

# Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

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## Responses to Information Requests

Responses to Information Requests (RIR) respond to focused Requests for Information that are submitted to the Research Directorate in the course of the refugee protection determination process. The database contains a seven-year archive of English and French RIRs. Earlier RIRs may be found on the UNHCR's [Refworld](#) website. Please note that some RIRs have attachments which are not electronically accessible. To obtain a PDF copy of an RIR attachment please email [Basesdedonnees.DatabaseUnit@irb-cisr.gc.ca](mailto:Basesdedonnees.DatabaseUnit@irb-cisr.gc.ca).

2 July 2014

### UKR104918.E

Ukraine: Situation of Yanukovich's opponents since the Euromaidan events, including high-profile individuals and journalists; state protection offered to them (2013-June 2014)  
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

#### 1. Yanukovich's Opponents

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a professor at the Graduate School of Public and International Affairs of the University of Ottawa, who has written for the international press on political issues and has conducted research on Russian history, military history and defence policy, indicated that "within government-controlled areas of Ukraine, Yanukovich's opponents are not in danger as they now control the government" (Professor 18 June 2014). A professor at the School of Political Studies of the University of Ottawa, whose research focuses on politics in Ukraine, Russia and Moldova, stated that "many well-known journalists and high-profile individuals who participated in the [events of] Euromaidan were given positions in the national and regional governments" (Professor of political science 22 June 2014). For example, media sources report that former boxer Vitali Klitschko [a top opposition leader of Yanukovich (AFP 12 Jan. 2014), "the leader of UDAR party and outspoken supporter of the Maidan protests" (Sofia News Agency 26 May 2014)], was elected as Kyiv Mayor (Reuters 26 May 2014; RIA Novosti 5 June 2014). He was also appointed by Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko as head of Kyiv City State Administration (Interfax-Ukraine 25 June 2014) on 25 June 2014 (Ukrainian News Agency 27 June 2014).

Both Professors indicated that the situation in separatist-controlled regions [such as Luhansk and Donetsk (Professor 18 June 2014)] is not the same (Professor 18 June 2014; Professor of political science 22 June 2014). According to the Professor, "[t]here were reports of beatings, kidnappings, and arrests of supporters of the current government in those areas" (18 June 2014). The Professor of political science similarly stated that there were reports of pro-Ukrainian political activists and local officials being detained and beaten by the pro-Russian separatists in Donetsk and Luhansk regions, as well as in Crimea (Professor of political science 22 June 2014). A UN press release similarly states that armed separatists in eastern Ukraine "have used killings, abductions and torture to instill a 'climate of intimidation and fear'" (UN 18 June 2014).

For example, according to the Professor, in the town of Horlivka [in the Donetsk region], a town councillor, Volodymyr Rybak, was kidnapped by rebel militiamen and murdered (Professor 18 June 2014). Rybak was a member of the *Batkivshchyna* [Fatherland, also sometimes translated as Motherland (*PHW* 2013, 1507)] party led by Youlia Tymoshenko (Reuters 23 Apr. 2014). According to the *Political Handbook of the World 2013 (PHW)*, *Batkivshchyna* was in the opposition's anti-Yanukovich coalition during October 2012 legislative elections (*PHW* 2013, 1507). Reuters also reports that Rybak "was mobbed by a hostile, pro-Russian crowd before he disappeared" (Reuters 23 Apr. 2014). According to Ukrainian police, Rybak and another unidentified man "appeared to have been tortured and dumped alive in a river to drown" near Slavyansk (*ibid.*). Reuters reports that, according to Ukraine's security service, "a rogue officer and a member

of Russian military intelligence were involved in Rybak's killing" (ibid.). However, Slavyansk's self-declared separatist mayor "blamed Ukraine's Right Sector nationalist group for the murder" (ibid.). Further and corroborating information on the incident could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

The Professor expressed the opinion that Ukrainian government "is not in a position to provide any protection in the areas under rebel control" (Professor 18 June 2014). For more information on the security situation and state protection in Ukraine, please refer to Response to Information Request UKR104895.

## 2. Journalists

According to the Professor, "the government and the rebels have detained journalists," but in most cases they have been released after several days (Professor 18 June 2014). Without providing details, the Professor of political science also stated that there were cases of Ukrainian journalists being beaten and detained by pro-Russian separatists in Donbas region (Professor of political science 22 June 2014). A UN report on the human rights situation in Ukraine states that, according to the Ukrainian Ministry of the Interior, between April 2014 and 7 June 2014, "armed groups in the eastern region abducted 387 people, among them 39 journalists" (UN 15 June 2014, para. 196). According to a Russian LifeNews TV channel reporter who was detained for a week in May 2014 by Ukraine's National Guard in Donetsk region, "[a]ny journalist working in Ukraine where armed standoff continues in the country's eastern regions is in mortal danger" (VOR 25 May 2014). In an interview with Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), a representative of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) stated that journalists in Ukraine's conflict areas "face violence, seizure, and destruction of equipment, and threats on a daily basis" (RFE/RL 16 Apr. 2014).

Sources report incidents involving journalists detained in eastern Ukraine, including the following:

- According to the Professor, Irma Krat, a journalist, was detained by rebels in Slovyansk in April 2014 and "has yet to be released" (Professor 18 June 2014). *The Independent* similarly states that Irma Krat was detained in Slovyansk by separatists (21 Apr. 2014). The Professor stated that she was a "prominent activist in the protests against President Yanukovich" (Professor 18 June 2014). She was "accused by the rebels of espionage and connections with the far right 'Right Sector' organization" (ibid.). *The Independent* also notes that she was accused of belonging to an extremist right-wing group, as well as taking part in the torture of a journalist and having an outdated press card (21 Apr. 2014).
- On 16 April 2014 three Russian television crew members were captured by Ukrainian authorities in the eastern region of Kharkiv and released on 17 April 2014 (RFE/RL 17 Apr. 2014). According to RFE/RL, reasons for their detention "have not been provided" by the Ukrainian government (ibid.).
- The UN report states that on 25 April 2014, a journalist from Lutsk was abducted and detained for 23 days by armed groups in Donetsk (UN 15 June 2014, para. 212). According to the report, he was beaten, tortured with electric shocks, and his abductors reportedly "tried to cut off one of his fingers" (ibid.).
- The Voice of Russia (VOR), a Moscow-based English-language radio station, reports that on 9 May 2014, two LifeNews journalists were captured by Ukraine's National Guard near Kramatorsk in Donetsk region (VOR 25 May 2014). They were released on 25 May 2014 (ibid.).
- Two sources report that western journalists were detained by pro-Russian forces in the town of Slovyansk (Reuters 9 May 2014; RFE/RL 2 May 2014) on 2 May 2014 (ibid.). According to RFE/RL, "American reporters for CBS television news and the online site BuzzFeed, and a team with Britain's Sky News" were briefly detained by rebels (ibid.). RFE/RL reports that a male member of the team was reportedly beaten by the rebels (ibid.).
- Without providing details, the UN report indicates that in May 2014, three journalists were released after being detained by armed groups because they covered the elections in the Donetsk region (UN 15 June 2014, para. 204). The report further states that two of the journalists were "badly beaten" and had to be hospitalized after their release (ibid.).
- The VOR reports that two Russian journalists of Russian TV Channel Zvezda were captured by Ukraine's National Guard and the Right Sector far-right ultranationalist movement on 6 June 2014 near the city of Slavyansk (VOR 11 June 2014). However, RT News, an English-language news channel network, reports that the journalists were detained for two days by government forces on accusations of espionage and "gathering intelligence and video data" (RT News 8 June 2014). According to VOR, the journalists were beaten and "violence was used against them" (VOR 11 June 2014). On 9 June 2014, they were released and returned to Moscow (ibid.).

Further or corroborating information on the incidents could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

According to the UN,

[t]he escalation in criminal activity [in Donetsk and Luhansk] resulting in human rights abuses is no longer limited to targeting journalists, elected representatives, local politicians, civil servants and civil society activists. Abductions, detentions, acts of ill-treatment and torture, and killings by armed groups are now affecting the broader population of the two eastern regions, which are now marked by an atmosphere of intimidation and consequent fear. (UN 15 June 2014, para. 4)

Without providing details, RFE/RL reported on 2 May 2014 that "several Ukrainian journalists, officials and ordinary citizens have gone missing in Slovyansk in recent weeks" (RFE/RL 2 May 2014). For additional examples of abductions and detentions of journalists, activists and civilians, among others in eastern Ukraine, please refer to the Section VB of the UN report (UN 15 June 2014, VB). The report is attached to this Response.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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## Additional Sources Consulted

**Oral sources:** Attempts to contact the following were unsuccessful within the time constraints of this Response: academics at the following universities: Harvard University, The New School in New York, Oxford University, University of Alberta, Western University; Party of Regions and the Svoboda Party.

Academics at the following universities could not provide information within the time constraints of this Response: Baylor University; University of Toronto; University of Waterloo.

**Internet sites, including:** ABC News; Amnesty International; *Argumenti i Fakti*; CNN World; Deutsche Welle; EUObserver; Euromaidanpress.com; Freedom House; Human Rights Watch; Institute of European, Russian and Eurasian Studies, Carleton University; International Crisis Group; Kyiv International Institute of Sociology; *Kyiv Post*; Minority Rights Group International; *The Moscow Times*; *The New York Times*; Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe; Reporters Without Borders; RT.com; Ukraine – Prosecutor's General Office of Ukraine, State Border Guard Service of Ukraine; *The Ukrainian Week*; *The Ukrainian Weekly*; United Nations – Refworld; Voice of Russia; *The Washington Post*.

## Attachment

United Nations (UN). 15 June 2014. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. *Report on the Human Rights Situation in Ukraine*. <<http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/UA/HRMMUReport15June2014.pdf>> [Accessed 25 June 2014]

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