

## Russia's crimes against Ukrainian and foreign independent media and iournalists



July 7, 2022.
The War Is Not Over Yet, a photo exhibition organised by PEN Ukraine and partners, was presented in Boyarka – the hometown of Maks Levin, an internationally renowned Ukrainian photojournalist killed by the Russian troops on March 13, 2022, in the Kyiv Region.

Writers, reporters, and photographers have become a central target for Russia in its war against Ukraine. Russian troops have bombarded Ukrainian cell towers, shelled vehicles emblazoned with PRESS signage, and murdered, wounded, and robbed members of the media. The crimes described here demonstrate a flagrant disregard for fundamental principles of international humanitarian law and basic human decency. In its report, *Journalists at war – Monitoring Russian occupants' crimes against independent media*<sup>1</sup> PEN Ukraine provides rolling updates, on a weekly basis, of all crimes perpetrated by the Russian invaders against representatives of independent Ukrainian and international media.

In ten months of the full-scale war, Russia has committed 470 crimes against journalists and media in Ukraine, according to the most recent report by the Institute of Mass Information<sup>2</sup>. Starting from February 24, 2022:

- 43 journalists have been killed, 8 of them while performing their professional duties: Yevhen Sakun, Brent Renaud, Pierre Zakrzewski, Oleksandra Kuvshynova, Oksana Baulina, Maks Levin, Mantas Kvedaravičius, Frédéric Leclerc-Imhoff;
- 15 journalists have been wounded;
- 14 journalists are officially considered missing, the fate of two journalists still remains unknown.

Apart from the brutal persecution of journalists, Russian attacks have been targeted against the media as institutions. Editorial offices have been bombarded with hacker attacks and threats of reprisals against personnel. In the temporarily occupied territories, entire media outlets have been silenced and transformed into Russian propaganda mouthpieces.

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¹ https://pen.org.ua/en/zhurnalisty-na-vijni-monitoryng-zlochyniv-rosijskyh-okupantiv-proty-vilnyh-media-onovlyuyetsya

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> As of January 9, 2023

According to the Institute of Mass Information<sup>3</sup>, at least 216 national, regional, and local Ukrainian media have shut down completely or partially due to Russian occupation and active combat operations in the region since the beginning of the full-scale invasion. This has been mostly the fate of regional media from Zaporizhzhia, Kherson, Khmelnytskyi, Kharkiv, Kyiv, Donetsk, Mykolaiv, Sumy, Luhansk, and Chernihiv Regions. They have been silenced because of their dedication to speaking the truth and fighting against Russian propaganda on the information frontline.

Occupation of Crimea in 2014 marked the start of Russian aggression against Ukraine, the course of which has aggravated over the next years. Since then, occupiers have limited freedom of speech by persecuting independent journalists who decided to stay and work in Crimea following the occupation. Civic journalists, most of whom are Crimean Tatars, are being systematically kidnapped and imprisoned. So-called "court hearings" against civic journalists, which take place mostly in Russia, are sham and based on fabricated evidence. The most common charges against civic journalists are "terrorism" and the "attempted seizure of power". As of December 9, 2022, at least 16 journalists are in prisons or under house arrests on trumped-up political charges in Russia and in the temporarily occupied Crimea: Osman Arifmemetov, Marlen (Suleyman) Asanov, Asan Akhtemov, Remzi Bekirov, Oleksiy Bessarabov, Vladyslav Yesypenko, Tymur Ibrahimov, Server Mustafayev, Seyran Saliyev, Amet Suleymanov, Ruslan Suleymanov, Rustem Sheykhaliyev, Iryna Danilovych, Vilen Temeryanov, Ernes Ametov, and Nariman Dzhelial, the First Deputy Chairman of the Mejlis of Crimean Tatar People, a former journalist.

## Russia's crimes against Ukrainian culture and historical heritage



Ukraine's National Hryhoriy Skovoroda Museum was destroyed on May 6 by a Russian missile strike. The photo was taken by Tetyana Teren, PEN Ukraine Executive Director, during a volunteering trip to the Kharkiv Region in June 2022.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> https://imi.org.ua/en/monitorings/435-crimes-against-journalists-and-the-media-committed-by-russia-in-half-a-year-of-the-invasion-imi-i47316

Since the beginning of the full-scale Russian invasion, 1189 objects of cultural heritage have been destroyed or seriously damaged by the Russian army<sup>4</sup>, according to the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine<sup>5</sup>. Museums and galleries, libraries and churches, monuments and memorials preserve our culture and historical memory, which are elements of our nationhood. Therefore, any attack on any such object brings far more damage than just financial losses. Destruction of cultural heritage targets our Ukrainian identity, which is one of the main aims of the Russian war against Ukraine.

On February 27, Russian invaders burned down the Ivankiv Historical-Cultural Museum, which was home to dozens of works by prominent Ukrainian folk artist Maria Prymachenko. Her paintings, luckily, were saved, however, some of the interior design items and valuable handcrafted works, as well as the building itself, were destroyed or damaged by the fire. On March 23, occupation forces destroyed the Kuindzhi Art Museum in Mariupol, which housed original works by Ivan Aivazovsky, Mykola Hlushchenko, Tetyana Yablonska, Mykhailo Derehus, and others. The fate of those paintings is currently unknown. On May 7, a Russian missile strike hit and destroyed Ukraine's National Hryhoriy Skovoroda Museum in the village of Skovorodynivka, Kharkiv Region. It burned to the ground<sup>6</sup>.

In November, the Ukrainian Armed Forces liberated Kherson and parts of the Kherson region. This was preceded by mass lootings of Kherson museums and libraries by Russian occupiers. Russian soldiers looted 15,000 objects from the **Oleksiy Shovkunenko Kherson Art Museum** along with the **Kherson Regional Museum** and other cultural venues. It was established that the Kherson Art Museum's collection was taken to the Simferopol Museum of Local Lore in occupied Crimea. The Russian occupiers also stole very valuable stock from the **Kherson Regional Library named after a writer Oles Honchar**.



Kherson Regional Library named after Oles Honchar was damaged on November 19 by Russian shelling. The photo was taken by Tetyana Teren, PEN Ukraine Executive Director, during a volunteering trip to Kherson in December 2022.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> As of January 16, 2023

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> https://restore.mkip.gov.ua/en

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Here you can find the most up-to-date list of destroyed cultural heritage in Ukraine: https://culturecrimes.mkip.gov.ua

In November 2022, the body of children's writer and poet **Volodymyr Vakulenko** was found in a grave in the Izium woods. On March 24, writer was kidnapped by Russian occupiers from his home in the village Kapytolivka near Izium. The occupiers shoved him into the bus marked with a Z-sign and took off in the direction of Izium. None of Vakulenko's relatives had seen him or heard from him since. After the liberation of the Kharkiv region in September 2022, his body was found in a mass grave. According to the police, Russian occupiers shot the writer twice using a 9-mm Makarov pistol. Vakulenko is best known as a children's writer. However, he also wrote poetry and prose, influenced by postmodernist, neoclassicist, and absurdist tendencies.

These are only a few tragic stories of cultural figures killed or kidnapped by Russia. PEN Ukraine regularly monitors losses among artists in the article *People of Culture Taken Away by the War*<sup>7</sup>. We, however, will never be able to fully understand the true extent of this tragedy. The value of contributions to Ukrainian art and culture these people could have made if it was not for Russia is unimaginable.

Daily Russian attacks do not only destroy institutions aimed at protecting our cultural heritage. Many prominent cultural figures who had been creating this exact heritage for our future generations have perished in this war either as innocent civilian victims or as members of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Actors, artists, sculptors, poets, and linguists could not remain indifferent to Russian brutality and prioritised their duty to protect their country over their work in the cultural sphere.

On May 7, **Ilya Chernilevskyi**, a poet, screenwriter, musician, and translator, was killed in the Avdiivka area as a result of the mortar shelling of the enemy. He went to fight on the frontline as a volunteer. On May 7, connection with him was lost. Information about his death was released on May 13. Ilya Chernilevskyi is the son of the famous poet, film director, and member of PEN Ukraine Stanislav Chernilevskyi.

On April 30, **Lyubov Panchenko**, a Sixtier artist, died at the age of 84. For a month, she was starving in occupied Bucha. Exhausted, she was taken to one of Kyiv's hospitals on April 2. Lyubov Panchenko was a professional Ukrainian designer, an honorary citizen of Bucha, a laureate of the Vasyl Stus Award, and a member of the Ukrainian Women's Union. She belongs to a group of artists of the 1960s who revived Ukrainian culture during the Khrushchov thaw. Before the war, she managed to save her creative heritage by passing it to the Museum of the Sixtiers Movement.

On April 23, two young actresses of the local *Concept Theater*, **Elizaveta Ochkur and Sonya Amelchikova**, were killed during the Russian shelling of Mariupol's residential areas. They both played Lucy in a stage adaptation of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, based on the book from *The Chronicles of Narnia* series.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> https://pen.org.ua/en/lyudy-kultury-yakyh-zabrala-vijna

## Russia's crimes against Ukrainian civil society



Ukrainian public activist Roman Ratushnyi in Izyum, Kharkiv Region. June 3, 2022, 6 days before his tragic death.

Photo: Twitter/@ratushnyi\_r

The most active members of Ukrainian civil society were among the first ones to join the Armed Forces to defend their homeland. In civilian life, they were the drivers of important reforms in Ukraine, helping to liberate it from the vestiges of the Russian colonial past, each in their own spheres of influence, and to maintain the eurocentric direction of development. Many prominent civil society members have fallen in battles or have been captured as prisoners of war since the beginning of the full-scale Russian invasion.

**Maksym Butkevych**, a Ukrainian human rights activist, journalist, and co-founder of the ZMINA Human Rights Centre and Hromadske Radio was taken captive by Russian occupiers. Presumably, it happened during the occupation of Hirska Hromada in the Luhansk region. On June 24th, occupiers' propagandist resources uploaded a video in which Butkevych and his comrades were being interrogated. There has been no contact with him since. As a human rights activist, he specializes in helping refugees and displaced persons, as well as countering discrimination. In March 2022, Maksym Butkevych joined the Ukrainian Armed Forces to defend Ukraine from Russian occupiers.

On June 9, **Roman Ratushnyi**, a famous Kyiv activist, head of the NGO Protect Protasiv Yar, and son of PEN Ukraine author Svitlana Povalyaeva, was killed in a battle near Izyum in the Kharkiv Region. From the first days of Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine, Roman defended his native city. After the liberation of the Kyiv region, he joined the Kholodnyi Yar brigade and fought against Russian invaders in the Sumy and Kharkiv regions.

"Roman belonged to a new generation of young Ukrainians. As a teenager, he was among the first protesters on the Maidan, demonstrating for Europe and for democracy. And ever since, Roman never stopped fighting for a better Ukraine. He fought for a corruption-free Ukraine, both as activist and journalist. He fought for a greener Ukraine, leading the movement to save a natural park in Kyiv from illegal constructions financed by oligarchs. He fought for a sovereign Ukraine, and he paid the ultimate price for it. Roman's life was taken too early, but his dream lives on. The dream of a new Ukraine, not only free, democratic and European, but also green and prosperous. A place that Ukraine's golden generation can finally feel their own," — said President of the European Commission **Ursula von der Leyen**.

