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Attacks on the Press in 2011 - Russia

Key Developments

- Convictions help impunity rate, but another murder is reported.
- As tens of thousands protest election, journalists are detained.

Authorities detained at least six journalists covering December protests over flawed parliamentary elections, but in a rare phenomenon Kremlin-controlled television reported on demonstrations that brought tens of thousands of Muscovites onto the streets. In December, a gunman killed the founder of the weekly *Chernovik*, the 20th work-related murder in Russia since 2000. CPJ advocated extensively against impunity in anti-press attacks, calling on the European Commission to press the issue in meetings with Prime Minister Vladimir Putin. Authorities made progress in two murder cases. In April, two suspects were found guilty in the 2009 murders of journalist Anastasiya Baburova and human rights lawyer Stanislav Markelov; in May, the defendants were sentenced to lengthy prison terms. The suspected gunman and several suspected organizers in the 2006 killing of Anna Politkovskaya were indicted. But impunity prevailed in the savage beatings of journalists Mikhail Beketov and Oleg Kashin. Authorities retaliated against one international reporter. Luke Harding, Moscow correspondent for *The Guardian* of London, was barred from re-entering the country in February after writing about U.S. diplomatic cables disclosed by WikiLeaks that described Kremlin officials in unflattering terms.

Analysis: Despite Progress, Impunity Still the Norm in Russia

Russian investigators have adopted a more serious tone when discussing unsolved journalist murders, but officials still lack the will to apprehend masterminds of the killings. The lack of convictions takes a serious toll on investigative journalism. Analysis by Nina Ognianova

[Refworld note: The sections that follow represent a best effort to transcribe onto a single page information that appears in tabs on the CPJ's own pages, which also include a number of graphics not readily reproducible here. Refworld researchers are therefore strongly recommended to check against the original report: [Attacks on the Press in 2011.](#)]

Impunity Index ranking: 9th

CPJ's Impunity Index calculates unsolved journalist murders as a percentage of each country's population. In 2011, Russia showed a slight improvement in its Impunity Index ranking due to the convictions in Baburova's killing.

CPJ's 2011 Impunity index:

1. Iraq
2. Somalia
3. Philippines
4. Sri Lanka
5. Colombia
6. Afghanistan
7. Nepal
8. Mexico
- 9. Russia**
10. Pakistan
11. Bangladesh
12. Brazil
13. India

Convictions in Baburova killing: 2

In April, a Moscow jury found ultranationalists Nikita Tikhonov and Yevgeniya Khasis guilty of murdering Baburova and Markelov. In May, a judge sentenced Tikhonov, the convicted gunman, to life in prison and his accomplice, Khasis, to an 18-year term. In only two of 19 journalist slayings since 2000 have authorities obtained murder convictions.

Six other journalist murder cases have gone to trial:

October 2004: A Togliatti district court judge acquitted a defendant in the killing of editor Aleksei Sidorov a year earlier.

May 2006: A Moscow jury acquitted two defendants in the July 2004 murder of editor Paul Klebnikov.

August 2007: A court in Russia's west-central republic of Tatarstan convicted five members of a criminal gang in the 2000 murder of journalist Igor Domnikov. The masterminds are at large.

April 2008: A Tula district court acquitted a man in the December 2005 attack that caused the January 2006 death of reporter Vagif Kochetkov.

February 2009: The three initial defendants in the October 2006 murder of reporter Anna Politkovskaya were acquitted by a Moscow jury.

March 2010: An Interior Ministry officer was found guilty on a lesser charge of negligent homicide in the August 2008 killing of publisher Magomed Yevloyev. He was soon released.

Years' recovery for editor: 3

Neighbors found Beketov, editor of an independent newspaper, lying unconscious in a pool of blood in the front yard of his home in Khimki on November 13, 2008. Attackers struck to kill: They broke his skull, smashed the fingers of both hands, broke his legs, and left him for dead in the freezing cold. Beketov spent three weeks in a coma and underwent multiple operations including leg and finger amputation. He also lost his ability to speak. No one has been arrested in the attack.

Other brutal attacks on Russian reporters:

March 10, 2009: Two assailants struck Vadim Rogozhin on the head with heavy objects as he was leaving the elevator of his apartment building in the southern city of Saratov. Hospitalized with a fractured skull, he was unconscious for weeks. Rogozhin regularly reported on high-level corruption. No one has been convicted.

April 27, 2010: Unidentified men struck newspaper editor Arkady Lander with metal rods at his apartment in the southern city of Sochi, leaving him with a concussion and a broken skull. Lander's newspaper had covered municipal elections from a pro-opposition angle. No one has been prosecuted.

November 6, 2010: Kashin, a Moscow reporter and a blogger, was struck with metal rods by two attackers. Kashin was hospitalized with a broken skull, jaw, fingers, and leg, and spent a week in a medically induced coma. Kashin was critical of ultranationalist groups and regional authorities. His assailants remain at large.

Arrests in Politkovskaya case: 2

In June, authorities indicted Rustam Makhmudov, the suspected gunman in Politkovskaya's killing. Two months later, investigators arrested a retired police lieutenant colonel on charges he helped carry out the crime. Two other suspects – already in custody in other cases – were named conspirators. Arrests in journalist murders are rare.

Other cases in which officials have identified suspects:

July: Two years after the killing of journalist and human rights defender Natalya Estemirova in the North Caucasus, investigators announced that the sole suspect in her murder was a Chechen separatist whom regional authorities had previously declared killed in a special operation. That theory has been disputed by Estemirova's colleagues and relatives.

June: Samara Investigative Committee head Vitaly Gorstkin told CPJ that investigators had identified a suspected gunman in the April 2002 murder in Togliatti of newspaper editor Valery Ivanov. Gorstkin said the suspect was believed to have fled Russia. Relatives and colleagues were skeptical; the suspect was widely believed to have been killed.

Killed in 2011: 1

An assassin ambushed Gadzhimurad Kamalov, founder of the independent Dagestani weekly

Chernovik, which probed sensitive topics such as government corruption, human rights abuses, and Islamic radicalism. Although deadly, anti-press violence had slowed in the two years prior to the slaying, Russia remained one of the deadliest nations for the press. Dagestan, with four journalist murders since 2000, is especially dangerous.

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