

07 October 2016

SIDE EVENT "FREEDOM OF SPEECH AND SITUATION WITH JOURNALISTS IN CRIMEA"

Human Rights Information Centre invites all interested parties to participate in a discussion about the freedom of speech and situation with journalists in Crimea.

The repressions against journalists in the Crimean peninsula are continuing. Russian authorities block independent media outlets, open criminal cases against Crimean journalists and attempt to limit freedom of expression in other ways. What is the current situation with media freedom in Crimea? How to protect Crimean journalists? The side event will look for answers to these questions. Participants will also discuss the problems with the access of foreign journalists to Crimea.



Friday, 23 September 2016



18:00-19:45



Belvedere room

PARTICIPANTS:



Tetiana Pechonchyk

the head of the Human Rights Information Centre

Alexander Popkov

a lawyer for the repressed Crimean journalist
Mykola Semena (Russian Federation);



Olena Lysenko

Crimean journalist

Yuriy Lukanov

Ukrainian journalist and media expert



Organiser of a side event:

Human Rights Information Center and Crimean Human Rights Group with the support of the British Embassy in Ukraine.



**CRIMEAN
HUMAN RIGHTS
GROUP**



**British Embassy
Kyiv**

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CURBING THE FREEDOM OF SPEECH, OPINION AND EXPRESSION IN CRIMEA: FACTS AND TRENDS



PURGE OF THE TELEVISION AND RADIO LANDSCAPES



RUSSIAN LEGISLATION ON EXTREMISM IS APPLIED TO CRIMEA

-  Oral statements accusing journalists of extremism, as well as demands from the Federal Security Service (FSB) and prosecutors to remove “extremist statements” from websites. For instance, the prosecution of Crimea twice notified the leadership of the ATR Crimean Tatar television channel regarding “inadmissibility of extremism”.
-  Summer 2014 – Editor-in-chief of the Crimean Tatar newspaper “Avdet”, Shevket Kaibullaev, was twice summoned for questioning to the prosecution and FSB of Simferopol.
-  June – August 2016 – 5 criminal cases started in Crimea with allegations of extremism on social networks.
-  On 18 July 2016 – a citizen of Yalta, Larisa Kitayskaya, was detained and her residence searched for alleged extremist publications in social networks.



CRIMINAL LIABILITY FOR “CALLS TO SEPARATISM”

-  In 2014 – new amendment to the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation entered into force: imprisonment for up to 5 years for “calls to separatism” (for instance, for stating that Crimea is part of Ukraine).
-  3 criminal cases launched against Crimean journalists under article 280.1; the latest case on 19 April 2016 against Nikolay Semena, Radio Liberty journalist. Law enforcement bodies forbade him to leave Crimea despite his need to get medical attention.





ILLEGAL DETENTIONS OF JOURNALISTS



In 2014 the majority of illegal detentions were perpetrated by the “Crimean Self-Defence” paramilitary group. From 15 to 19 May 2014 only (throughout preparations and commemoration of the Memorial Day for Victims of Crimean Tatar Deportation) there were 9 cases when “Crimean Self-Defence” violated journalist rights. None of these cases have yet been investigated.



On 15 January 2016 – officers of the Extremism Combating Centre attempted kidnapping an independent journalist Zair Akadyrov who had been reporting on a court case. Perpetrations by the law enforcement agencies have been left unprosecuted.



On 10 May 2016 Ukrainian journalist, Igor Burdyga, was groundlessly detained by FSB and questioned for over 6 hours.



All in all, between September 2014 and September 2016, 12 cases of unlawful detention of journalists by law enforcers took place.



REFUSALS TO REGISTER OR RE-REGISTER CRIMEAN MEDIA



From 1 April 2015 Roskomnadzor (Federal Service for Supervision of Communications, Information Technology, and Mass Media) stopped recognizing Crimean media outlets that had been registered in Ukraine. As a result of this decision, the number of media outlets registered in Crimea dropped by 88%.



Only 2 media outlets reporting in Crimean Tatar language have been able to complete re-registration in accordance with Russian legislation requirements. All in all, the Crimean Tatar language media-landscape in 2015-2016 shrunk by 5 times (from 20 to 4 media outlets).



SEARCHES AND CONFISCATION OF PROPERTY



The last two years witnessed 19 searches on property of Crimean journalists, in most cases resulting in confiscation of all digital devices that could be found.



On 19 April 2016 law enforcers launched simultaneous searches with 7 Crimean citizens linked to “Krym.Realii” website.



MAKING THE PROCESS OF MEDIA ACCREDITATION MORE CUMBERSOME



There is a chance of losing accreditation for “opinionated coverage” of the State Council of the Republic of Crimea by a media outlet.



The majority of Crimean courts through internal regulations prohibit photography or video-recording of the lobby, corridors and other premises, which is justified by “measures linked to anti-terrorist security”.



Unaccredited journalists may not enter the city council premises of Kerch, Alushta, Saki, and other cities.



BLOCKING OF THE WEBSITES AND SOCIAL MEDIA GROUPS



In October 2015 Roskomnadzor limited online access to websites of information agencies “Crimean Centre for Investigative Journalism”, “News from Crimea” and “BleackSeaNews” from the territory of Russia and Crimea.



Odnoklassniki social network blocked and then deleted a one of the largest groups that united Crimean Tatars, called “Crimea and Crimean Tatars”. The group had over 14,5 thousand members and was originally started in May 2008.



In August 2016 six websites of pro-Ukrainian media were blocked at once on the peninsula (including, for instance, the Radio Liberty “Krym.Realii” project). At the same time, the Sevastopol-based internet newspaper “Meridian Sevastopol” noted that its website was not blacklisted on the Unified Register of Domain Names that Allow to Identify Internet Websites Containing Information Prohibited for Distribution in the Russian Federation.

PRISON CELL OR HOSPITAL BED?



CRIMEAN JOURNALIST MYKOLA SEMENA IS FACING CHARGES THAT MAY GET HIM FIVE YEARS IN JAIL. AT THE SAME TIME, HE IS IN NEED OF MEDICAL ATTENTION DUE TO SEVERE SPINAL ISSUES. HIS DOCTORS CLAIMED THAT WITHOUT AN OPERATION HE IS RUNNING A RISK OF DEVELOPING A DISABILITY.

The journalist is banned from traveling from Crimea to Kyiv for treatment. Russian authorities in the illegally annexed Crimea charged him with public calls to challenge territorial integrity of the Russian Federation. This is a backlash against Mykola Semena for publicly expressing his political views.

HONEST PEOPLE HAVE TO RAISE THEIR VOICES IN SUPPORT OF MYKOLA SEMENA. THEY HAVE TO DEMAND COMPLETE WITHDRAWAL OF ALL CHARGES AGAINST HIM AND LIFT OF THE BAN TO TRAVEL OUTSIDE THE CRIMEAN PENINSULA FOR TREATMENT.

ASSAULT AGAINST FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION IN CRIMEA

FACTS AT A GLANCE:



After annexation of Crimea in the spring of 2014, all local Ukrainian TV channels were promptly shut down and replaced by Russian ones.

After the illegal annexation of Crimea, the Russian Parliament amended Article 280.1 of the Criminal Code to include a criminal penalty of five years in jail for "public incitement to violation of the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation committed with the use of media". These changes in the law are a freshly-introduced suppression tool to be used against journalists who disagree with annexation of Crimea.



On 10 March 2015, the Russian secret service, the FSB, launched a criminal case under Article 280.1 of the Criminal Code against the editor-in-chief of «BlackSeaNews» Andriy Klymenko. This happened after his speech before the Atlantic Council in Washington on «Human Rights in Crimea under Russian Occupation». Presently, the journalist faces a prison term of up to five years.

On 13 March 2015, the parents of Crimean journalist Anna Andriyevska were informed that the FSB had opened a criminal case against their daughter under article 280.1. of the Criminal Code. She is accused of writing an article about volunteers in the Ukrainian battalion «Crimea». As above, the journalist faces a prison term of up to five years.



In early August 2016 Natalia Poklonskaya, who was appointed by Moscow to serve as a «prosecutor» of Crimea, launched a shut-down campaign against six pro-Ukrainian Crimean media outlets and a number of Ukrainian media Internet sites. Poklonskaya attributed her actions to «a fight against terrorism and extremism».