



Activism 2020:

A MONITORING REPORT
ON PERSECUTION OF ACTIVISTS
AND HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

JANUARY–MARCH 2020

Activism 2020: A Monitoring Report on Persecution of Activists and Human Rights Defenders in the Government-Controlled Territory of Ukraine (January–March 2020) / O. Dmitriev, A. Moskvychova, T. Pechonchyk; ZMINA. Kyiv, 2020, 32 p.

The report has been prepared by the ZMINA Human Rights Centre as a part of the Increasing the Role and Protection of Human Rights Defenders in Ukraine project, in partnership with the Netherlands Helsinki Committee and with financial support by the European Union.

The views of the report's authors do not reflect the official position of the European Union.



The ZMINA Human Rights Centre works in the field of protecting the freedom of speech, freedom of movement, opposing discrimination, preventing torture and cruel treatment, fighting impunity, supporting human rights defenders and activists in the Ukrainian territory, including the occupied Crimea, and defending the rights of people who have suffered from the armed conflict. The organization conducts information campaigns, education programs, works to monitor and document cases of human rights violations, prepares studies and analyses, and achieves change through national and international advocacy.

This publication may contain graphic depictions of incidents or victims of attacks or persecution which may shock, affect or provoke anxiety in some readers.

See more details about the ZMINA Human Rights Centre and its activities at:

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INTRODUCTION

The team of the ZMINA Human Rights Centre gladly presents a monitoring report on the pressure and persecution of activists in the 1st quarter of 2020, created as a part of the Increasing the Role and Protection of Human Rights Defenders in Ukraine project, which ZMINA implements in partnership with the Netherlands Helsinki Committee with financial support by the European Union.

The purpose of this report is to evaluate the situation with persecution of and pressure on public activists in January–March 2020, to describe the new incidents and newly discovered circumstances in older cases of attacks against human rights defenders which became known in this period.

Given the existence of an urgent problem of protecting civil society actors and the discovery of gaps in legislation and the work of law enforcement agencies, the main purpose of this report is to provide full and up-to-date information about the situation with persecution of and pressure on human rights defenders and activists to representatives of the government, media, international missions and partners, and the wider public.

In the context of decentralization, mobilization of efforts in the solidarity struggle against the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, socioeconomic perturbations, the topic of persecution of activists and human rights defenders, as well as impunity for this persecution, has been gaining increased relevance for the promotion and advocacy of human rights standards, monitoring of the government's fulfillment of its obligations, and protection of social interests.

We hope that the information described in the report will be useful for analyzing and drawing conclusions about the security climate for human rights defenders and activists in the period in question.

METHODOLOGY: WHAT WE MONITORED AND HOW

The general monitoring methodology was based on the developed monitoring and documenting procedures¹, approved by the Coalition for Protecting Civil Society and published on November 20, 2018; as well as on the updated monitoring and analysis methodology used in drafting the analytical report *The Situation of Human Rights Defenders and Civil Activists in Ukraine in 2019*².

The monitoring includes descriptions of the cases of attacks, persecution and pressure on human rights defenders and activists in the territories controlled by the Ukrainian government which took place in January–March 2020, as well as some newly discovered circumstances of the cases involving similar incidents in past periods.

OBJECT OF THE MONITORING

The object of the monitoring are the activities of Ukrainian human rights defenders and civil activists, their associations and organizations, as defined by the *Guidelines on the Protection of Human Rights Defenders of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights*³ and the *UN Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms*⁴.

Based on these documents, by “**human rights defenders**,” we mean any persons who, individually or in cooperation with other people, promote and defend human rights, particularly advocate for civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, the rule of law, non-discrimination for any characteristic, regardless of their professional occupation or other status,⁵ who engage in these activities by peaceful means and recognize the universal nature of all human rights for all people (without any distinction by race, skin color, gender, language, religion, political or other beliefs, national or social background, ownership of property, birth, age, or any other circumstance), and do not aim to promote corporate or business interests. Following the UN Human Rights Council Resolution, we will also focus our attention on the activists who are engaged in defending the rights of women and the LGBT community, environmental and land rights, corporate responsibility issues, representatives of patient organizations and initiatives, as well as those working on the issues of increasing transparency and accountability of government and local self-government bodies, exposing cases of corruption and use of violence for which the state, commercial structures and non-governmental actors are to blame.

¹ Documenting Methodology of the Coalition for Protecting Civil Society – <https://bit.ly/2xFTUPG>

² Analytical Report *The Situation of Human Rights Defenders and Civil Activists in Ukraine in 2019* – <https://bit.ly/3bCuHoc>

³ *Guidelines on the Protection of Human Rights Defenders of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights* – <https://bit.ly/2wgPWwK>

⁴ *UN Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms* – <https://bit.ly/3dYdTtP>

⁵ The information about attacks and pressure on political figures, officials, self-government representatives, attorneys and lawyers, journalists was taken into account in the cases when the motive for their persecution was their public activism or actions in defense of human rights.

Within the monitoring, the concepts of a “*human rights defender*” and “*activist*” were viewed as interpenetrating terms with an understanding that civil activists do not always limit their activities to the principle of universal human rights and the use of exclusively peaceful means. In general, the term “activist” is used in the sense of “*an active member of a collective; public figure*”; “*someone who uses or supports decisive actions (such as public protests) in support of or in opposition to one of the sides in a contested issue*”; “*someone who is convinced of the need for political or social change and participates in such measures as public protests to achieve this change*”; “*people who promote or implement a certain idea without acting for their own direct personal gain.*”

To generalize for the monitoring purposes, the concept of a “**civil activist**” is used to refer to people who, individually or in cooperation with other people, engage in decisive actions to achieve political or social change, to stop violations of law or other negative activities, who propagate and implement socially beneficial ideas, acting, among other things, for the purpose of promoting or defending human rights, social interest, without a sole intention of personal gain.

However, we reserve the right not to include in our monitoring reports the cases of persecution of activists or organizations for which there are good reasons to believe that they have used violent actions or calls to violence against third persons. At the same time, we do not consider attacks on or politically motivated persecution of these people legitimate or legal and do not approve of such actions in any way.

SUBJECT OF THE MONITORING

The subject of the monitoring are various forms of obstructing the activities of human rights defenders and civil activists who act in defense of social interests, which took place in Ukraine in the first quarter of 2020. These can include illegal restrictions in the sphere of freedom of association, freedom of speech, freedom of peaceful gatherings, and freedom of movement against human rights defenders and activists who act in defense of social interests; the use of physical violence (murders, beating); damage of property; cases of politically motivated legal persecution (particularly through criminal, civil or administrative procedures); discreditation campaigns; surveillance; privacy violations; threats and other types of pressure.

For the purposes of the monitoring, we use the term “*incident*” in the text to refer to an individual event or a series of events when a human rights defender or a civil activist became a victim of persecution as a result of their activities.

By “*physical attack*,” we mean dealing bodily injuries of various degrees, from the ones that caused a brief health disorder or minor loss of productivity and to the injuries that pose a danger to life at the moment they are suffered, or ones that cause the loss of any organ or its functions, a mental illness or any other health disorder associated with sustained loss of working ability or irreparable bodily disfigurement. One of the most severe kinds of physical attacks is “*murder*,” causing another person’s death by intention or negligence, violently taking their life.

By “*damage of property*,” we mean intentional destruction or damage of property which belonged to the activist or organizational victim or was used by them (in particular, by spoiling property, arson, explosion or any other means).

“*Discreditation*” refers to intentional actions aimed at undermining the credibility, image and trustworthiness of human rights defenders, civil activists or their associations by creating and

spreading unreliable information and/or information that includes sensitive personal details. Discreditation campaigns often unfold through social media or conventional media with questionable reputation and may contain signs of manipulation, “*covert PR*”⁶ and other materials that violate the standards of journalism.

By “*violation of privacy*,” we mean a set of actions when the victim’s right to protection of their personal information is violated, or when information about a person is used by other people who do not have the right to access, own or dispose of this information; violation of the requirements for storing and using confidential information and information intended for internal office use, etc. One of the ways to violate privacy is “*surveillance*,” illegal covert observation of a subject or visual observation using video recording, photography, specialized technical surveillance equipment, performed without the approval of an investigative judge.

We base our definition of the concept of “*politically motivated legal persecution*” on Paragraph 3 of PACE Resolution 1900 (2012)⁷, meaning by this the cases:

- a) when criminal and administrative actions have been used in violation of one of the fundamental guarantees set out in the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and its Protocols, in particular freedom of thought, conscience and religion, freedom of expression and information, freedom of assembly and association;
- b) when criminal and administrative actions have been used for legitimate actions in defense of social interests without connection to any offence;
- c) when criminal and administrative actions are clearly out of proportion to the offence the person has been found guilty of or is suspected of;
- d) when criminal and administrative actions have been used in a discriminatory manner as compared to other persons;
- e) when criminal and administrative actions are the result of proceedings which were clearly unfair and this appears to be connected with actions in defense of human rights or social interests.

Within the monitoring, we monitor persecution both by governmental and non-governmental actors, unidentified individuals; persecution of both activists and human rights defenders themselves and their family members, loved ones and acquaintances if this persecution is associated with their human rights advocacy / public activities.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION AND VERIFICATION STANDARDS

The monitoring and gathering of information involve describing cases of attacks, persecution and pressure on human rights defenders and activists, verifying the circumstances of the incidents, and examining the context using a number of indicators to determine each incident’s connection to the victim’s activities. The preferred way to collect information is direct contact with the victims, primary reports by victims themselves and (or) witnesses of the incidents, their relatives, legal representatives. Documentation is also conducted by means of media and social media monitoring; analyzing open sources and interviewing third parties, including remote interviewing; exchanging information with other non-governmental organizations and initiatives, law enforcement agencies; monitoring court trials; and collecting official information from the authorities by sending requests from the ZMINA Human Rights Centre and its partners. Visiting missions can be organized to verify individual cases that happened in other regions of Ukraine.

⁶ By *covert PR*, we mean intentional covert good or bad publicity presented as news, auteur texts, analytics, television programs, etc.

⁷ Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. Resolution 1900 (2012) – <https://bit.ly/3dJHGpS>

Information collection is based on the principle of semi-structured interviews with a protocol record. Information verified by default is information from the official resources of state government and local self-government bodies, law enforcement agencies, legislation and regulations, and replies to official addresses or requests for public information sent for the purposes of the monitoring; first-hand information from the victim (witness), their close relatives or individuals who represent their interests.

Each incident is documented according to a standard operational procedure; documentation includes the following information: a) description of the incident that has happened (specifying the date, location, type of persecution, information about the persecuted person, etc.); b) information about the persecuted person and their previous human rights / public activities; c) information about the connection between the incident that has happened and the human rights / public activities of the injured party; d) information about actions taken regarding the incident by law enforcement agencies or other state government or local self-government bodies.

ASSUMPTIONS

The list of cases of obstruction of the activities of human rights defenders and civil activists who act in public interests which is included in the report is not exhaustive, because it contains only the cases which became known to the ZMINA Human Rights Centre and its partners. The document only reflects the information which was successfully documented and verified as cases of attacks, persecution and pressure on activists and human rights defenders in accordance with the definitions of this methodology. Difficulties with collecting and documenting information are caused by the fact that in a number of cases, activist victims do not address the media or law enforcement agencies due to distrust or fears of making the situation worse.

Nevertheless, the monitoring will give a general idea about the atmosphere in which civil society actors and the professional community that defends human rights and acts in public interest have to work in Ukraine. The goal of the report is not so much to exhaustively analyze all cases as to cover and analyze the environment around human rights defenders' and activists' work, as well as to identify and generalize certain trends.

SAFETY

Not all descriptions of incidents that happened in the analyzed period of time may be included in the public part of the report for the purposes of safety and protection of the victims, or in the cases when these individuals want to avoid spreading this information. In a number of cases, information in the report may be anonymized at the victim's request.

AUTHORSHIP

This monitoring has been prepared by the ZMINA Human Rights Centre as a part of the *Increasing the Role and Protection of Human Rights Defenders in Ukraine* project, in partnership with the Netherlands Helsinki Committee and with financial support by the European Union. Reprint or other use of this material is welcomed under the condition that the authors are mentioned and that it is done for non-commercial purposes.

SITUATION AND TRENDS: JANUARY–MARCH 2020

In the monitoring period, we registered 23 incidents in the territory controlled by Ukraine: 7 in January, 10 in February and 6 in March. Most of them took place in Kyiv (10), Kyiv Region and Odesa Region (2 in each), but we also registered incidents in Vinnytsia Region, Lviv Region, Dnipropetrovsk Region, Donetsk Region, Rivne Region, Zhytomyr Region, Zhytomyr Region, Chernivtsi Region, Zaporizhia Region and Zakarpattia Region—one incident in each.

GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION

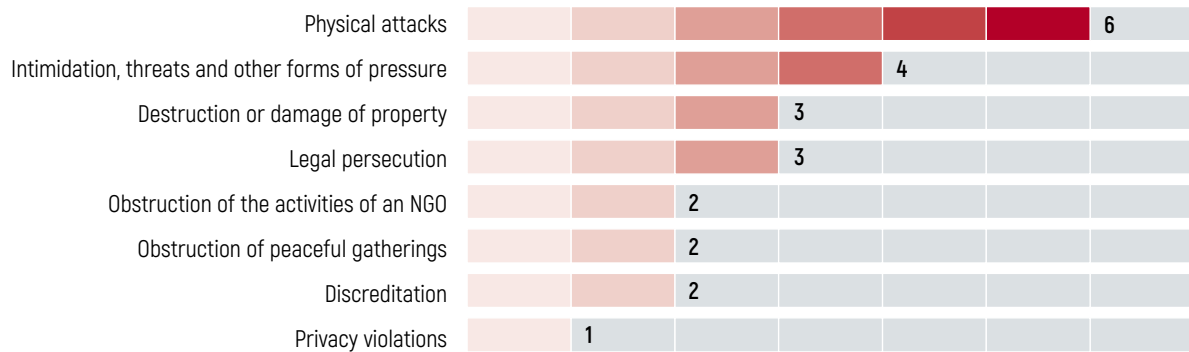


Of all the recorded cases, 6 incidents involved physical aggression against civil activists; 4 involved intimidation, threats and other forms of pressure against them; 3 involved destruction or damage of property. There were also 3 cases with signs of legal persecution (that is, opening criminal investigations or civil lawsuits without any connection to an offence, or with disproportionately severe punishment for a minor offence). Two cases were categorized as obstruction of peaceful gatherings, and another two as obstruction of activities of non-governmental organizations (these include, in particular, disrupted educational events); two more cases were categorized as attempts to discredit the activities of activists. One case was related to violation of privacy and involved publication of information about an activist which could not be obtained from open sources.

It should be noted that a significant number of the incidents we described involved several types of persecution—for instance, when attacks were preceded by threats, when events were disrupted due to threats, or when privacy violations were intended to discredit an activist. In these cases, we

tried to single out the main or the more serious type of persecution, and in our calculations, we focused on the dominant type.

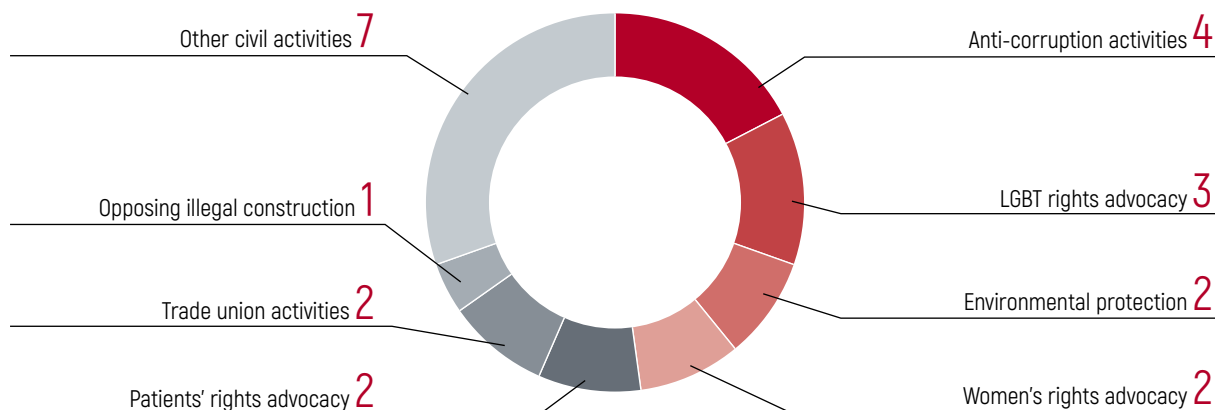
TYPES OF PERSECUTION



The most high-risk types of activities which could be categorized according to our methodology included fighting corruption (in three months, 4 cases of persecution of activists engaged in these activities were recorded) and protection of LGBTI people's rights (3 cases). At the same time, we described two cases in each of the following categories: women's rights activists (this includes two attacks—in Kyiv and in Lviv—after the March 8 demonstrations in these cities), representatives of patient organizations and initiatives, trade union activists, and environmental activists.

However, most types of activities of the activists featured in the monitoring in these three months (7) cannot be categorized according to our methodology. In particular, these are the activities of bloggers and other public figures who cover several problematic topics at the same time, which makes it difficult to single out the dominant one; or, for instance, when pressure against a human rights advocate (in this case specifically, publication of his personal information in a right-wing radical Telegram channel) was not due to his main activities, but allegedly due to his participation in a discussion of far-right violence, which was specified by the publication's author himself.

TYPES OF ACTIVITIES



In general, the activities of public social media accounts, particularly Telegram channels, which published photos and other personal information of activists in the period in question have raised concern among human rights advocates.⁸

⁸ Declaration of inadmissibility of pressure against human rights activists from far-right organizations (Заява про неприпустимість тиску на правозахисників з боку ультраправих організацій) / ZMINA, March 3, 2020: <https://zmينا.ua/statements/zayava-pro-nepriypustymist-tysku-na-pravozahysnykiv-z-boku-ultrapravyyh-organizacij/>

In addition, in the monitoring period, the tendency of the past few years with attempts to limit the right to public gatherings in defense of LGBTI rights was observed; in particular, this was attempted by some Chernivtsi City Council members who registered a draft decision to ban LGBTI-themed events, although such decisions had been made earlier and vetoed by the mayor (see the Overview of the Incidents chapter).

Digital threats for representatives of the civil sector remain relevant this year as well. According to the findings of the Digital Security Lab monitoring, in three months, 23 separate incidents and one phishing campaign against a number of civil activists were registered. According to this information, the campaign was held in January⁹ and February¹⁰ and included phishing emails wrote for specific persons deliberately—for example, for the activists of the Who Ordered the Assassination of Katia Handziuk? initiative, the Cannabis March for Freedom initiative, Protect Protasiv Yar initiative and the Vidsich movement.

In March,¹¹ in turn, according to the Digital Security Lab's information, the dominant activities were attempts to hack email and social media accounts. One of them, in particular, involved an attempt to hack a Facebook account with two-factor authentication by intercepting an SMS, and another was an attempt to hack an organizational website.

At the same time, we came to know about the end of consideration of a court case against the activists of the initiative to protect Lake Kachyne in Kyiv from development, which was initiated by a civil lawsuit from the developer, which the ZMINA Human Rights Center and its partners included in their analytical report on *The Situation of Human Rights Advocates in the Ukrainian Territories Controlled by the Government: Three Years after the Maidan*¹² in 2016.

On January 24, 2020, the Kyiv Court of Appeals passed the decision¹³ to cancel the first-instance court decision to impose an about 200,000 UAH fine on the activists in favor of one of the contractors that wanted to build a high-rise apartment building on the lake's location and accused the activists of supposedly obstructing the performance of "economic activities." The consideration of the plaintiff's appeal was denied, according to the initiative's representative Tamara Kharchylava.

Lake Kachyne is located in the middle of the Pozniaky residential neighborhood in Kyiv. Starting from 2015, it was surrounded by confrontation: the Zhytloinvest-UKB Communal Company planned to construct a high-rise building on the water reservoir's location and partially filled it with soil. The developer's representatives explained this by saying that the lake was allegedly not a natural water reservoir, but a result of human activities. The building which was planned to be constructed on the location was supposedly intended to accommodate the deceived investors of the Elita-Centre. In the end, through an expert analysis and discovering Lake Kachyne in old maps of Kyiv, the activists achieved its recognition as a water reservoir.¹⁴

⁹ Digital threats for civil activists and journalists: January 2020 (Цифрові загрози для громадських активістів та журналістів: січень 2020) / Digital Security Lab, February 14, 2020: <https://dslua.org/publications/tsyfrovi-zahrozy-dlia-hromads-kykh-aktyvistiv-ta-zhurnalistiv-sichen-2020/>.

¹⁰ Digital threats for civil activists and journalists: February 2020 (Цифрові загрози для громадських активістів та журналістів: лютий 2020) / Digital Security Lab, March 16, 2020: <https://dslua.org/publications/tsyfrovi-zahrozy-dlia-hromads-kykh-aktyvistiv-ta-zhurnalistiv-liuty-2020/>.

¹¹ Digital threats for civil activists and journalists: March 2020 (Цифрові загрози для громадських активістів та журналістів: березень 2020) / Digital Security Lab, April 6, 2020: <https://dslua.org/publications/tsyfrovi-zahrozy-dlia-hromads-kykh-aktyvistiv-ta-zhurnalistiv-berezen-2020/?fbclid=IwAR32TRDdGu6HWpHuuq8dPDVn9E3bVzut8mEk1ducaOyTvi1h8lNYnl2TOY8>.

¹² The Situation of Human Rights Advocates in the Ukrainian Territories Controlled by the Government: Three Years after the Maidan (Становище правозахисників на підконтрольних уряду територіях України: три роки після Майдану): https://zmina.ua/content/uploads/sites/2/2019/09/Stanovyshhe-pravozahysnykiv-na-pidkontrolnykh-uryadu-terytoriyah-Ukrayiny.pdf?fbclid=IwAR1q62o6CIEj7hHdxSbhphiR06d6hvWT_rd_GKJT8sXirNMIZybf55NxJM.

¹³ Lake Kachyne defenders won the case against the developer who demanded that they pay 200,000 UAH for "dismantling the fences" / ZMINA, January 24, 2020: <https://zmina.info/news/apelyaczijnyj-sud-zvilnyv-vid-splaty-bagatotsyachnogo-shtrafu-aktyvistiv-yaki-vystupaly-proty-zabudovy-ozera-kachynogo/>.

¹⁴ Threats, confrontations, trials: What is going on around the development of Kyiv's green areas (Погрози, сутички, суди: що відбувається навколо забудови зелених зон Києва) / Radio Svoboda, November 13, 2019: <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/zabudova-zelenykh-zon-kyeva/30269365.html>.

TRENDS

EFFECTS OF THE SARS-COV-2 CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC ON ACTIVISM AND HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVITIES

One of the defining events for activism and human rights work in the monitoring period was the introduction of quarantine preventive measures to counteract the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus and the COVID-19 coronavirus infection¹⁵.

The introduction of the emergency legal regime and gradual implementation of the decisions of the national government and local self-governments to counteract the pandemic have led to restrictions in the work of non-governmental organizations and individual activists.

Under the conditions of restricted movement and presence in public spaces, the established need to maintain self-isolation and social distancing, and a ban on group gatherings, the civil sector's opportunities to perform their activities at the same level of effectiveness, to express peaceful protest, to conduct advocacy meetings, etc., have been limited significantly.

Gradual intensification of the restrictions has catalyzed the discussion around the problem of whether the measures are proportional to the goal of regulations for overcoming the pandemic. At the same time, the overwhelming majority of non-governmental organizations and activists have shifted their work to online interactions, to remote monitoring, analytical or norm-making formats of activities; they have expanded the use of electronic means of communication and interaction, etc.

DISCREDITATION OF ACTIVISM AND THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE SOROSIATA ("SOROS KIDS")

In the period in question, there was a negative trend of attempts to discredit the civil society and reformers in the government by associating them with the figure of the American businessman and philanthropist George Soros. What we mean here is primarily the use of the word *Sorosiata* ("Soros kids") by a number of media and political figures in a negative context.

A study by the Content Analysis Centre¹⁶ points out that before April 2019, mentions of the *Sorosiata* in the media were episodic, and they were practically non-existent on social media. The highest number of mentions of the *Sorosiata* in 2019 was associated with the so-called "group of reformers" in the team of President Zelensky, who also mentioned this concept in a neutral context¹⁷.

The word *Sorosiata* became the most widespread in November 2019–March 2020. According to Google Trends data¹⁸, the dynamics of search queries grew over this period, reaching a statistical maximum in early March (on March 1–7, 2020).

The March peak can be illustrated by the organization of a whole specialized TV marathon titled *Smells Like Soros*¹⁹ on the ZIK TV channel on February 28, 2020; during the marathon, the TV chan-

¹⁵ The government has made a number of decisions to protect Ukrainians from COVID-19 – <https://bit.ly/39JwWN>

¹⁶ Content Analysis Centre: Analytical Report for the period of January 1, 2016–January 19, 2020. "SOROSIATA": THE USAGE OF THE CONCEPT IN THE UKRAINIAN INFORMATION SPACE – <https://bit.ly/2Xdoivy>

¹⁷ Zelensky does not feel Soros's influence on Ukraine – <https://bit.ly/348Cojs>

¹⁸ Google Trends: The interest dynamics of the search term "Sorosiata" in Ukraine in the past 12 months – <https://bit.ly/2xOnG5d>

¹⁹ Special Broadcast: Smells Like Soros. Whose puppet is Honcharuk? The State Investigations Bureau finally reached Poroshenko | 13 Talk Show | February 28, 2020 – <https://bit.ly/2xNXyYc>

nel's staff and invited experts discussed the activities of George Soros and allowed for the possibility of his influence on Ukrainian non-governmental organizations. This broadcast provoked a negative response among a number of media organizations²⁰ which defined it as a provocation intended to upset the situation in the country and deepen the divide in society between different population groups.

According to the statement, during the ZIK TV marathon, there was de facto discreditation of international organizations that have made contributions in support of Ukraine on its path towards reforms and European integration; discreditation of the civil sector that is actively involved in the reforms and has a progressive vision of Ukraine's development; discreditation of journalism as a profession, particularly of the work of investigative journalists, and breach of the standards of credibility, objectivity of information, balance of opinions, and journalistic ethics; discreditation of a number of key reforms in the systems of health care, education, anti-corruption agencies, etc., by undermining trust in the institutions and people who implement these reforms.

Tellingly, the broadcast participants included the MP Oleksandr Dubinsky, who actively uses the term *Sorosiata*²¹ to refer to people who were linked to George Soros's foundations and, in his opinion, also lobbied for the interests of other countries.

The use of the term in this meaning has reached beyond the affiliation of activists and human rights defenders solely with the figure of George Soros, and the *Sorosiata* label started to be used to refer to anyone who "coordinates their activities" with foreign and international organizations, such as the World Bank, EBRD, USAID, etc.²²

In the monitoring period, the situation with the use of the term *Sorosiata* has gained characteristics of a forced meme, a situation when a word or phrase is used intentionally, often through mass media and social media, to establish a clear stigmatizing connection in the collective mind—this time in particular, a connection between activism and promoting the interests of foreign countries or citizens, but without sufficient or adequate argumentation for the connection. Given that the information that was spread did not provide substantial evidence, these actions by some media and politicians could be viewed as attempts to manipulate information and deceive the society by claiming that some Ukrainian civil activists, as well as reform-oriented government representatives, are subordinate to and managed by foreign foundations.

The information campaign against the *Sorosiata* discredits the civil sector which is actively involved in reform processes, undermines trust in institutions, and creates a distorted image of activism as a form of biased, affiliated activity. In addition, similar past situations in Hungary and the Russian Federation show that conceptual stigmatization of activism and human rights activities can transform into a much deeper restriction of the work of international organizations and lead to a reduced level of social trust in activists and human rights defenders, excessive requirements for the activities of non-governmental organizations, considerable reduction in the level of citizens' activity and progress of reforms in the country, etc.

A CHANGE IN THE LEADERSHIP OF THE PROSECUTOR GENERAL'S OFFICE AND ITS EFFECT ON INVESTIGATIONS OF ATTACKS AGAINST ACTIVISTS

On March 17, 2020, at an extraordinary session, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine appointed the new Head of the Prosecutor General's Office of Ukraine (PGO). The new head was the former acting director of the State Investigation Bureau (SIB) Iryna Venediktova, who was appointed to this position in late 2019.

²⁰ A statement by media organizations on the Smells Like Soros television marathon on the ZIK TV channel – <https://bit.ly/39A3LnC>

²¹ Dubinsky explained how to easily recognize *Sorosiata* in the Ukrainian government – <https://bit.ly/3axUoGe>

²² *Sorosiata* have seized power in Ukraine: Who are they? – <https://bit.ly/2JBnB7s>

Venediktova's tenure at the SIB was marked by holding a non-transparent competition for the positions of her deputies and the appointment of Oleksandr Babikov, who had worked at the Aver Lex law firm which defended the ex-president Viktor Yanukovych, to one of these positions. Given that the SIB also conducted pre-trial investigations of the Euromaidan cases, these actions provoked ambiguous and controversial responses among the families and attorneys of the activist victims, because they contained a conflict of interests which could, in their opinion, threaten an unbiased investigation of the Euromaidan cases.

When Venediktova was appointed as the Head of the Prosecutor General's Office, a number of non-governmental initiatives expressed fears regarding the continuation of the effective investigation of the Euromaidan cases, Kateryna Handziuk's murder and attacks against other activists, especially compared to the previous progress in these investigations under the procedural leadership of Deputy Prosecutor General Viktor Trepak.

When Iryna Venediktova was appointed as the Prosecutor General, the functional duties of the deputy heads of the Prosecutor General's Office were changed, and Deputy Prosecutor General Viktor Trepak was taken off all the criminal cases investigated by the Security Service of Ukraine, including the case of the murdered Kherson activist Kateryna Handziuk, as well as the investigation of attacks against the Odesa activist Serhiy Sternenko. Because of this, Trepak resigned, remarking that this redistribution of powers in the Prosecutor General's Office was a way to influence and interfere with the performance of the prosecutor's duties, and made it impossible to further perform his procedural responsibilities in these cases, therefore effectively removing him from them entirely.

This provoked a negative public response by a number of human rights defenders and activists. For instance, according to representatives of the Who Ordered the Assassination of Katia Handziuk? initiative, Trepak's removal could significantly slow down the investigation: Trepak was appointed as the Deputy Prosecutor General in the autumn and took several months to make himself familiar with the case, significantly intensifying the course of the investigation in early 2020; preparing a new procedural head for this case will take a long time within the period determined by the law, which can negatively affect the quality and effectiveness of the investigation. The Who Ordered the Assassination of Katia Handziuk? initiative also made a statement about pressure by Iryna Venediktova on the activist's father Viktor Handziuk²³.

On March 31, Venediktova signed Trepak's resignation. After his resignation, Viktor Trepak told *Ukrayinska Pravda* in an interview that Venediktova instructed him to declare that the Odesa activist Serhiy Sternenko, who was attacked three times in Odesa in 2018, was a suspect²⁴. According to Sternenko's testimony, when he was defending himself from the attackers during the last attack, he fatally wounded one of the attackers, Ivan Kuznetsov. Trepak answered to Venediktova that there were no grounds for declaring him a suspect, and therefore such an action would be illegal. He also sent a report to Venediktova with arguments for the lack of grounds to declare Sternenko a suspect. On March 28, a number of human rights organizations made an open statement about the unacceptability of political pressure on the investigation of attacks on the activist Serhiy Sternenko²⁵.

THREATS OF LEGAL RESTRICTIONS OF THE FREEDOM OF UNIONS AND ASSOCIATIONS AND BILLS ON LOBBYING

In February–March 2020, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine registered four bills on legal regulation of lobbying and lobbying activities.

²³ PROSECUTOR GENERAL VENEDIKTOVA HAS STARTED PRESSURING KATIA HANDZIUK'S FATHER – <https://bit.ly/2V7jYLM>

²⁴ Viktor Trepak: Venediktova was extremely dissatisfied with my position in Sternenko's case – <https://www.pravda.com.ua/articles/2020/04/4/7246442/>

²⁵ A statement about the unacceptability of political pressure on the investigation of attacks on the activist Serhiy Sternenko – <https://cutt.ly/Bt0NLZE>

The main Bill 3059 “On state registration of lobbying actors and performing lobbying in Ukraine”²⁶ was submitted on February 11 by MPs from the *Batkivshchyna* faction, Yulia Tymoshenko and Serhiy Vlasenko. All three alternative bills, 3059-1²⁷ (O. Dubinsky, O. Vasylevska-Smahliuk), 3059-2²⁸ (a group of MPs: O. Kachur, T. Tarasenko, Y. Yasko and others) and 3059-3²⁹ (D. Monastyrsky, P. Frolov) were submitted by representatives of the parliamentary majority.

Each of the four bills contain controversial norms for civil society which pose a potential threat to the activities of activists and non-governmental organizations in general. This is primarily about a normative generalization of advocacy activities of civil society actors, aimed to promote reforms or positive socially useful change, within the concept of lobbying activities. Only one of the bills, 3059-2, contains a separate normative definition of advocacy as an activity separate from lobbying without a goal of receiving profits and in issues of social interest, aimed at defending the rights, freedoms and legitimate interests of individuals. In addition, only this bill mentions public consultations as a process, separate from lobbying, of communication between state or government actors and interested parties in formulating policies and resolving issues of local significance for the purpose of coordinating public, social and private interests.

The danger of the broad use of terminology and absorption of advocacy by the concept of lobbying lies in the fact that as a result of adopting the bills in their existing form, any advocacy activities, campaigns implemented by non-governmental organizations will automatically be regulated as lobbying activities, except for Bill 3059-2, which distinguishes between lobbying, advocacy and public consultations. However, this bill does not contain a list of clear forms, directions and spheres of advocacy, or a criteria-based definition of which specific activities of non-governmental organizations could be considered advocacy, either.

Another threatening feature of all the bills is the establishment of high fines for failure to comply with the legislative norms, as well as the lack of a clear and full mechanism for imposing these fines, which can be exploited by authorized government bodies with significant misuse of the administrative procedure, selectively, to put pressure on non-governmental organizations.

In general, the submitted bills also have other gaps and dangers, especially in the parts where their texts contradict the laws that have already been adopted. For instance, Bill 3059-1 contains the term “non-profit organization,” which also applies to political parties and to co-owners of apartment buildings; and Bill 3059-3 novelizes the term “commissioned public action” in the current legislation as one of the types of lobbying activities, thus planning to legalize this form of public activities.

This is not the first attempt by the Ukrainian parliament to regulate lobbying and advocacy. In particular, the 8th Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine registered four similar bills, none of which reached the stage of consideration in the first reading. Bill 5144 “On lobbying,” registered by non-faction MPs together with Bill 5145 “On introducing changes to the Tax Code in relation to adopting the Ukrainian Law ‘On lobbying,’” as well as the alternative Bill 5144-1 “On lobbying,” were removed from consideration in the autumn of 2017. Bills 5661 “On public advocacy” and 7129 “On ensuring transparency and legality of communication with state and government actors” were withdrawn by the newly elected 9th Verkhovna Rada.

²⁶ Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine: Draft Bill 3059 “On state registration of lobbying actors and performing lobbying in Ukraine” of February 11, 2020 – <https://bit.ly/2RfAGHN>

²⁷ Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine: Draft Bill 3059-1 “On lobbying” of February 28, 2020 – <https://bit.ly/2UJKoo0>

²⁸ Draft Bill 3059-2 “On legal and transparent regulation of lobbying activities” of March 2, 2020 – <https://bit.ly/39Seael>

²⁹ Draft Bill 3059-3 “On lobbying activities” of March 03, 2020 – <https://bit.ly/2yDrR4a>

BRIEF OVERVIEW OF INCIDENT

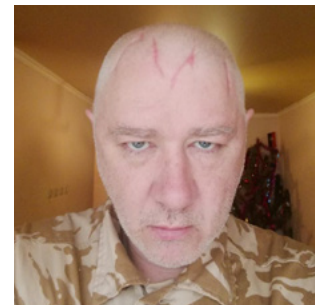
■ JANUARY 2020

#physical_attack

In the evening of **January 6, 2020**, in the yard of the apartment building in **Podilsk**, Odesa Region, where the veteran and blogger **Oleksandr Yaroshenko** lives, he was attacked by two people with a bat.

The doctors diagnosed the victim with concussion, multiple lacerations on the head and arms, and hematomas. The attackers also took his backpack with the groceries he had bought at the store.

However, Yaroshenko is convinced that the reason for the attack was his civil activities, particularly his opposition against the “local mafia,” against corruption in the Prosecutor’s Office and against smuggling in his border district.



■ Oleksandr Yaroshenko two months after the beating; a photo from his Facebook page

According to Yaroshenko, he was a journalist before 2014. In 2014, he went to fight in the ATO as a volunteer soldier, and when the OUN Battalion was withdrawn from the ATO zone, in 2015, he returned home to Podilsk, where he started to engage in civil activism.

On January 6, the Podilsk Police opened an investigation according to Article 187 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine (robbery), identified the attackers, and on January 9, the preventive measure was chosen for them in the form of house arrest. According to the police version, these individuals beat Yaroshenko up under the influence of alcohol, and they did not link the attack to the victim’s activism. At the same time, in late January, the case was handed over from the Podilsk Police Department to the Rozdilna Police Department for an unidentified reason. At the moment of the publication, information on the further course of the investigation and on the reason for handing the case over to a different department has not been provided in reply to a request from the ZMINA Human Rights Centre to the Police Department, sent on March 17.

Yaroshenko himself says that there are no investigative proceedings, and that the event was re-categorized from robbery to hooliganism. On March 26, ZMINA sent a request to the Odesa Region Prosecutor’s Office to verify the information.

#physical_attack

In the evening of **January 10, 2020**, in **Kryvyi Rih**, Dnipropetrovsk Region, two unidentified individuals with a knife and brass knuckles attacked **Serhiy Barabashuk**,³⁰ the head of the miners’ union of the Sukha Balka Private Joint-Stock Company.

³⁰ In Kryvyi Rih, the head of the miners’ union at the local company was attacked (У Кривому Розі напали на керівника профспілки гірників місцевого підприємства) / ZMINA, January 12, 2020 року: <https://zmina.info/news/u-kryvomu-rozi-napaly-na-kerivnyka-profspilky-girnykiv-misczevogo-pidpryyemstva/>.

During the attack, Barabashuk fought back, used pepper spray against the attackers and called the police. According to the victim's testimony, he does not know the attackers personally, but when the police arrived and arrested them, one of the arrested men started to shout insults and threats to Barabashuk, mentioning his union activities.

According to the victim, the investigation has been completed, and the criminal case materials have been handed over to the court. The hearing was scheduled for March 27, but it was postponed indefinitely due to the quarantine announced in the country in connection to the coronavirus epidemic.

The Kryvyi Rih Sukha Balka Private Joint-Stock Company specializes in underground mining of iron ore. It includes two mines and employs about 3,000 workers.

#physical_attack

In the morning of **January 14, 2020**, in **Kyiv**, there was a confrontation between individuals who accompanied construction equipment traveling to the territory of the plot on which the construction was ordered to stop on January 10 by the Kyiv City State Administration Department for Preservation of Cultural Heritage, and the activists of the **Mykilska Slobidka non-governmental organization** who stood watch there. (Later, on January 23, the developer, Nova Slobidka LLC, would appeal the Department's decision in court;³¹ however, at the moment of the incident, the construction was not permitted.)

The video published by the activists on Facebook³² shows the fight involving batons and pepper sprays; noises that sound like gunshots can be heard in it.

The activists have stated that four people were injured as a result of the incident, but two of them, according to the activists, did not go to the law enforcement agencies.

The police opened an investigation³³ according to Part 2 of Article 296 (hooliganism).

Mykilska Slobidka NGO was founded in December 2015³⁴ in Kyiv. It works on developing the neighborhood and defending the rights of Mykilska Slobidka residents in court. According to open-source information, the organization is headed by Andriy Dekalo.

#physical_attack

On **January 18, 2020**, in **Varash**, Rivne Region, an unidentified individual broke into the apartment of the activist **Olha Kravchuk**, who protested against corruption in the local hospital and managed the relevant Viber group; he tried to strangle her and threatened her.

³¹ The court terminated the cultural heritage protection order to stop the construction works at 7-9 Mykilsko-Slobidska Str. (Суд зупинив дію припису охорони культурної спадщини про припинення робіт за адресою вул. Микільсько-Слобідська 7-9) / Depo.ua, January 24, 2020: <https://www.depo.ua/ukr/politics/sud-zupiniv-diyu-pripisu-okhoroni-kulturnoi-spadshchini-pro-pripinennya-robit-za-adresoyu-vul-mikilsko-slobidska-7-9-202001241100917>.

³² Mykilska Slobidka NGO. Facebook page. January 14, 2020: <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1584260185047776>.

³³ Law enforcement officers are determining the circumstances of the fight near the construction site in the capital's Dniprovsky District (Правоохоронці встановлюють обставини бійки біля будівельного майданчика у Дніпровському районі столиці) / National Police. Kyiv, January 14, 2020: https://kyiv.npu.gov.ua/news/xuliganstvo/pravoohoronczi-vstanovlyuyut-obstavini-bijki-bilya-budivelnogo-majdanc.hika-u-dniprovskomu-raioni-stoliczi/?fbclid=IwAR235RTQnISXhTu9IVwddILK7thJsnyzNOFQ_6CVlgWLvq1c-E0nyzVAvXY.

³⁴ Mykilska Slobidka NGO / YouControl, April 7, 2020: https://youcontrol.com.ua/catalog/company_details/40157613/.

The victim told the ZMINA Human Rights Centre³⁵ that she was coming back home with her two-year-old child. At the moment when Kravchuk was locking her front door, she was attacked by an unidentified man from behind; he pulled the door open and grabbed her by the throat. He demanded to delete the Viber group within an hour, or else he threatened to come back. When the activist's child started to cry, the attacker left.

Olha Kravchuk encountered corruption and unprofessional attitude at the Varash hospital a year before the incident. After this, she created the Viber group where she discussed these problems with other city residents who cared about it, with local councilors, and published documents. According to the activist, the hospital demanded that patients buy bandages, syringes, bathroom cleaning detergent, and demanded money for the services that were supposed to be free of charge. Kravchuk complained on the Health Ministry hotline and achieved the creation of a working group, ordered by the Varash mayor; the group initiated an investigation into the targeted use of the local funds by the Public Facility “Specialized Medical Unit #3 of the Ministry of Health Care of Ukraine” in the period of 2015–19.

After the attack, Olha Kravchuk deleted the Viber group and announced that she would stop her anti-corruption activities due to fears for her child's safety.

In reply to a request from the ZMINA Human Rights Centre, the Rivne Region Police Department noted that proceedings according to Article 129 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine (murder threat) were opened based on the fact of the incident. According to the police information, nobody was informed about being a suspect, and already on February 29, based on the results of the pre-trial investigation, the decision was made to close the case due to “absence of elements of a crime.”

#obstruction_of_peaceful_gatherings

#intimidation_threats_and_other_forms_of_pressure

#privacy_violations

On **January 19, 2020**, in Mykhailivska Square in **Kyiv**, a demonstration against far-right violence was held on the occasion of the anniversary of the murder of the Russian lawyer Stanislav Markelov and the journalist Anastasia Baburova; the demonstration was organized by the anti-fascist initiative **January 19 Committee**.³⁶ A counter-demonstration was held next to it “in the memory of victims of left-wing terror,” organized by the far-right who first tried to throw eggs at their opponents, and when the demonstration ended, threw firecrackers at them. Nobody was injured during the demonstration.



■ The demonstration on January 19, 2020. Credit: Mykola Myrnyi

The Kyiv Police detained 11 people from the far-right demonstration on site, delivered them to the department and then released them after drafting misdemeanor protocols according to Article 173 (minor hooliganism) of the Misdemeanor Code of Ukraine.³⁷

³⁵ In Varash, someone tried to strangle an activist who protested against corruption in the hospital (У Вараші активістку, яка протестувала проти корупції в лікарні, намагалися задушити) / ZMINA, January 21, 2020: https://zmina.info/news/u-varashi-nevidomyj-nakynuvsy-na-aktyvistku-yaka-protestovala-proty-korupcziji-v-likarni/?fbclid=IwAR3JOWEqTde-_8C3Ure1pxlppv1RZBidZTKue8_aT9IYFK1zpiJJBv9mhU.

³⁶ Stop Far-right Terror (Зупинимо ультраправий терор) / Facebook event: <https://www.facebook.com/events/607899129753522/>.

³⁷ For illegal actions in Mykhailivska Square, the police delivered eleven people to the police department (updated) (За протиправні дії на площі Михайлівській поліцейські доставили до управління поліції одинадцять осіб (оновлено)) / National Police of Ukraine. Kyiv, January 19, 2020: <https://kyiv.npu.gov.ua/news/novini/za-protipravni-diji-na-ploshhi-mixajlivskij-policejski-dostavili-do-upravlinnya-policziji-odinadcyat-osib/>.

Meanwhile, some participants of the demonstration were persecuted after the event. In particular, **Taras Bilous**, an editor of the Commons journal, who held a banner reading “Disband the Azov Regiment,” spoke about a phone call two hours after the demonstration; the caller advised him “not to do anything stupid.” In addition, the activist was also threatened in social media posts and direct messages, and information about him and threats against him was published in the Tales of the 4th Reich Telegram channel³⁸ (in particular, it published Bilous’s picture from the demonstration with a call to violence against him: “*Find and beat down. A matter of honor!*”). In addition to this post, the Telegram channel contains shares of articles from various media, deliberations on social and political topics, and posts and images with signs of hate speech and tolerance for Adolf Hitler’s ideology.

Bilous also stated that someone searched for him at the university dormitory where he used to live, asking the staff about his current location.

The lawyer Stanislav Markelov and the journalist Anastasia Baburova died from gunshot wounds when they were attacked on January 19, 2009, in the centre of Moscow. In two years, Nikita Tikhonov, the leader of the Combat Organization of Russian Nationalists, was sentenced to life in prison for this murder, while his comrade Yevgenia Khasis was sentenced to 18 years in prison for abetting the crime. Demonstrations in the memory of Markelov and Baburova, as well as other victims of violence motivated by national intolerance or ideological hostility, have taken place on January 19 for over ten years in various countries. In Kyiv, their participants face systematic obstruction from right-wing radicals,³⁹ sometimes in a violent form.

#discreditation

On **January 23, 2020**, **Iryna Fedoriv**, a resident of **Kotsiubynske**, Kyiv Region, and a representative of the CHESNO Movement who actively advocates for preservation of the Bilychi Forest near Kyiv, made a statement⁴⁰ about a number of discrediting publications about her. These materials were, in particular, published on the *Pravda Irpenia* website, and a separate website fedoriv.info was launched to accumulate such publications.

An example of these is an anonymous text titled *Kotsiubynske’s Merger with Kyiv Is Lobbies by the “Toilet of the Year”* (on the *Pravda Irpenia* website,⁴¹ dated January 22, and reprinted verbatim on fedoriv.info⁴² without a date).



The text contains an actual quote from Fedoriv’s blog in *Ukrayinska Pravda*⁴³ and a passage about why the author of the analyzed publication disagrees with the arguments in the quote. But then, in the publication background, there is an extended negative characterization of Iryna Fedoriv which contains signs of manipulation: the text calls the activist a “*bad publicity monger*,” “*scandalously*

³⁸ Tales of the 4th Reich (Былины IV рейха) / Telegram channel, January 19, 2020: https://t.me/sanatoriy_satani/794.

³⁹ 10 років після вбивства Маркелова і Бабурової: акція пам’яті у Києві / Громадське, 19 січня 2019: <https://hromadske.ua/posts/10-rokiv-pislya-vbivstva-markelova-i-baburovoyi-akciya-pamyati-v-kiyevi-nazhivo>

⁴⁰ Iryna Fedoriv. Особиста фейсбук-сторінка. 23 січня 2020: <https://www.facebook.com/fedoriv.iryana.chesno/posts/1055218924830251>

⁴¹ Приєднання Коцюбинського до Києва любіює «унітаз року» / Правда Ірпеня, 22 січня 2020 року: <https://irpin.news/priyednannia-kotsiubynskoho-do-kyieva-lobiuiue-unitaz-roku/>

⁴² Приєднання Коцюбинського до Києва любіює «унітаз року» / Федорів Ірина Павлівна досьє на чорну піарницю: <http://fedoriv.info/content/pruyednannya-kotsiubynskogo-do-kyieva-lobiuiue-unitaz-roku>

⁴³ Міністерство розвитку громад ігнорує волю громади Коцюбинського й інфраструктурну діяльність / Українська правда. Блоги, 22 січня 2020 року: <https://blogs.pravda.com.ua/authors/fedoriv/5e282aa80d1eb/>

known journalist” and “the winner of the Toilet of the Year journalism anti-award” (this title was “awarded” to her and Vyacheslav Pikhovshek in 2018 by the NGO INTER-ACTION Centre for Social Development,⁴⁴ but we could not find any data online that someone won the “anti-award” before or after this). Then Iryna Fedoriv is accused of meeting the then-president Viktor Yanukovich and the Prosecutor General Viktor Pshonka in 2011. In this, the text uses the phrase “blood-stained president,” which makes the sentence emotionally charged, but it omits the fact that this was a meeting to prepare an interview with Yanukovich for a documentary,⁴⁵ which Fedoriv herself, who then worked as a journalist for the STB TV channel, reported in her blog.

Another accusation, about the allegedly wrong information indicated by Iryna Fedoriv in her declaration about the value of her property, is not true. In 2018, the CHESNO Movement published an official explanation of the situation that had developed⁴⁶: there was a technical mistake which was corrected within the period established by the law.

Iryna Fedoriv views these publications as pressure because of her civil activities. According to the activist, her tires were also slashed before,⁴⁷ and once, her electricity meter was stolen.

Iryna Fedoriv is the editor-in-chief of the CHESNO website, blogger, former member of the 6th Kotsiubynske Village Council (from November 2010). As an activist, she consistently advocates for preservation of the Bilychi Forest, which is adjacent to the village; there were attempts to give a part of the forest lands to developers. The confrontation about merging Kotsiubynske either with Kyiv or with Irpin is still going on; this will determine who makes the decisions about the village’s properties. A few years ago, there was also an escalation of violence against the local politicians and officials: in November 2016, the village head, Olha Matiushyna, was attacked;⁴⁸ in June 2017, the head of the local election commission, Liudmyla Demchenko, was beaten;⁴⁹ and in October 2018, there was an arson of the car of Daryna Aleksandrova, an employee of the Kotsiubynske Village Council who also opposed cutting down the Bilychi Forest.⁵⁰

#destruction_or_damage_of_property

On the night before **January 30, 2020**, in **Zaporizhia**, unidentified individuals burned the car of **Andriy Lukin**, a blogger and activist.

Lukin does not remember any threats or other events preceding the incident, but he pointed out in an interview for *Radio Svoboda*⁵¹ that he had criticized illegal alcohol trade before and he linked the arson to this in particular.

⁴⁴ Лауреатами журналістської антипремії «Унітаз року 2017» стали В'ячеслав Піховшек та Ірина Федорів / *Gazeta.ua*, 26 січня 2018 року: https://gazeta.ua/articles/life/_laureatami-zhurnalistykoyi-antipremiyi-unitaz-roku-2017-stali-vyacheslav-pikhovshek-ta-irina-fedoriv/817020

⁴⁵ Yanukovich gave his word that the forest will not be cut down (Янукович дав слово, що ліс не вирубуватимуть) / *Ukrayinska Pravda. Blogs*, May 24, 2011: <https://blogs.pravda.com.ua/authors/fedoriv/4ddb75e6dd43/>.

⁴⁶ Explanations on the situation around the e-declaration of the CHESNO editor Iryna Fedoriv (Роз’яснення щодо ситуації довкола е-декларації редакторки ЧЕСНО Ірини Федорів) / CHESNO, April 1, 2018: <https://www.chesno.org/post/1361/>.

⁴⁷ Unidentified individuals slashed a tire on the journalist Fedoriv’s car. Video (Невідомі проколюли шину на машині журналістки Федорів. Відео) / *Ukrayinska Pravda*. Kyiv, June 7, 2017: <https://kiev.pravda.com.ua/news/5937ebf9c34b1/>.

⁴⁸ Kotsiubynske Village Head makes a statement about an attempt on her life (Селищний голова Коцюбинського заявляє про замах на її життя) / TSN, November 1, 2016: <https://tsn.ua/ukrayina/selishchniy-golova-kocubinskogo-zayavlyaye-pro-zamah-na-yiyi-zhittya-797704.html>.

⁴⁹ In Kyiv Region, the head of the Kotsiubynske Election Commission was brutally beaten in an ordered hit (На Київщині на замовлення жорстоко побили голову ТВК Коцюбинського) / TSN, June 14, 2017: <https://tsn.ua/kyiv/na-kiyivschini-na-zamovlennya-zhorstoko-pobili-golovu-tvk-kocubinskogo-945307.html>.

⁵⁰ In Kotsiubynske, a village council employee’s cars were burned (У Коцюбинському спалили машини працівниці селищної ради) / *Ukrayinska Pravda*, October 15, 2018: <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2018/10/15/7195176/>.

⁵¹ “He said it, set it on fire and left.” What we know about the arson of the journalist Halyna Tereshchuk’s car («Сказав, підпалив і пішов». Що відомо про підпал авто журналістки Галини Терещук) / *Radio Svoboda*, January 30, 2020: <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/sho-vidomo-pro-pidpav-avto-zhurnalistky-halyny-tereshchuk/30408693.html>.

On the same day, the police launched an investigation according to Article 194 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine (intentional damage of property).⁵²

Andriy Lukin is a resident of Zaporizhia who actively covers the city's life and problems on Facebook and Instagram, raises charity contributions for orphanages or individuals experiencing hardship, and publishes various entertainment content. Before the attack, he published a video about cases of animal abuse in Zaporizhia, and another video earlier about cutting down trees.

■ FEBRUARY 2020

#obstruction_of_activities_of_a_non-governmental_organization

#physical_attack

On **February 1, 2020**, in **Vinnytsia**, four men disrupted a closed workshop on sexual orientation and gender identity for journalists, organized by the **Gender Zed** NGO and by the **Vinnytsia Investigative Journalism Agency**.

The attackers inquired who the event organizers were, shouted threats against the LGBTI community, and poured oil and scattered feathers over one of the tutors.⁵³



■ A photo from Roman Kostyshyn's Facebook page

Some time after the incident, the responsibility for it was claimed by the Vinnytsia NGO Edelweiss, which positions itself as a “youth nationalist organization based on the Ukrainian idea” (at the beginning of its activities, the organization declared that it was “national-socialist” and spread the corresponding ideas on social media; however, by now, it has moved onto more moderate rhetoric).⁵⁴ Its founder and head, Roman Kostyshyn, published a video of the attack and called the action “preventive,”⁵⁵ and the people present at the workshop recognized him as one of the attackers, because he was the only one among them who did not wear a mask.

The police launched an investigation⁵⁶ according to Articles 171 (obstruction of legal journalistic activities) and 296 (hooliganism) of the Criminal Code of Ukraine. On April 9, the police searched Roman Kostyshyn's place of residence⁵⁷ as a part of the investigation.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ In Vinnytsia, masked men disrupted a sexual orientation and gender identity workshop (У Вінниці чоловіки в масках зірвали тренінг з питань сексуальної орієнтації та гендерної ідентичності) / ZMINA, February 1, 2020: https://zmina.info/news/u-vinnytsi-choloviky-v-maskah-zirvaly-trening-z-pytan-seksualnoyi-oriyentaciyi-ta-gendernoyi-identychnosti/?fbclid=IwAR0k3SmiX98E0eWUSwKd76DnNk12CPbRXZ1P_UvEx3MvlzW0d8P6cwLh5dU.

⁵⁴ The Edelweiss organization, which disrupted the LGBT workshop in Vinnytsia, opens branches all over Ukraine. What we know about it (Організація “Едельвейс”, яка зірвала ЛГБТ-тренінг у Вінниці, відкриває осередки по всій Україні. Що про неї відомо) / ZMINA, March 7, 2020: <https://zmina.info/articles/organizaciya-edelweys-yaka-zirvala-lgbt-trening-u-vinnytsi-vidkryla-oseredky-po-vsij-ukrayini-shho-pro-neyi-vidomo/>.

⁵⁵ Roman Kostyshyn. Personal Facebook page, February 4, 2020: <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=2763494310433918&set=a.1346347645481932&type=3&theater>.

⁵⁶ The police launched an investigation into the illegal actions against the organizers of the workshop for journalists (Поліція розпочала розслідування за фактом протиправних дій відносно організаторів тренінгу для журналістів) / National Police. Vinnytsia, February 1, 2020: <https://vn.npu.gov.ua/news/xuliganstvo/policziya-rozpochala-rozsliduvannya-za-faktom-protipravnix-dij-vidnosno-organizatoriv-treningu-dlya-zhurnalistiv/>.

⁵⁷ A search in the residence of the head of Edelweiss, the organization that disrupted the workshop on LGBT issues in Vinnytsia (У керівника організації “Едельвейс”, яка зірвала тренінг з питань ЛГБТ у Вінниці, проводять обшук) / ZMINA, April 4, 2020: http://zmina.info/news/u-kerivnyka-organizaciyi-edelweys-yaka-zirvala-lgbt-trening-u-vinnytsi-provodyat-obshuk/?fbclid=IwAR01Ajl_gnnozntfBahcekVuFZbam7nGb0si1Lk-l3300rW-EL7hi094FM.

#discreditation

On **February 13, 2020**, the aforementioned *Pravda Irpenia* website published a discrediting material about the local activist **Mykhailyna Skoryk-Shkarivska**, titled *Mykhailyna Skoryk-Shkarivska Came to a City Council Meeting Drunk*.⁵⁸ The information was based on Facebook comments made by “a city resident who was also present during the meeting” and illustrated by a photo that featured Skoryk-Shkarivska breaking through a Municipal Guard cordon. There were no attempts to explain the context or circumstances of the conflict at the City Council meeting.

The YouTube video of the incident⁵⁹ shows people trying to prevent Skoryk-Shkarivska from reaching the rostrum, but she breaks through and speaks about the city’s general plan. Her whole statement cannot be heard, because she is interrupted by her interlocutor’s voice, who emotionally opposes her and stands closer to the person who was filming. There are no signs of Mykhailyna Skoryk-Shkarivska being under the influence or engaging in unmotivated aggression in the video.

According to the activist herself, she attended the meeting as a representative of a neighborhood committee and intended to discuss the unreasonability of closing and moving to a different location the Irpin City Children’s Hospital, adjacent to the neighborhood she represented. According to Skoryk-Shkarivska, she did not succeed at expressing the committee’s position that time due to obstruction, but the issue was discussed later.

Earlier, the activist had already drawn attention to *Pravda Irpenia*’s discrediting activities, using the example of the campaign against the local entrepreneur Oleksiy Zinevych:⁶⁰ in February 2019, Irpin City Council’s Facebook page shared a fabricated “*statement on organizing a gay parade in the city*,” allegedly by Zinevych; the website in question picked it up, and then published “updates” about alleged cancellation of the march due to the public’s protests, without providing any evidence of such “protests,” but referring to comments under social media posts of unknown origin (the same way as it was done in the case of Iryna Fedoriv described above). According to Mykhailyna Skoryk-Shkarivska’s explanation, the problem with bringing the media to responsibility for spreading false information is that *Pravda Irpenia* is not a registered media. Indeed, the website does not contain the source data or any information about its authors, editors or owners.

Mykhailyna Skoryk-Shkarivska is an Irpin activist, media expert and politician, the initiator of the public monitoring of the City Council’s decisions and procurement, who also focuses a lot on opposing illegal construction in Irpin.

#legal_persecution

On **February 14, 2020**, the non-partisan MP Andriy Derkach submitted a complaint to the police about the alleged embezzlement of \$149 million by representatives of the **Anti-Corruption Action Center (AntAC)** NGO and the charity organization **100 PERCENT LIFE**.⁶¹

In turn, AntAC representatives claimed that neither the organization in general nor any of its members had ever received anything approaching this amount in the eight years of its existence, and that the law enforcement agencies had already conducted multiple checks in this regard.⁶²

⁵⁸ Mykhailyna Skoryk-Shkarivska came to a City Council meeting drunk (Михайлина Скорик-Шкарівська прийшла п’яна на сесію міськради) / *Pravda Irpenia*, February 13, 2020: <https://irpin.news/mykhaylyna-skoryk-shkarivs-ka-priyshla-p-iana-na-sesiuu-mis-krady/>.

⁵⁹ Yuriy Ustinovskiy (Юрій Устіновський). YouTube channel, February 13, 2020: https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=585&v=fW4qM-wu-fw&feature=emb_logo.

⁶⁰ The Irpin fake, or How the government organized a gay pride in Irpin (Ірпінський фейк, або Як влада організувала гей-парад в Ірпені) / *Ukrayinska Pravda. Columns*, February 18, 2019: <https://www.pravda.com.ua/columns/2019/02/18/7206992/>.

⁶¹ Andrey Derkach. Facebook page, February 14, 2020: https://www.facebook.com/derkach.al/posts/1070451763306888?__tn__=R

⁶² Attack against the AntAC (Атака на ЦПК) / Anti-Corruption Action Centre, date not specified: http://attack.antac.org.ua/?fbclid=IwAR1uKwL44Hi9cOfNYvc9yXGKjMil_2hrlQ2isDJWs_N-ITyyTPulBSiwmXQ

The organization's head **Vitaliy Shabunin** expressed an assumption⁶³ that the goal of the investigation was to establish control over the actions of anti-corruption activists, because now the investigators can petition the court to wiretap, set up surveillance or conduct other covert investigative activities.

The organization addressed the Prosecutor General's Office (PGO) (because the complaint was initiated by an MP) regarding the MP's knowingly false report of a crime, and sent a bank report to serve as evidence of the actual movement of money on the organization's accounts. According to the AntAC, as of March 30, the organization had not received a reply from the PGO about launching an investigation.

Meanwhile, on March 18, 2020, representatives of the CO 100 PERCENT LIFE stated that as a part of the investigation initiated by MP Derkach, the police came to the Kharkiv address where one of the organization's founders Serhiy Dmytriev is registered and where his parents currently live. Police representatives tried to enter the residence but refused to present the documents allowing them to conduct investigative actions of any kind.⁶⁴

The Anti-Corruption Action Center is an NGO founded in 2012 by Vitaliy Shabunin and Darya Kale-niuk. It develops and advocates for legislative foundation for counteracting corruption (in particular, regarding the anti-corruption agencies NABU, Special Anti-Corruption Prosecution, High Anti-Corruption Court and Agency for Searching and Managing Assets, criminalization of illegal enrichment, etc.), monitoring state procurement, and initiates investigations into abuses. CO 100% LIFE (previously called the All-Ukrainian Network of People Living with HIV) is one of the biggest patient organizations in Ukraine which implements projects aimed to improve access to health care in Ukraine and, among other things, advocated for transparent state procurement of medicine through international organizations together with the AntAC.

Andriy Derkach has been a member of six Verkhovna Rada conventions as a representative of the Will of the People group, the Party of Regions, and the Socialist Party of Ukraine. In 2017, he wrote a complaint to the General Prosecution Office and initiated an investigation into the possible disclosure of pre-trial investigation information by NABU officials in the context of Ukraine's alleged interference with the American election;⁶⁵ in 2019, he submitted a statement about the US Embassy's alleged influence on the NABU to the State Investigation Bureau.⁶⁶

#destruction_or_damage_of_property

#intimidation_threats_and_other_forms_of_pressure

On the night before **February 17, 2020**, in **Kyiv**, unidentified individuals threw a firecracker at the door of the Charity Organization **100 PERCENT LIFE**, and left a poster reading "*Mrs. Lada, thank you for the bill*" on the gate; the poster referred to Lada Bulakh, a former member of the organization and current MP of the Servant of the People faction.

⁶³ Avakov tries to legalize covert investigative actions against AntAC through MP Derkach. Statement (Аваков намагається легалізувати негласні слідчі дії щодо ЦПК за допомогою нардепа Деркача. Заява) / Anti-Corruption Action Center, February 18, 2020: <https://antac.org.ua/news/avakov-namahaet-sia-lehalizuvaty-nehlasni-slidchi-shchodo-tspk-za-dopomohoiu-nardepa-derkacha-zaiava/>

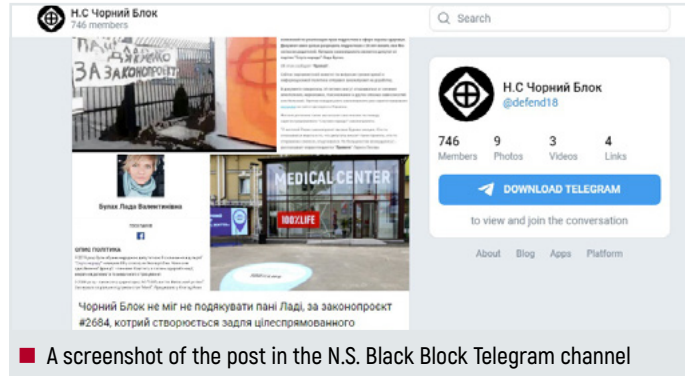
⁶⁴ 100% Life – the network of people living with HIV (100% життя – мережа ЛЖВ) / Facebook page, March 18, 2020: <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=2497381053858387>.

⁶⁵ The courts completely sabotage the cases handed to them from the National Anti-Corruption Bureau and the Special Anti-Corruption Prosecution (Є повний саботаж судами справ, переданих їм від НАБУ і САП – Ситник) / *Radio Svoboda*, August 19, 2017: <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/28685332.html>.

⁶⁶ MP Derkach claims that he has handed the documents about "the influence of US Embassy" on the NABU to the State Investigation Bureau (Депутат Деркач заявляє, що передав у ДБР документи про «вплив посольства США» на НАБУ) / *Radio Svoboda*, October 9, 2019: <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/news-derkach-posolstvo-us-nabu/30207279.html>.



Image credit: CO 100% Life



A screenshot of the post in the N.S. Black Block Telegram channel

The organization associates this with the fact that Bulakh registered Bill 2684⁶⁷ in the Verkhovna Rada, which would allow teenagers to sign declarations with family physicians and address them or other specialists independently (without their parents), and guarantee them the right to obtain information about the state of their health.

Meanwhile, on February 17, 2020, **N.S. Black Block** claimed responsibility for the attack on the Charity Organization 100 PERCENT LIFE by publishing the information and the video of the attack on its Telegram channel.⁶⁸

At the moment of the publication, the channel is not accessible. Still, the Black Block Manifesto,⁶⁹ dated January 25, 2020, is available online; it contains the same symbols as in the screenshots from the Telegram channel mentioned above. The Manifesto states that the Black Block is a national socialist union without a single leader whose aim is “to fight for Ukrainian independence, national traditions and values.”

The police have launched an investigation into the incident, categorizing it as hooliganism. The attackers' identities, according to CO 100% LIFE, had not been officially established as of March 23.

#obstruction_of_activities_of_a_non-governmental_organization

On **February 23**, 2020, at around 10 p.m. in **Kyiv**, volunteers of the Student Social Service of the Kyiv Polytechnic Institute discovered stickers with swastikas and Celtic crosses at the entrance to the premises where an information session on the rights of homosexual people was planned to take place as a part of the KyivPride: Stronger Together project.⁷⁰

In addition, according to **KyivPride**, a week before the event its opponents wrote a complaint to the university's administration asking to prevent the information session; options for opposing it and attacking the event's organizers were also discussed on social media.



A photo from the KyivPride Facebook page

As a result, the organizers decided to postpone the information session indefinitely.

⁶⁷ Draft Bill on introducing changes to some legislative acts of Ukraine to realize teenagers' rights in health care (Проект Закону про внесення змін до деяких законодавчих актів України щодо реалізації прав підлітків у сфері охорони здоров'я) / Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, December 27, 2019: http://w1.c1.rada.gov.ua/pls/zweb2/webproc4_1?pf3511=67795.

⁶⁸ N.S. Black Block (Н.С. Чорний блок) / Telegram channel, February 17, 2020: <https://t.me/defend18/19>.

⁶⁹ Black Block Manifesto (Маніфест “Чорного блоку”), January 25, 2020: <https://telegra.ph/Man%D1%96fest-CHORNOGO-BLOKU-01-26?fbclid=IwAR3i96EMs357vcQH9Y7bBqKySWsP4OwLJBQTOpw4i-lsy5nhQHZYaj4BoU>.

⁷⁰ KyivPride. Facebook page, February 24, 2020: <https://www.facebook.com/kyivpride/photos/a.858394070937490/2581807951929418/?type=3&theater>.

KyivPride is a non-governmental organization founded in 2016 to advocate for the rights of the LGBTIQ community and to raise its visibility in society. Among its activities, the most well-known is holding annual Pride Weeks composed of various cultural and educational events on LGBTIQ topics, concluded by Marches for Equality, which have brought together several thousand participants in the past few years.

#legal_persecution

In the morning of **February 25, 2020**, in **Odesa** and **Kyiv**, at the places of registration and residence of three Ukrainian Cyber Alliance activists **Andriy Pereveziy**, **Andriy Baranovych** and **Oleksandr Halushchenko** (as well as some of their family members, according to Andriy Pereveziy), the police and the CORD (operational sudden action corps) conducted searches and seized information media and equipment.



■ A photo from the Ukrainian Cyber Alliance Facebook page

The Odesa Region police later confirmed⁷¹ the information on its website, indicating that it was about the October 2019 incident when unidentified individuals demonstrated the image of the Swedish environmental activist Greta Thunberg, captioned “F*ck you Greta,” on Odesa Airport screens instead of airline logos.

The event was categorized according to Part 2 of Article 361 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine (unauthorized interference in the work of electronic computing machines (computers), automated systems, computer networks or electronic communication networks).

The Ukrainian Cyber Alliance, in turn, deny their involvement in the airport incident, at the same time claiming that before the incident, they informed the Security Service and the Odesa Airport about vulnerabilities in their security system. In addition, the activists emphasize that the information they collect is openly accessible.

At a press conference on February 26,⁷² representatives of the Ukrainian Cyber Alliance announced that they were suspending their activities aimed at cooperation with Ukrainian law enforcement agencies until the investigation is finished.

The Ukrainian Cyber Alliance unites Ukrainian IT professionals (cyber security experts in particular) from different cities. They position themselves as a hacktivist group (derived from “activist” + “hacker”; the most common definition of “hacktivism” is civil activities or promotion of political ideas using digital tools, including tools outside the legal field). The association is known for a number of actions. In particular, in December 2017, the activists organized a flashmob to discover vulnerabilities in the cyber security systems of state enterprises and institutions;⁷³ before that, they published correspondence between the former advisor for the Russian President, Vladislav Surkov, with Ukrainian and Russian journalists, politicians and activists.

⁷¹ Odesa Region law enforcement is conducting an investigation into the criminal case based on unauthorized interference with the information systems of the Odesa Airport (Правоохоронці Одещини проводять слідчі дії у кримінальному провадженні за фактом несанкціонованого втручання до інформаційних систем одеського аеропорту) / National Police. Odesa Region, February 25, 2020: <https://od.npu.gov.ua/news/zvichajni-novini/pravooxoroncz-odeshini-provodyat-slidchi-diji-u-kriminalnomu-provadhenni-za-faktom-nesankcionovanogo-vtruchannya-do-informacijnih-sistem-odeskogo-aeroportu/>.

⁷² InformNapalm. Facebook page, February 26, 2020: <https://www.facebook.com/informnapalm24/videos/570096263598088/>.

⁷³ Ukrainian hackers have published service documents of the military, energy managers and officials (Українські хакери оприлюднили службові документи військових, енергетиків і урядовців) / *Radio Svoboda*, December 26, 2017: <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/28940075.html>.

#obstruction_of_peaceful_gatherings

On **February 27**, 2020, 22 members of the Chernivtsi City Council submitted for consideration the draft decision in support of Mykola Hunko's petition to ban public campaigns and events on LGBTI topics in public spaces and municipally owned premises in **Chernivtsi**.

This was the second attempt to approve this decision: in November last year, the mayor Oleksiy Kaspruk vetoed the city council decision of October 31 in support of Hunko's previous petition because the decision was discriminatory and violated the Ukrainian Constitution.

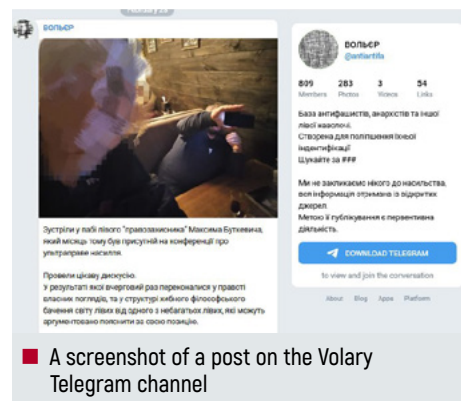
For now, the document is listed among the draft decisions⁷⁴ which the City Council intended to consider on March 26, but there is no data on its approval at the moment of the publication.

#intimidation_threats_and_other_forms_of_pressure

#privacy_violations

On **February 28**, 2020, in **Kyiv**, Oleksiy Svnarenko, the head of the far-right organization National Resistance, took a photo of **Maksym Butkevych**, the coordinator of the No Borders project for helping refugees and asylum seekers to publish it on the Volary Telegram channel where the far-right identify their "enemies."

This way, according to the human rights advocate, he was included in the list of potential far-right attack targets.⁷⁵ The photo was published with the caption: *"We met the left-wing 'human rights advocate' Maksym Butkevych in the pub. A month ago, he attended a conference on far-right violence."* In addition, the Telegram channel includes information on researchers of far-right movements **Vyacheslav Likhachov** and **Anna Hrytsenko**, some LGBT activists, left-wing activists, etc. The channel's authors explain its existence with the need to identify *"anti-fascists, anarchists and other left-wing scum."*



■ A screenshot of a post on the Volary Telegram channel

According to Maksym Butkevych, later, on March 3, between 8 and 9 p.m., he was recognized and called by two men in an underground crossing near a metro station; they said all kinds of things to him using swear words. The activist states that there were no direct threats, but there were disguised and threatening warnings. Butkevych is not sure if this attention by the far-right is associated with the Volary publication; he cannot rule out that the meeting was accidental, but also cannot rule out the opposite.

Maksym Butkevych is a human rights advocate, media tutor, journalist, coordinator of the No Borders project, which has been active since 2006 in helping asylum seekers and opposing cases of xenophobia and hate speech.

⁷⁴ Draft City Council decisions for March 26, 2020 / Chernivtsi City Council, official web portal, February 17, 2020: <http://chernivtsy.eu/portal/proyekty-rishen-miskoyi-rady-na-26-berezhnya-2020-roku>.

⁷⁵ Volary (Вольер). Telegram channel, February 28, 2020: <https://t.me/antiantifa/706>.

#privacy_violations

#discreditation

On **February 29**, 2020, the former deputy head of the administration of the ex-president Yanukovich, Andriy Portnov, published a discrediting post⁷⁶ on his website and social media pages about the volunteer and blogger **Roman Sinicyn**. Portnov claimed that Sinicyn was “involved in mass riots, violence, propaganda of war, inciting hate and making money off military volunteers, is characterized by greed for profits and interaction with gangs involved in intentional murders.” In the same post, he refers to alleged information on taxes paid by Sinicyn and his travels (crossing the Ukrainian border)—information not available in open sources.

In reply, Sinicyn called Portnov “a burp of the past,”⁷⁷ denied Portnov’s accusations and said that he reported the crime of leaking personal information and passing it on to third parties to the National Police and the State Investigation Bureau.

According to the activist, as of March 31, the case was not included in the Unified Registry of Pre-Trial Investigations; his lawyers were told that an examination was still being conducted.

Roman Sinicyn (real name: Roman Balan) is a Ukrainian activist, blogger, member of the Who Ordered the Assassination of Katia Handziuk? initiative, co-founder of the People’s Rear volunteer association helping the Ukrainian military; for a while, he was the head of the attestation commission of the Ukrainian Ministry of Internal Affairs.

#intimidation_threats_and_other_forms_of_pressure

Late in the evening of **February 29**, 2020, there was a shooting near **Pershotravensk** in Zhytomyr Region, on the shore of the Khomora River, where environmental activists came to monitor the possible dumping of industrial waste from the Poninkivska Paper Factory.⁷⁸

The initiative group in question is made of local residents who oppose pollution of the rivers Khomora, which crosses Zhytomyr and Khmelnytsky Regions among others, and Sluch, which flows through Khmelnytsky, Zhytomyr and Rivne regions. They do not unite into an NGO because they believe that their activities as a group of people, a local environmental initiative coordinated on social media,⁷⁹ are more effective. The activists try to capture cases of dumping industrial waste on video.

According to the eyewitnesses, that time they were trying to capture a case of dumping waste on video to appeal to the State Environmental Inspection which collects water samples.

The people present during the incident testify that they did not see the faces of the attackers, who shot in their direction, but there were no victims. Borys Muravsky, an eyewitness, counted 8 shots; later, 6 shells were found on the location of the incident and handed over to the police.

On March 2, the police launched an investigation⁸⁰ according to Part 2 of Article 296 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine (hooliganism), the incident is investigated by the Department in Baranivka, Zhytomyr Region.

⁷⁶ Andrey Portnov (Андрей Портнов). Facebook page, February 29, 2020: https://www.facebook.com/aportnovua/posts/123419379231605?__tn__=-R.

⁷⁷ Roman Sinicyn. Personal Facebook page, March 2, 2020: <https://www.facebook.com/romabra/posts/10206441668118632>.

⁷⁸ Anna Sobetskaya. Personal Facebook page, March 1, 2020: <https://www.facebook.com/anna.sobetskaya.3/videos/1986725794807658/>.

⁷⁹ !!! Save rivers Khomora and Sluch !!! (!!! Врятувати річку Хомора та Слuch !!!) / Facebook group: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/373425253146167/>.

⁸⁰ The police are checking the reports of shooting near Poninky (Поліція перевіряє повідомлення про стрільбу неподалік Понінок) / National Police. Zhytomyr Region, March 2, 2020: <https://zt.npu.gov.ua/news/aktualno/policziya-pereviryaje-povidomlennya-pro-strilbu-nepodalik-poninok/>.

■ MARCH 2020

#legal_persecution

On **March 7**, 2020, the then-Head of the State Investigation Bureau (SIB) (and current Head of the General Prosecutor's Office) Iryna Venediktova stated⁸¹ that she had filed a lawsuit to defend her honor, dignity and business reputation against the Anti-Corruption Action Centre NGO, the online publication *Ukrayinska Pravda* and personally against the publication's owner Olena Prytula for the article published on January 28, titled *Avakov's octopus: how the "temporary" minister grows his influence in the law enforcement block*⁸² and authored by the organization, which speaks about her husband's possible influence on the SIB's personnel policies. The amount of the lawsuit is 150,000 hryvnias.

At the same time, according to the AntAC lawyer Olena Shcherban, neither AntAC nor *Ukrayinska Pravda* had received any court materials as of March 30, and they could not find the relevant information in the Unified State Registry of Court Decisions.

#physical_attack

On **March 8**, 2020, in **Kyiv**, after the end of the **Women's March**, two of its participants were beaten in an underground crossing on Naberezhno-Khreshchatytska Street. According to an eye-witness **Maryna Dubyna**,⁸³ a group of 8 people blocked their group's path and, after clarifying if the young men among them attended the march, attacked them, beating one of them and spraying pepper spray into the other's face.

According to the victims' lawyer, Oksana Huz, 4 people were arrested after the incident and delivered to a police department; three of them were released, and the third one was announced as a suspect with a preventive measure in the form of house arrest. Their exact identity is unknown.

According to the lawyer, the victims insisted on launching an investigation according to the articles on "hooliganism" and "violating citizens' equality" of the Criminal Code of Ukraine; however, in reply to a request from the ZMINA Human Rights Centre, the National Police specified that the record in the Unified Registry of Pre-Trial Investigations only cited the first article (Part 4 of Article 296).

According to the National Police information, about 2,000 people participated in the annual March for Women's Rights in Kyiv. There were also counter-rallies organized by initiatives that present themselves as defenders of "traditional values" (the rally featured the symbols of Tradition and Order, Silver Rose and others). No violations were recorded during the events.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Irina Venediktova. Personal Facebook page, March 7, 2020: <https://www.pravda.com.ua/articles/2020/01/28/7238587/>.

⁸² Avakov's octopus: how the "temporary" minister grows his influence in the law enforcement block (Спрут Авакова: як «тимчасовий» міністр нарощує свій вплив у силовому блоці) / *Ukrayinska Pravda*, January 28, 2020: <https://www.pravda.com.ua/articles/2020/01/28/7238587/>.

⁸³ Maryna Dubyna. Personal Facebook page, March 8, 2020: <https://www.facebook.com/doobyna/posts/1551101718375111>.

⁸⁴ "Are you afraid of coronavirus? Sexism has more victims": March for Women's Rights in Kyiv (photo report ("Боїшся коронавірусу? У сексизму більше жертв": як пройшов Марш за права жінок у Києві (фоторепортаж)) / ZMINA, March 8, 2020: <https://zmina.info/articles/boyishysya-koronavirusu-u-seksyzma-bilshe-zhertv-yak-projshov-marsh-za-prava-zhinok-u-kyievi-fotoreportazh/>.

#physical_attack

On **March 8, 2020**, in **Lviv**, raw eggs were thrown at three participants of the **Women's March** after the demonstration. **Marta Chumalo**, one of the victims, did not manage to identify the two attackers, a young man and a young woman.

In reply to a request from the ZMINA Human Rights Center, the police stated that there were no official complaints on behalf of the victims on March 8. The activists explained that they sent their reports by mail on a business day. At the moment of writing this report, it is not known for sure whether an investigation is being conducted.

According to media reports,⁸⁵ the March for Women's Rights in Lviv brought together about 200 participants; the demonstration marched from Rynok Square to the Opera. Just like in Kyiv, several people organized a counter-rally here under the slogan "Against abortion in Ukraine." This rally was announced on social media by the radical right initiative Tradition and Order Lviv.



■ A photo from Marta Chumalo's Facebook post

#intimidation_threats_and_other_forms_of_pressure

On **March 10, 2020**, during a protest against violations at Matrona Moskovska Mine in **Toretsk**, Donetsk Region, **Volodymyr Yelets**, a labor union activist who is also the coordinator of the regional legal reception of the Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union (UHHRU), was threatened⁸⁶ by the head of company security Yuriy Hnatiuk.

According to the UHHRU, mining in Matrona Moskovska Mine stopped in December 2019, but in March 2020 it was resumed without the required permits. On March 10, union representatives, together with miners who wanted to quit their jobs in this company because of its failure to pay wages, held a rally and then broke into the mine's administrative building. There were confrontations in the building, during which, according to Volodymyr Yelets, Yuriy Hnatiuk threatened him.



■ A photo from the material on the UHHRU website

After this, according to the UHHRU, Volodymyr Yelets noticed that he was being followed and found out that unidentified individuals were gathering information about him.

On March 11, Yelets recorded a video statement⁸⁷ in which he told about the incident and stated that if anything happened to him, he linked it to these threats. According to the UHHRU, the surveillance stopped after the publication.

⁸⁵ "Flowers to flower beds, rights to women!" A feminist march in Lviv (video) ("Квіти – клумбам, права – жінкам!" У Львові відбувся феміністичний марш (відео)) / *Radio Svoboda*, March 8, 2020: <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/marsh-zhinok/30476211.html>.

⁸⁶ New trade union. What the threats against the UHHRU Reception coordinator are linked to (Нова профспілка. З чим пов'язані погрози на адресу координатора приймальні УГСПЛ) / Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union, March 25, 2020: https://helsinki.org.ua/articles/nova-profspiika-z-chym-pov-iazani-pohrozy-na-adresu-koordinatora-priymalni-uhspil/?fbclid=IwAR1pWomijHq5Dq7tnnU_zyhVSyoXHJb7InTeX2bD_XqHcvtBW0DpAv5g.

⁸⁷ Volodymyr Yelets. Personal Facebook page, March 11, 2020: <https://www.facebook.com/volodymyr.yelets/videos/1174716009530238/>.

#intimidation_threats_and_other_forms_of_pressure

On **March 26, 2020**, in **Uzhgorod**, unidentified individuals poured yellow paint over a car that belonged to the City Council member **Viktor Shchadey** and left a funeral wreath on its roof.⁸⁸ The victim associates the incident with his public activities and believes that it constitutes intimidation.

The police announced that a criminal investigation was launched⁸⁹ with preliminary categorization according to Part 1 of Article 194 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine (intentional damage of property).



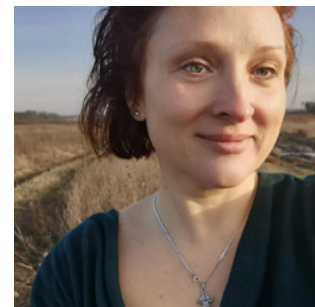
■ Photos from Viktor Shchadey's public page

Viktor Shchadey is a member of the Uzhgorod City Council, former acting mayor (2014), the founder of the Zakarpattia Centre for Supporting Housing Co-Owners Associations, public figure. He conducts public monitoring of the City Council's procurement and appeals to law enforcement agencies regarding the violations, actively covering the events on social media.⁹⁰

#intimidation_threats_and_other_forms_of_pressure

On **March 27, 2020**, **Annabella Morina**, the founder of the Pochaina Civil Movement organization, made a statement about threats from construction workers who installed sewerage pipes near the Pochaina River bed in **Kyiv** for the needs of the residential complexes that are being constructed on Rybalsky Island.⁹¹

In the video published by the activist on her Facebook page,⁹² when a person talking to Morina notices that she is filming, he first threatens to sue her, then to take away and "drown" her phone, and then to drown the woman herself; then other male voices can be heard rudely demanding that she go away.



■ Annabella Morina, a photo from the activist's Facebook page

According to the activist, she has filed a statement with the police, but as of April 2, she did not know if the information was recorded in the Unified Registry of Pre-Trial Investigations.

Annabella Morina (real name: Hanna Honcharenko) is a Kyiv local historian and journalist, the founder of Pochaina Civil Movement, which has worked since 2015 to preserve and restore Pochaina River, a former tributary of Dnipro that has nearly disappeared because of construction in Kyiv and currently exists as a system of lakes in the capital's Obolon District.

⁸⁸ Viktor Shchadey (Віктор Щадей). Facebook page, March 29, 2020: <https://www.facebook.com/Uzhhorod/posts/2886981274702702>

⁸⁹ Uzhgorod police investigates the fact of damaging a councilor's property (Поліція Ужгорода розслідує факт пошкодження майна депутата) / National Police. Zakarpattia Region, March 26, 2020: <https://zk.npu.gov.ua/news/Informaciya/policziya-uzhgoroda-rozsliduje-fakt-poskodzhennya-majna-deputata/>.

⁹⁰ Viktor Shchadey (Віктор Щадей). Personal Facebook page, January 30, 2020: <https://www.facebook.com/Uzhhorod/posts/2759472700786894>.

⁹¹ A local historian who initiated the restoration of Pochaina River in Kyiv made a statement about threats (Красьнавиця-ініціаторка відродження річки Почайна у Києві заявила про погрози) / ZMINA, March 27, 2020: <https://zmina.info/news/inicziatorka-stvorenniya-parku-pochajna-u-kyievi-zayavyla-pro-pogrozy/>.

⁹² Annabella Morina. Personal Facebook page, March 27, 2020: <https://www.facebook.com/annabella.morina/videos/3473270849390660/>.



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