help building a robust advocacy network. By ensuring that the Ukrainian journalist cases are consistently raised in international forums, this co-ordinated action enhances the visibility of the crisis and increases the diplomatic pressure on Russia to release the detained journalists.

30. With regard to the participation of Ukraine in the campaign,[13] the country was the first of the 46 member States to set up a campaign committee, gather relevant national actors and adopt a national action plan for the safety of journalists. This plan included protective measures, although the continuing military aggression underlines the need for further international pressure and support for Ukrainian journalists.

12. See also the Implementation Guide for CM/Rec(2016)4.
13. Journalists Matter, Council of Europe Campaign for the Safety of Journalists: Ukraine, National chapter.

31. The campaign could play a role in accelerating efforts to liberate Ukrainian journalists by heightening the political and diplomatic pressure, as the campaign provides a ready-made network to amplify this call. The campaign's advocacy channels could also bring the plight of Ukraine into the international spotlight and at high-profile events, and it could bring together our international partners in organisations where Russian representatives still participate, to somehow facilitate new forms of multilateral co-operation designed to protect journalists that may be at risk.

32. The Assembly has also addressed the issue of the protection of journalists for several years.[14]

33. In Resolution 2573 (2024) "Missing persons, prisoners of war and civilians in captivity as a result of the war of aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine", the Assembly recalled that, although the illegal Russian detentions started back in 2014, many of those abducted have been captured since the beginning of the full-scale war in 2022, and underlined that the situation in temporarily occupied Crimea remained particularly difficult. It urged its members to engage their governments, civil society and media networks to raise awareness of the plight of Ukrainian journalists. The Assembly also called for sustained international pressure on the Russian Federation to release the detained journalists and to provide immediate access for independent international bodies to inspect the conditions in which these journalists were being held. The international community must insist on transparency and accountability to protect the human dignity and rights of those unlawfully imprisoned.

34. Our committee in particular has highlighted the Council of Europe's instruments that can be helpful in this regard.

35. In Resolution 2317 (2020) "Threats to media freedom and journalists' security in Europe", the Assembly stated that the Council of Europe bodies should not only continue to advocate the development in all European countries and beyond of a safe environment for journalists and other media actors, but they should also make use of all their leverage to prompt member States to remedy quickly and effectively any threats to media freedom, urging and supporting the reforms required to this end. All Council of Europe member States should effectively guarantee the safety of journalists, create an environment conducive to freedom of the media and prevent the misuse of laws or normative provisions that may affect this freedom, without which there is no democracy. Furthermore, Recommendation 2168 (2020) highlighted the role of the Council of Europe Platform to promote the protection of journalism and safety of journalists and made a number of recommendations to the Committee of Ministers in order to reinforce the role of the Platform and tap all of its potential.

36. In Resolution 2532 (2024) "Guaranteeing media freedom and the safety of journalists: an obligation of member States", the Assembly expressed its strong concern over the multiple attacks to media freedom and the numerous cases of impunity, especially in relation to murders of journalists. It further commended the launch of Journalists Matter, the Council of Europe campaign for the safety of journalists, and called on member States to fully endorse and take an active part in this campaign. Finally, the Assembly called on all member States to engage with the partners of the Platform to promote the protection of journalism and safety of journalists and establish effective response mechanisms to their alerts.

37. The Platform's objective is to be a real-time mechanism for monitoring and addressing threats against journalists and media professionals. Since 2015 the Council of Europe has co-operated in this ground-breaking project together with leading journalists' and freedom of expression organisations.

38. The Platform operates by collecting and verifying alerts on serious threats to media freedom and the safety of journalists. These alerts are submitted by the Platform's partner organisations and are then published to raise awareness and prompt action from national authorities. By making these alerts public, the Platform seeks to ensure accountability and encourage member states to fulfil their commitments under the European Convention on Human Rights to protect freedom of expression. It also facilitates dialogue between journalists, civil society, and governments to address systemic issues affecting media freedom. The member States are expected to act and address the issues and inform the Platform on the actions taken in response to the alerts. Council of Europe member States also have a positive obligation to ensure an enabling environment for media pluralism.

39. Additionally, the Safety of Journalists Platform serves as an advocacy and reporting tool, offering an evidence-based overview of trends and challenges to journalists' safety and media freedom within Europe. Its annual reports and data inform the Council of Europe's policies and actions, providing a foundation for

14. See for example Resolutions 1535 (2007), 2035 (2015), 2141 (2017), and 2213 (2018). See also Resolution 2217 (2018), Recommendation 2130 (2018), and Recommendation 1702 (2005).

broader efforts to counter threats to press freedom. The Platform also highlights the work carried out by the Council of Europe in the field of media freedom, such as texts prepared by the Assembly, standards adopted by the Committee of Ministers, relevant case law of the European Court of Human Rights or the work of the Commissioner for Human Rights.

40. The Platform relies on voluntary contributions from governments to finance its activities in support of press freedom and safety of journalists.

41. The Platform's annual assessment provides essential evidence on the trends and press freedom issues in Europe as well as guidance on how to address them at the national and European levels.

42. Their 2024 assessment shows that never before had journalists been exposed to so many different and varied forms of threat that undermined journalism and the public's right to be informed. The impact of the war in Ukraine was felt well beyond the country's borders and there was a tightening of security across Europe that often ran counter to fundamental freedoms. In times of crisis, even our liberal democracies may feel the temptation to take measures to curb freedoms.

43. Concerning Ukraine, the 2024 assessment lists the war in Ukraine as the most pressing concern, with Ukrainian and international journalists risking their lives daily on the front lines. It is the country with the highest number of alerts on the Platform (40), and most violations occurred in Russian-occupied territories or were attributed to Russian forces. In 2024, the Platform documented at least seven incidents in which journalists were targeted, including the tragic death of Reuters safety adviser Ryan Evans in late August in a missile strike in eastern Ukraine. In a number of other cases, journalists were injured, and media offices were targeted.

44. The following chapter provides a more comprehensive overview of the Russian Federation's actions against Ukrainian journalists.

4. Violations of international humanitarian law by the Russian Federation regarding Ukrainian journalists

4.1. Introduction

45. Since the start of the war, the Ukrainian media market and community have suffered great losses,[15] and Ukrainian journalists had to face new challenges, such as working in unsafe and unstable conditions in all areas of the war zone, surviving in a financial crisis, without electricity, etc. A significant number of media outlets have been forced to close, while others have had to reduce their activity and temporarily lay off their employees without pay. Local and print media have been particularly impacted by these challenges.

46. The Russian Federation has targeted media facilities on diverse occasions, hitting TV towers in Kyiv, Kharkiv and other Ukrainian regions.[16] On 6 April 2025 a Russian ballistic missile struck Kyiv, causing significant destruction to buildings housing the editorial offices of Ukraine's State Foreign Broadcasting Enterprise.[17] To this, the Russian Ministry of Defence officially stated that it had destroyed a military facility. As a result of a massive Russian missile strike on Kyiv during the night of 10 July, the offices of the Ukrainian TV channel "Channel 5" suffered significant damage.[18] More recently, on 28 August 2025, a massive Russian attack on Ukraine damaged the Kyiv offices of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) and Ukrainska Pravda, while in the Dnipropetrovsk region, a drone strike damaged the office of local newspaper Mezhivsky Merydian.[19]

47. The safety of journalists is of increasing concern. Despite displaying their "PRESS" identification, they are sometimes deliberately targeted by military fire, and the list of reporters injured or killed and media outlets badly damaged by airstrikes has continued to rise. Investigative journalists are facing an increase in attacks, both physical and online, from Russian authorities. Finally, cyberattacks, breaches of source confidentiality and restrictions on access to information are also matters of concern.

15. RSF, "Ukraine".
16. "RSF refers Russian strikes on four Ukrainian TV towers to International Criminal Court".
17. "Putin and his troops are doing everything to destroy the truth – UA Journalist Oleh Borysov on PACE".
18. "Russian Attack Damages "Channel 5" Office in Kyiv".
19. "Russian strikes on Ukraine damage 3 media outlets".

48. According to the IMI, Russia has killed 108 media professionals since 24 February 2022. 12 died while reporting, 96 died as combatants or were killed by Russian shelling or torture (data as of 9 May 2025). Dozens of journalists have suffered concussions, limb fractures and injuries, and shrapnel wounds while reporting. At least 333 media outlets have ceased all or part of their operations as a result of the large-scale Russian invasion. Thousands of media professionals had left the country or had to change jobs. Also, IMI recorded cases of threats being sent to journalists and editors of both national and regional media. At first, the occupiers were threatening the journalists physically (by coming to the homes of journalists or their parents); later, the threats moved over to the online realm (by way of e-mails with threats of criminal prosecution, imprisonment in Siberia, torture, interrogations and nuclear weapons). In particular, on 18 May 2022, the editorial board of the Center for Journalistic Investigations Syla Pavdy received a letter including threats about nuclear weapons from Russia.[20]

49. The abduction and mistreatment of journalists began with the Russian annexation of Crimea, continued with the occupation of the eastern Donbas, and escalated during the full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

50. In the first months of the occupation of the Crimean peninsula, almost all professional journalism in Crimea was destroyed by the Russian security forces in order to suppress freedom of speech, take control of the media and force journalists to spread Russian propaganda. As a result, a large number of Crimean media ceased their activities, and many journalists left the territory of the peninsula. These events contributed to the emergence of citizen journalists in Crimea, who take daily risks to cover everything that is happening under the occupation. They are mostly not professional journalists, but Crimean Tatar activists and relatives of political prisoners, most of whom are forced to work anonymously for their safety. Citizen journalists are often persecuted by the Russian occupation security forces. During the occupation, many citizen journalists were illegally imprisoned. There are currently 15 citizen journalists on the list including Amet Suleymanov, Iryna Danylovych, Server Mustafaev, Osman Arifmemetov, Tymur Ibrahimov, Marlen Asanov. Russia is gradually trying to completely suppress freedom of speech, including by amending legislation that was illegally integrated into the temporarily occupied territories, and the occupation authorities are constantly looking for excuses to illegally imprison citizen journalists, spying on them, kidnapping them, holding them incommunicado, torturing them, conducting searches in their homes, seizing professional equipment, imposing administrative fines, and illegally trying them in fabricated cases and on charges of sabotage, extremism, or terrorism.

51. The Russian authorities do this in order to avoid acknowledging the crimes committed against journalists, and there is no mechanism for releasing civilians from custody, as it is the case for prisoners of war.

52. The Russian Federation has seized the offices of Ukrainian media outlets in the occupied territories to deliberately spread their aggressive propaganda in those areas. Some media outlets are also forced to shut down due to overt threats by the Russian forces, the inability to operate under temporary occupation, damage to media offices and the financial crisis caused by Russia's war. Furthermore, IMI has also recorded instances of journalists being captured and kidnapped by Russian forces. At least 100 journalists with regional and national media outlets have been in Russian custody since the start of the Russo–Ukrainian war in 2014.

53. According to Reporters Without Borders,[21] in the occupied territories, all local Ukrainian information professionals who refuse to collaborate with the Russian occupation forces are arrested. The Russian occupation forces come to their homes and arrest them in the middle of the night. From one day to the next, their families have no news and do not know where they are being held. It is a long and arduous task for their families to identify them and locate them.

54. To date, at least 26 Ukrainian civilians working in journalism are unlawfully held in Russian custody, in appalling conditions, simply for doing their important job of documenting the truth. These are journalists from occupied Crimea and, since the start of the full-scale invasion in 2022, from parts of Zaporizhzhia Oblast, Kyiv city, and Kyiv Oblast as well. The Russian Federation has tortured and mistreated them, withholding medical assistance. Neither the journalists' families nor their lawyers have had access to them. Their loved ones live in fear and uncertainty. These journalists had no access to due process, legal aid, or basic humanitarian assistance, which is another violation of fundamental human rights.

55. A report on denial of fair trials in Russia provides data suggesting that violations of fundamental guarantees of independence and impartiality of the judiciary may not merely be procedural weaknesses but rather a reflection of an intentional approach to guide the court system in ways that serve political interests,

20. "Russians begin to threaten journalists with nuclear weapons".
21. "Declared dead by Russia, the brutal reality of Victoria Roshchyna's last months in captivity".

possibly by undermining the rights of individuals who challenge or contradict the prevailing political objectives.[22] Trials are weaponised as a tool of persecution against real or perceived opponents to the Russian regime. Ukrainian prisoners of war are subjected to especially harsh show trials, often paraded as "dangerous Nazis" or "terrorists" before the Russian public, being falsely accused of war crimes or other serious crimes under Russian criminal law to sway the Russian public opinion in support of the special military operation. The victims are unable to invoke international humanitarian law protections, as they are tried on the charges of ordinary crimes under Russian criminal law. There is a systematic denial of justice through the degradation of the Russian justice system and laws. The report concludes by urging the ICC to acknowledge the heinous nature of the crime of the denial of fair trial and prioritise the investigation of the crime on the same par as the crimes committed in the places of unlawful detention and torture.

4.2. Examples of dead or missing journalists

56. Ukrainian photojournalist Maks Levin was reporting on the Russian invasion and the fighting between Russian and Ukrainian forces in Kyiv Oblast when he went missing on 13 March 2022. Evidence gathered by the international organisation "Reporters Without Borders"[23] showed that he was executed in cold blood by Russian troops on the day he disappeared, possibly following interrogation and torture. Levin's body and car were found on 1 April 2022 in a forest north of Kyiv, which had been a battlefield at the time.

57. The case of Victoria Roshchyna is emblematic. Ms Roshchyna was a Ukrainian journalist who died after spending over a year in Russian custody. The Russian forces detained her without charges in August 2023 in Ukraine's temporarily occupied territories, where she was performing her duty as a journalist, planning to report on the life of the people under occupation. She was first held in Russian torture prisons in the occupied part of Zaporizhzhia Oblast and later moved to jail No. 2 in Taganrog, Rostov region, Russia. In October 2024, the Russian Ministry of Defence wrote to her father Volodymyr Roshchyn, notifying him that Victoria had died while in custody.

58. A Reporters Without Borders documentary investigating Ms Roshchyna's case[24] was released in March 2025, which showed that she had been brutally tortured: her body had stab wounds, she had been electrocuted and weighed under 30 kilos. When the Russian Commissioner sent an inspection to the jail, the guards hid her away in a closed room on another floor. Ms Roshchyna was last seen on 8 September 2024, when she was taken out of her cell and taken to an unknown location. According to an investigation by Forbidden Stories,[25] Ms Roshchyna's remains were part of 757 corpses repatriated to Ukraine from Russia in February 2025. In a letter to Forbidden Stories, Ukrainian prosecutors explained that the forensic examination "revealed numerous signs of torture and ill-treatment on the victim's body, including abrasions and haemorrhages on various parts of the body, a broken rib, neck injuries, and possible electric shock marks on her feet." Moreover, Ms Roshchyna's body had been returned in bad shape (it had been frozen and was in a state of mummification), "with signs of an autopsy that was performed before arrival in Ukraine" and missing certain organs, including parts of the brain, the larynx, and eyeballs, which would have been seemingly performed as an attempt to hide the cause of death.

59. The Main Investigation Department of the Security Service of Ukraine is conducting a pre-trial investigation into her unlawful imprisonment and death. A molecular examination was ordered to identify her body to confirm that it was her. Experts took DNA samples from both of Ms Roshchyna 's parents. Based on the results of this examination, the expert concluded that with a probability of more than 99%, the body belonged to Ms Roshchyna.

60. In addition, in February 2025, a forensic medical examination was ordered to determine the cause of her death, the injuries and the nature of their infliction. According to its results mentioned above and due to the condition of the body, it was not initially possible to determine the cause of death. Therefore, the necessary samples were taken and the issue of conducting an additional forensic examination with the participation of French experts to determine the cause of death and the nature of the injuries is currently being resolved. There is an ongoing investigation by Ukrainian law enforcement officers to establish all the circumstances of Ms Roshchyna's deprivation of liberty, her death and the use of torture against her.

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22. Iryna Marchuk, Sergiu Ostaf, Daria Svyrydova and Maksym Tymochko, "Denying a fair trial as an atrocity crime during Russia's war against Ukraine: context, practice, law and perspectives" (2024).
23. Exclusive RSF investigation into the death of Maks Levin: "Information and evidence collected indicates this Ukrainian journalist was executed."
24. "What happened to journalist Victoria Roshchyna in captivity? Victoria's last task".
25. "Russia's 'Ghost Detainees': The Investigation That Cost Viktoriia Roshchyna Her Life".

61. On 1 August 2025, the President of Ukraine, by presidential decree,[26] posthumously awarded Victoria Roshchyna the Order of Freedom — a State award conferred for outstanding and exceptional merits in affirming Ukraine's sovereignty and independence, and in defending constitutional rights and freedoms of individuals and citizens.

62. An example of a missing civilian journalist is Dmytro Khyliuk, who was captured by Russian troops in March 2022,[27] while Kyiv Oblast was occupied, and taken to the territory of the Russian Federation. Civilian hostages should be released outside of prisoner swaps, but in Mr Khyliuk's case, the Russian Federation tried to frame him as a combatant. Dmytro was held in a prison in Russia's Vladimir region and the Russian authorities have not disclosed any details of his conditions of detention. Another former Ukrainian prisoner of war, who was released last year and had shared a cell with Mr Khyliuk's for a year, said that he had lost a lot of weight and had weighed "no more than 45 kilos" at the time. He also said that the journalist had been cruelly mistreated. An investigation by Reporters Without Borders[28] traced Mr Khyliuk to Preventive Detention Centre No. 2 in Novozybkov, a small city in southwest Russia about 50 km from the Ukrainian border.

63. On 24 August 2025, Mr Khyliuk was released as part of a prisoner exchange between Ukraine and Russia.[29]

4.3. Testimonies of released journalists

64. As mentioned before, the abduction and mistreatment of journalists predate the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

65. For instance, Stanislav Aseyev, one of the few independent journalists to remain in eastern Ukraine's Donbass region following the separatist takeover, was arbitrarily detained there for two and a half years.[30] Following his abduction by Russian-backed separatists on 2 June 2017, Mr Aseyev was held in solitary confinement for a period of one and a half months. During this time, he was subjected to torture. He was subsequently transferred to Isolatsia, a former contemporary art centre that had been converted into a secret concentration camp in Donetsk, where he was compelled to make public "confessions" on Russian television. He was convicted on charges of espionage and extremism, that is, simply for being a journalist. He was finally released during a prisoner exchange on 29 December 2019. Following his return to Kyiv, Mr Aseyev collaborated with the investigative journalism group Bellingcat to locate Denis Kulikovsky, the director of Isolatsia, in Kyiv in 2021 and to facilitate his arrest. At the beginning of January 2024, Mr Kulikovsky was sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment by an Ukrainian court for "cruel treatment".[31]

66. Maksym Butkevych is a journalist and human rights defender, who has worked for 15 years on behalf of victims of human rights abuses, primarily refugees and asylum seekers. His work with Russian nationals who had had to flee Russia and with human rights defenders who remained in the country made him aware of the human rights situation in Russia. After the start of the full-scale invasion, he feared that human rights would be eviscerated and that all of the progress made in Ukraine would be erased. He therefore joined the Ukrainian armed forces, working as a platoon commander. On 21 June 2022 he was captured by Russian troops in the Luhansk region, leading to over 2 years in Russian captivity.[32] Upon learning who he was, the Russian authorities orchestrated charges of war crimes, and tortured him until he made a forced confession, before sentencing him to 13 years imprisonment only on the basis of that fake confession.[33] He has met many prisoners who have been subjected to the same process. The scheme is that Russians destroy a town with artillery, then blame the civilian casualties on Ukrainian POWs. He learned first-hand how international humanitarian law and human rights law is utterly disregarded by Russia. Over the first few months, he lost 25 kilos. There was a total absence of hygiene, he lived without shoes for several months, and was subjected to beatings, threats of sexual violence, and electric shocks. The vast majority of the abuse was not intended to extract important information, but to inflict suffering on Ukrainian soldiers for maintaining that they are Ukrainian. Russian propagandist officers told them that Russia would soon prevail on the battlefield, that they had the most battle-hardened army in Europe, and that they would not stop at Ukraine in teaching the importance of traditional values. Unfortunately, apart from military POWs, he came across detained civilians who had been sentenced for co-operating with Ukraine; many of them were tortured and forced to confess to

26. УКАЗ ПРЕЗИДЕНТА УКРАЇНИ №569/2025.
27. "UNIAN correspondent Dmytro Khyliuk in russian captivity for 3 years".
28. "Disappearance" of Ukrainian journalist Dmytro Khyliuk in Russia: investigation of a State lie.
29. "Ukrainian journalists Dmytro Khyliuk and Mark Kaliush finally free after over two years in Kremlin jails".
30. Stanislav Aseyev: "The first month in detention was the hardest".
31. Ukrainian journalist Stanislav Aseyev after his torturer's conviction: "His trial is the greatest success of my life".
32. *Die Zeit*: And yet he remained a human.
33. *Le Monde*: Maksym Butkevych's two years of captivity and interrogation in Ukraine.

crimes that they had never committed. Torture is a system organised from the very top and it is encouraged. Legal changes had made them traitors to the Russian Federation. Another group of civilian detainees were under "preventive arrest", not accused of anything, and their three-months' detention was extended again and again, with no information for their loved ones. The real number of such detainees is unknown, but Mr Butkevych assesses that there are more civilian detainees than POWs, with torture and ill-treatment just as widespread as it is against military detainees. Special groups are targeted, such as media professionals, journalists, and activists of the Crimean tartar movement.

5. Court proceedings

5.1. European Court of Human Rights

67. Since early 2014 the European Court of Human Rights has received several inter-State applications and thousands of individual applications[34] concerning the conflicts in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol and in eastern Ukraine, and concerning the Russian Federation's military operations on the territory of Ukraine.

68. In Ukraine v. Russia (re Crimea), the Court found on 25 June 2024 that the Russian authorities were responsible for "administrative practices" entailing numerous violations of the Convention, including the following:

– Article 2: enforced disappearances and lack of effective investigations into them;

– Article 3: ill-treatment of Ukrainian soldiers, ethnic Ukrainians, Crimean Tatars and journalists; degrading conditions of detention in the Simferopol pre-trial detention centre (SIZO) resulting from overall shortcomings in the organisation and functioning of the Crimean prison system; ill-treatment of "Ukrainian political prisoners" both in Crimea and the Russian Federation and lack of effective investigations into such ill-treatment;

– Article 5: unacknowledged and incommunicado detention of Ukrainian soldiers, ethnic Ukrainians, Crimean Tatars and journalists;

– Article 10: unlawful suppression of non-Russian media, including closure of Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar television stations; unlawful deprivation of liberty, prosecution and conviction of the "Ukrainian political prisoners" in Crimea for exercising their freedom of expression;

– Article 18 (in conjunction with Articles 5, 6, 8, 10 and 11): ongoing restriction of the rights of "Ukrainian political prisoners" for an ulterior purpose not prescribed by the Convention.

69. Regarding this judgment, the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers, in its role of supervising the implementation of the Court's judgments, stated in a decision of 6 March 2025 that the Russian authorities must immediately restore application of the Ukrainian law in Crimea, cease all administrative practices found by the Court to be in breach of the European Convention on Human Rights and release all Ukrainian political prisoners whose human rights were restricted by these practices in Crimea, as well as to free all illegally detained Ukrainian soldiers, ethnic Ukrainians, Crimean Tatars and journalists. Furthermore, the Committee of Ministers invited the authorities of member States to explore all possible means to ensure execution of this judgment, with a view to ensuring accountability for the serious breaches of international law established in it.

70. On 9 July 2025 the Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights delivered a judgment in 4 inter-state cases brought by Ukraine against the Russian Federation. In its judgment, the Court, *inter alia*, found that the administrative practice in the occupied territory of Ukraine of unjustified interference with freedom to receive and impart information and ideas, instances of intimidation, detention, ill-treatment and killing of journalists, blockages and refusals to register and accredit media outlets and journalists, application of purported laws prohibiting and penalising dissemination of information in support of Ukraine including on social media, application of terrorism and extremism laws to instances of free speech and independent media reporting, excessive and arbitrary effects of measures blocking access to websites and broadcasters in occupied territory, all breached requirements of Article 10 of the Convention. It found the Russian Federation responsible for these grave and serious breaches and a follow up to implementation measures would be given to the judgment at the September 2025 human rights meeting of the Committee of Ministers. Most notably, in the operative part of the judgment, the Court called on the Russian Federation that it "must without delay

34. HUDOC – European Court of Human Rights.

release or safely return all persons who were deprived of liberty on Ukrainian territory under occupation by the Russian and Russian-controlled forces in breach of Article 5 of the Convention before 16 September 2022 and who are still in the custody of the Russian authorities".

5.2. International Criminal Court

71. Reporters without Borders (RSF) has to date filed nine complaints with the ICC, including about Russian strikes on four radio and TV towers in Ukraine, journalists or media crews that have been deliberately targeted by Russian forces or have been the victims of indiscriminate bombardment, the case of a Ukrainian fixer detained for nine days, tortured by Russian forces, the killing of Agence France-Presse's video co-ordinator Arman Soldin and Ukrainian journalist Bohdan Bitik.

72. These RSF complaints triggered or contributed to 14 investigations by the Ukrainian Prosecutor's Office into crimes against journalists.

73. In February 2025, RSF filed its ninth complaint against Russia with the ICC and the Ukrainian judiciary regarding the Russian Federation's arbitrary arrest and deportation of at least 19 Ukrainian journalists to its territory or other occupied areas in Ukraine.

74. RSF has also filed two criminal complaints in France. In all, RSF has documented 53 events that could be classified as war crimes, in which a total of 121 journalists have been victims, and the targeting of 14 TV towers and media infrastructure.

5.3. Ukrainian courts

75. Since the beginning of the full-scale invasion launched by Russia, pre-trial investigations have been conducted in Ukraine in 122 criminal proceedings related to war crimes against journalists during the armed conflict.

76. The following facts have been established to date:

– 65 journalists were killed, including 8 foreign nationals;

– 46 journalists were injured, 25 of them international;

– 18 people were illegally detained or imprisoned;

– 2 journalists are in captivity, and 1 is missing.

77. The pre-trial investigation has yielded the following results:

– a total of 16 people were served notices of suspicion in 8 criminal proceedings;

– 5 indictments against 11 people were sent to court: 3 persons were convicted, 1 to 9 years, 2 to 12 years of imprisonment. As for the other persons, the trial is ongoing.

78. Aside from the case of Victoria Roshchyna, which is outlined above, the following paragraphs present several examples of criminal proceedings undertaken by the Ukrainian judiciary.

79. On 12 March 2025, journalist Oleh Baturin was detained following a tip-off for his pro-Ukrainian position and journalistic activities. He was held for some time in the Kakhovka District Police Department. During his interrogation, he was threatened with a scalp and "bidding farewell to life". he was handcuffed in the cell to a pipe, where he had to stand all the time, for 6 days. Subsequently, he was taken to the Kherson Regional Administration, where he was interrogated without torture, and then moved to the Kherson Detention Center. He was released on 25 March 2022. On 27 March 2024, the Suvorovskyi District Court of Odesa sentenced the defendants, two representatives of the Russian Federation occupation formations, to 12 years in prison.

80. In July 2022, a journalist of the TV channel "Ukraine", Slobodian A., was detained for filming stories in Kherson that covered the situation in the city. She was not tortured but she was held from 5 July to 5 August 2022 in the Kherson temporary detention centre, where the conditions were inhumane. The trial is ongoing.

81. On the night of 24-25 August 2024, Reuters journalists were staying at a hotel when a missile hit the premises, killing one journalist and wounding five. This hotel was the only one in Kramatorsk that did not work on a regular basis and it was possible to stay there only after making a prior arrangement with the owner. Journalists from various publications usually stayed at the hotel. According to the investigators, someone informed the Russian armed forces about the location of the hotel. The suspect is a Colonel-General of the Russian Armed Forces. The investigation is ongoing.

82. In 2022, Lithuanian director Mantas Kvedaravičius was working on a film about Mariupol. He was in the city officially on a humanitarian mission, and at the end of March he tried to leave Mariupol. He was on the evacuation list. On 28 March 2022, he and another man (located in the occupied territory) were detained because there were suspicions that Mantas could be an adjuster or a member of the Ukrainian sabotage group. Mantas was not released, and on 1 April 2022 his body was handed over to his wife. He had been executed and there were bruises on the body. The suspects are members of illegal armed groups of the Russian Federation. There is an ongoing joint investigation with Lithuania, and these suspicions were announced on 20 February 2024.

83. On 13 March 2022, between 12 and 13 pm, near the Zhyraf shopping centre in Irpin, Bucha district, Kyiv region, Russian military personnel fired at a car with people inside, resulting in the death of The New York Times journalist Brent Reno. The case is investigated by the National Police, the Security Service of Ukraine and the Office of the Prosecutor General.

84. On 19 September 2022, a local journalist and editor of the Kakhovska Zoria newspaper, Kyselyova Zh., was detained after a search of her apartment. She was taken to the Novokakhovka police department, where she was interrogated, given a preventive conversation, and persuaded to co-operate with the occupation authorities. They threatened to imprison her minor son. She was detained at the police station until 1 October 2022 and then released. The pre-trial investigation is ongoing.

85. On 27 June 2024, representatives of the administration or Russian military again came to Ms Kiselyova's home, tied her up, put a bag over her head and took her in an unknown direction. They brought her to a private house, unknown to her, where she was interrogated about her pro-Ukrainian position, journalistic activities, co-operation with the Armed Forces, the SBU, etc. She was interrogated about local activists, including Oleh Baturin. The next day, she was probably dragged to the outskirts of Genichesk, where she was placed in the basement of a small hotel. There, she was tortured, struck all over her body, electrocuted, and accused of subversion. On 31 July 2024, she was released. The pre-trial investigation is ongoing.

86. A journalist of Radio Liberty, Tolstyakova K., while conducting her activities in the vicinity of Kyiv, found documents of Russian servicemen and subsequently began communicating via WhatsApp and Telegram to find out their whereabouts. In response, a Russian serviceman began to threaten to kill her via messenger apps. On 26 September 2022, the Solomianskyi District Court of Kyiv sentenced this serviceman to 9 years in prison.

87. Ukrainian law enforcement agencies have been co-operating with the International Criminal Court (ICC) since the beginning of the invasion. The Office of the Prosecutor General fulfils the ICC's requests in accordance with international and national law.

6. Summing up

88. Since the start of the full-scale war of aggression in February 2022, the Russian Federation has committed over 800 crimes against media and media professionals.

89. This war is also a war against truth, and as such free media and journalists are treated as enemies by the aggressor.

90. The recent prisoner exchanges between Ukraine and the Russian Federation prove once again that the process of liberating journalists in Russian captivity presents specific challenges.

91. We all know that the current Russian regime does not care for international law. Therefore, the only means to ensure the release and return to Ukraine of those journalists who have been arrested and are illegally detained is exerting political and diplomatic pressure on the Russian Federation. Pressure of sanctions and accountability mechanisms should also be mounted and steadily and continuously increased.

92. This is a role that every member State of the Council of Europe should play. It is an obligation both under the Statute of the Council of Europe (ETS No. 1) and under the Reykjavík Declaration.

93. Moreover, I believe that international organisations to which the Russian Federation is a member, in particular the UN and the OSCE, as well as the ICRC as an international non-governmental organisation, could play an important role in this regard.

94. Regarding the Council of Europe itself, Journalists Matter, the Council of Europe Campaign for the Safety of Journalists, could be used more extensively to highlight the situation of Ukrainian journalists illegally detained in the Russian Federation, and this awareness-raising effort could be amplified through international and local journalists' associations. The Platform on the Safety of Journalists should be engaged in documenting instances of serious and grave breaches of international human rights law by the Russian authorities.

95. I would also wish to encourage parliamentarians to engage with their governments to support journalists. Financial help would be useful in this regard, as Ukrainian media's financial situation has been hit hard. The European Union is doing its part with a new €10 million grant programme,[35] and member States could do the same to help free media survive in times of war. In addition, measures should also be taken to integrate Ukrainian journalists displaced externally, to report on events as regards Ukraine and the war of aggression in the national media of the host member States.

96. It is important not to be silent. In this regard, I would like to mention the example of Nariman Dzhelyal, first deputy chairman of the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar People, who was a political prisoner but also a journalist, and who was probably one of the first civilians in captivity to be released. He was aware that the Assembly had spoken about him and called for his release, and it was important for him when he returned to see that he had not been forgotten.

97. On the matter of remembrance, I would like to salute and support the proposal made by the President of the Assembly, Mr Theodoros Rousopoulos, to establish an annual "Victory for Victoria"[36] commemoration, honouring war correspondents and journalists who risk (and often lose) their lives in the line of duty while defending the right to information and truth in conflict zones. Mr Rousopoulos proposed that this commemoration, which could be celebrated at the autumn part-session of the Assembly, should be named in memory of Victoria Roshchyna, although her story is not an isolated one. Every year, dozens of journalists are killed, imprisoned, or forcibly disappeared in war zones.

98. The objectives of this commemoration would be to:

– commemorate journalists killed or disappeared in conflict, especially those covering war crimes or defending human rights;

– promote freedom of expression, media independence, and the protection of journalists as enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights and Council of Europe standards;

– support Council of Europe initiatives such as the Platform for the Protection of Journalism and Safety of Journalists.

99. The "Victory for Victoria" commemoration could be marked for example by specific resolutions of the Assembly, a minute of silence during Assembly autumn part-session (Victoria was born October 1996 and killed September 2024), or side events or committee hearings in co-operation with journalism organisations across Europe.

100. Drawing upon these conclusions, I hereby propose a set of concrete measures in the draft resolution.

35. "EU Boosts Support for Independent Media in Ukraine with an Additional €10 Million".
36. This proposal was made on 3 June 2025 during the meeting of the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media in Trondheim (Norway).