

The release of political prisoners continues in Ukraine

Civil and political rights in Ukraine. July 15 - August 4, 2019

RIGHT TO FREEDOM AND OPINION

On July 16th, Law No. 2704-VIII “On ensuring the functioning of the Ukrainian language as the state language”, passed in April 2019, entered into force. According to the evaluation of the “Uspishna Varta” human rights platform, it continues the policy of forcibly Ukrainising all spheres of public life, including the media. The law introduces **language quotas for print publications, online media, and their pages on social networks**. According to experts, the implementation of this law may lead to a change in the structure of consumption of information products in favour of online resources and reduce the market for traditional media (TV channels and the press). “Uspishna Varta” insists on the need for additional discussions with representatives of the media market about the new language law and about making appropriate changes based on the said discussions. A detailed analysis from the experts of "Uspishna Varta" can be found [here](#).



Physical violence against Ukrainian journalists and the media also remains one of the main obstacles in front of freedom of speech in Ukraine. Thus, on July 30th in Kiev activists from the right-wing radical group "Tradition and Order" rushed into the press-center of the "Ukrinform" news agency and [tried to disrupt](#) a press conference that was happening inside it. During the disorder, 5 employees of the

news agency were injured. The police initiated criminal proceedings under Article 125 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine – inflicting minor injuries. The incident was [condemned](#) by the OSCE and the European Federation of Journalists, who called on Ukrainian law enforcement bodies to investigate the case as soon as possible.

July 20th marked **3 years since the murder of the journalist Pavel Sheremet**. On this day, Kiev hosted a memorial action “Who killed Pavel? Three years without an answer”. Recall that on July 20th 2016, Pavel Sheremet entered into his car and went to work, but after a few minutes of movement the car was blown up by unknown persons. The journalist died on the spot. Despite the resonance of the crime, three years after the murder of journalist Pavel Sheremet, the public does not know the names of the orderers, organizers, or perpetrators of the murder.



Despite the substantial liberalisation of the political regime in Ukraine after the presidential election in April 2019, **in Ukraine users of social networks continue to be detained by the security agencies.** For example, on August 2nd the Security Service of Ukraine reported about an “anti-Ukrainian agitator” who had been **identified** in Sumy and who allegedly received information from representatives of the special services of the Russian Federation and spread it on the Internet. The SBU did not disclose the personal information of the “agitator”, and his face in the video is blurry.

RIGHT TO FREEDOM OF CONSCIENCE AND RELIGION



On July 27th, a procession of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC), dedicated to the 1031st anniversary of the Baptism of Russia, was held in Kiev. According to the representatives of the UOC, about 300,000 people took part in the event. **In contrast to the previous year, the event took place without significant incidents or threatening behaviour towards the participants from the side of the authorities and right-wing groups.**

On the next day, July 28th, the newly formed Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU) held its announced procession. According to representatives of this church, about 20,000 people took part in it.

As a result of these activities, it is possible to talk **about a significant decrease in the level of state intervention in religious matters, compared to the previous year.** At the same time, **in the western regions of Ukraine, the practices of forcefully capturing UOC churches and issuing threats to believers continue.**

Thus, in Lyudovishchi in the *Ternopol region*, despite the agreement reached between OCU and UOC believers about taking turns to hold services, representatives of the newly established church violated the agreement and cut the church’s locks, blocking the access of believers to the church’s entrance, and also insulted UOC believers. The provocation stopped only after the arrival of a police squad. And in the village of Nuyno in the Volyn region, officials of the regional state administration, ignoring the requests of believers, transferred the church of the UOC for the use of the OCU.

On July 29th, radical-minded activists staged a **provocation** at the Kiev-Pechersky Lavra. They attempted to enter the territory of the Lavra by car. However, they were not allowed to enter by the guards. After this, the activists proceeded on foot, broke through to the governor, and

organized a rally in the administrative building of the town. The police were called to the place of the provocation.

The conflict continues between the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU), established under the patronage of the former president Petro Poroshenko, and the UOC Kiev Patriarchate (Filaret). Thus, on July 31st, the UOC-KP filed a lawsuit against the Ministry of Culture, which cancelled the registration of this church structure. The Ministry confirmed that the OCU had all the powers and legal grounds to make decisions regarding the future of those religious organisations that were a part of the UOC-KP.

At the same time, **supporters of the OCU continue to capture the temples of the UOC-KP.** Thus, on July 30th, in the village of Petukha in the Kiev region, representatives of the OCU, together with 100 activists, [captured](#) the parish of the UOC-KP. A similar attempt to capture a parish of the UOC-KP was made by supporters of the OCU on August 1st in the village of Klavdievo-Tarasovo in the Borodyansky district of the Kiev region.

Thus, **the situation with freedom of conscience and religion in Ukraine is still quite tense.**

MONITORING OF HUMAN RIGHTS CASES

A positive factor testifying to the improvement of the situation concerning civil rights and freedoms in Ukraine is the decisions to release political prisoners. Impetus was given to this process by the decision of the Constitutional Court from June 25th, which declared as unconstitutional part 5 of article 176 of the Criminal Procedure Code of Ukraine ([see the review of “Uspishna Varta” for July 1-7](#)). Politically accused people who spent one to five years in custody without a court sentence and without an alternative were able to leave under house arrest or another measure of restraint.



Thus, on July 22nd, the Kiev Court of Appeal [released from detention](#) the Ukrainian politician Aleksandr Efremov. He spent 3 years in a pre-trial detention center without a court sentence on charges of state treason and encroaching on territorial integrity. The court changed the measure of restraint imposed on the politician to around-the-clock house arrest with the wearing of an electronic bracelet. Details about the case of Efremov can be found [here](#).

After 4 years, the doctor and publicist Igor Dzhadan (Kharkov) was also released from the pre-trial detention center on bail. On July 4th the Dzerzhinsky District Court of Kharkov issued a decision to change the measure of restraint. And already on July 12th, after bail was paid, Igor Dzhadan was released from the pre-trial detention center. More information about the case of Igor Dzhadan can be found [here](#).

On July 16th, the Svyatoshinsky Court of Kiev released from custody the representative of the “Berkut” unit **Sergey Tamtur**, who was charged in connection with the events on Maidan in 2014. He was assigned an alternative measure of restraint in the form of around-the-clock

house arrest with the wearing of an electronic bracelet. The presiding judge of the jury noted that the suspicion of him committing a crime had decreased.

However, **a number of political prisoners are still in custody**. Thus, on July 19th the court did not find the grounds to change the measure of restraint imposed on the **journalist Kirill Vyshinsky**, and thus **extended** his detention in custody until September 19th. The comments of the trial's participants can be found in this [video](#). Recall that the journalist Kirill Vyshinsky is accused of committing treason - Part 1 of Article 111 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine. This article stipulates a sanction of up to 15 years in prison. The journalist has been kept in a remand prison for more than a year without an alternative. The details of the case of Kirill Vyshinsky can be found [here](#).

On July 23rd, the Kuibyshevsky District Court of the Zaporozhye region extended for another 60 days the period of detention imposed on the businessman Andrey Tatarintsev, who is accused of financing terrorism for transferring fuel to a children's hospital located in the part of the Lugansk region not controlled by Ukraine. The lawyers of Tatarintsev intend to appeal. The details can be found [here](#).

“Uspishna Varta” also continues to **monitor the court hearings of political prisoners who had previously been released from custody**.

On July 18th, the Shevchenkivskyi Court of Kiev decided to support the motion of the prosecutors to extend the measure of restraint in the form of around-the-clock house arrest imposed on General **Aleksandr Shchegolev** for another 60 days. During the hearing, the lawyers of the accused asked for his Ukrainian passport to be returned so that he could vote in the parliamentary election, but the court did not return the document to Shchegolev. It is reported that several “activists” attended the court session and distinguished themselves by a number of provocations during the trial. More details about the case of General Aleksandr Shchegolev can be read [here](#).

Remember that you can contact the human rights defenders of “Uspishna Varta”:

by calling the toll free hotline number: 0 800 20 40 04

by sending an email to: info@uspishna-varta.com

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