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(Final version)

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

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A. Draft Resolution

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.
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;

Amendment 1
Tabled by the Committee on Legal Affairs
and Human Rights

In the draft resolution, after paragraph 16.1, insert the following paragraph:

"implement the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights in the Ukraine v. Russia inter-State 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 ensuring their safe return to the jurisdiction of the Ukrainian authorities;"

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

- 16.2.1. Oleksii Bessarabov, Sevastopol, Crimea, 09/11/2016;
- 16.2.2. Dmytro Shtyblikov, Sevastopol, Crimea, 09/11/2016;
- 16.2.3. Ernes Ametov, Bakhchysarai, Crimea, 11/10/2017;
- 16.2.4. Marlen Asanov, Bakhchysarai, Crimea, 11/10/2017;
- 16.2.5. Tymur Ibrahimov, Bakhchysarai, Crimea, 11/10/2017;
- 16.2.6. Seiran Saliev, Bakhchysarai, Crimea, 11/10/2017;
- 16.2.7. Server Mustafaiev, Bakhchysarai, Crimea, 21/05/2018;
- 16.2.8. Rustem Sheikhaliev, Simferopol, Crimea, 27/03/2019;
- 16.2.9. Ruslan Suleimanov, Simferopol, Crimea, 27/03/2019;
- 16.2.10. Osman Arifmemetov, Rostov-on-Don, Russia, 28/03/2019;
- 16.2.11. Remzi Bekirov, Rostov-on-Don, Russia, 28/03/2019;
- 16.2.12. Amet Suleimanov, Bakhchysarai, Crimea, 11/03/2020;
- 16.2.13. Asan Akhtemov, Simferopol, Crimea, 04/09/2021;
- 16.2.14. Iryna Danylovysh, Koktebel, Crimea, 29/04/2022;
- 16.2.15. Yevheniy Ilchenko, Melitopol, Zaporizhzhia region, 10/07/2022;
- 16.2.16. Vilen Temerianov, Vil'ne, Crimea, 11/08/2022;
- 16.2.17. Iryna Levchenko, Melitopol, Zaporizhzhia region, 06/05/2023;
- 16.2.18. Vladyslav Hershon, Melitopol, Zaporizhzhia region, 20/08/2023;
- 16.2.19. Anastasia Hlukhovska, Melitopol, Zaporizhzhia region, 20/08/2023;
- 16.2.20. Heorhiy Levchenko, Melitopol, Zaporizhzhia region, 20/08/2023;
- 16.2.21. Oleksandr Malyshev, Melitopol, Zaporizhzhia region, 20/08/2023;

- 16.2.22. Maksym Rupchov, Melitopol, Zaporizhzhia region, 20/08/2023;
- 16.2.23. Yana Suvorova, Melitopol, Zaporizhzhia region, 20/08/2023;
- 16.2.24. Aziz Azizov, Bakhchysarai, Crimea, 05/03/2024;
- 16.2.25. Rustem Osmanov, Bakhchysarai, Crimea, 05/03/2024;
- 16.2.26. 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

**Amendment 2
Tabled by the Committee on Legal Affairs
and Human Rights**

In the draft resolution, replace paragraph 20 with the following paragraph:

"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."

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.