

The problems of harassment of journalists in Eastern Europe: the case of Ukraine

Alexey Semenov, CIS-EMO Political Analyst

Freedom of the press and freedom of speech are among the most important civil liberties, but in many countries of the OSCE region, there are still cases of political harassment of journalists for their direct professional activities.

For example, in May 2018, members of the Security Service of Ukraine broke into the office of the Russia-related “RIA Novosti Ukraine” News Agency. They carried out a search, which lasted for about eight hours. At the same time, the head of the news agency Kirill Vyshinsky was detained in Kiev. He is suspected of supporting the self-proclaimed republics of Donbass and high treason. He is tried for publishing articles of several authors considered controversial by the Ukrainian authorities, however, these articles were quite neutral, there was nothing in them that would encroach upon the statehood of Ukraine. Thus, Vyshinsky was arrested for his direct professional activities. Recall that according to the Helsinki Final Act, the OSCE participating States have undertaken to promote conditions that allow journalists from one participating country to conduct their professional activities in another. The actions of the Ukrainian authorities against Vyshinsky are completely unacceptable.

In addition, in early August 2018, the well-known Ukrainian journalist and video blogger Anatoly Shariy, who received political asylum in the EU because of the persecution in Ukraine, stated about the attempts of the National Police of Ukraine to find out his whereabouts. Pechersky Court of Kiev issued a resolution allowing investigators of the National Police to contact Google, which owns YouTube video hosting, requesting data on the YouTube channel of Mr. Shariy. Investigators want to know the geolocation of Mr. Shariy, the location of Wi-Fi points, the IP address from which his channel operates and other personal data that allows identifying the exact location of a person: information about the operator or provider, the location of the base station, language, time zone and location of the mobile phone. Based on the text of the decree, all this takes place within the framework of the criminal case opened in 2018 about incitement of religious and national discord, but there are no concrete examples of such kindling in the court's decision. It should be noted that Mr. Shariy actively criticizes the Ukrainian authorities, which gives grounds to make an assumption about the political nature of this case. Earlier, in February 2018, the editors of his website “Shariy.net” received threats from the “C14” (“Sich”), a radical Ukrainian nationalist group.

In addition, I would like to recall the murders in Ukraine of such journalists as Oles Buzina, Vyacheslav Veremiy, Pavel Sheremet, the arrest of Ruslan Kotsaba, and government attacks on such media as “Vesti.ua”, “Strana.ua”, “Skhemy”, “Inter”, “RIA Novosti Ukraine”, as well as numerous incidents of attacks against journalists. All these facts raise serious concerns about the situation with freedom of the press in Ukraine.