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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Resolution 2618 (2025)[1]

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

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Parliamentary Assembly deplores the challenging conditions under which journalists and media professionals report during wartime. In 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 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 and 96 died as combatants or were killed by Russian shelling or torture. Despite displaying their "Press" identification, journalists 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 and 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 commits.

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, violations 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 disappearance 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 began 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 they do nothing to adversely affect their legal status.

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1. *Assembly debate* on 1 October 2025 (32nd sitting) (see Doc. 16237, report of the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media, rapporteur: Ms Yevheniia Kravchuk; and Doc. 16251, opinion of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights, rapporteur: Ms Nadejda Iordanova). *Text adopted by the Assembly* on 1 October 2025 (32nd sitting).

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 to exert every available means of 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 United Nations and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), can play an important role in this regard.

12. The Council of Europe 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 Council of Europe's 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 more than a year in Russian custody.

14. The Assembly welcomes the recent release of three Ukrainian journalists: Vladyslav Yesypenko, unlawfully detained by the Russian Federation since March 2021 after being 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 journalists who continue to suffer under unlawful detention.

15. Finally, the Assembly stresses the necessity of providing reparations to victims of the Russian Federation'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. implement the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights in the *Ukraine v. Russia* interstate cases, delivered on 25 June 2024 and 9 July 2025, in particular by immediately releasing all journalists who were unlawfully detained and are still in the custody of the Russian authorities, and by ensuring their safe return to the jurisdiction of the Ukrainian authorities;

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

– Oleksiy Bessarabov, Sevastopol, Crimea, 9 November 2016;

– Dmytro Shtyblikov, Sevastopol, Crimea, 9 November 2016;

– Ernes Ametov, Bakhchysarai, Crimea, 11 October 2017;

– Marlen Asanov, Bakhchysarai, Crimea, 11 October 2017;

– Tymur Ibrahimov, Bakhchysarai, Crimea, 11 October 2017;

– Seyran Saliev, Bakhchysarai, Crimea, 11 October 2017;

– Server Mustafayev, Bakhchysarai, Crimea, 21 May 2018;

– Rustem Sheikhaliev, Simferopol, Crimea, 27 March 2019;

– Ruslan Suleimanov, Simferopol, Crimea, 27 March 2019;

– Osman Arifmemetov, Rostov-on-Don, Russian Federation, 28 March 2019;

– Remzi Bekirov, Rostov-on-Don, Russian Federation, 28 March 2019;

– Amet Suleymanov, Bakhchysarai, Crimea, 11 March 2020;

– Asan Akhtemov, Simferopol, Crimea, 4 September 2021;

– Iryna Danylovych, Koktebel, Crimea, 29 April 2022;

– Yevheniy Ilchenko, Melitopol, Zaporizhzhia region, 10 July 2022;

– Vilen Temerianov, Vilne, Crimea, 11 August 2022;

– Iryna Levchenko, Melitopol, Zaporizhzhia region, 6 May 2023;

– Vladyslav Hershon, Melitopol, Zaporizhzhia region, 20 August 2023;

– Anastasia Hlukhovska, Melitopol, Zaporizhzhia region, 20 August 2023;

– Heorhiy Levchenko, Melitopol, Zaporizhzhia region, 20 August 2023;

– Oleksandr Malyshev, Melitopol, Zaporizhzhia region, 20 August 2023;

– Maksym Rupchov, Melitopol, Zaporizhzhia region, 20 August 2023;

– Yana Suvorova, Melitopol, Zaporizhzhia region, 20 August 2023;

– Aziz Azizov, Bakhchysarai, Crimea, 5 March 2024;

– Rustem Osmanov, Bakhchysarai, Crimea, 5 March 2024;

– Hennadiy Osmak, Henichesk, Kherson region, 11 March 2024;

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

16.5. 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;

16.6. ensure unhindered access for the United Nations Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine 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 Caused by the Aggression of the Russian Federation against 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 action which would ensure the enforcement of judgments of the European Court of Human Rights, notably those delivered in the interstate cases of *Ukraine v. Russia*;

17.6. efforts towards the development of a new special protocol to the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War and the promotion of a United Nations General Assembly resolution recognising the status of civilians unlawfully deprived of their 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 officials of the Russian Federation 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 forums, 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 troops 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 (unmanned aerial vehicle – 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 and leadership of the Main Directorate of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation (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 from Ukraine to other countries 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 direct and public incitement to commit genocide against the Ukrainian people, including through hate speech, disinformation and propaganda, notably those aiming to justify the war of aggression against Ukraine.

21. The Assembly also 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 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.