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Crimea's Prosecution Opens Criminal Probe against Journalist Mykola Semena

SOURCE OF THREAT ▶ State

CATEGORY ⓘ ▶ Other acts having chilling effects on media freedom

PARTNER: CPJ, AEJ, EFJ/IFJ, Index

All activities of the Council of Europe concerning the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol are being undertaken in compliance with the terms of decision CM/Del/Dec(2014)1196/1.8 and subsequent decisions of the Committee of Ministers condemning the illegal annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol by the Russian Federation and upholding the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine.

On 19 April 2016, FSB agents in the Russia-annexed Ukrainian region of Crimea raided and searched the house of journalist Mykola Semena (freelancer with Krym.Realii - RFE/RL's Crimea service), confiscated his reporting equipment, and briefly detained him for interrogation in connection to a criminal probe on charges of making calls to separatism. The charges stem from an article published by Krym.Realii under a pseudonym; Semena denied any wrongdoing. According to his lawyer, FSB told Semena that he is the main suspect in the case and that he is banned from leaving the region for the period of investigation. If convicted, Semena faces up to five years in prison.

On 19 April 2016, Crimea's Chief Prosecutor, Natalia Poklonskaya announced that an unnamed journalist with Krym.Realii (Crimea Realities) was under FSB investigation in connection with an article published by the news website, which she said had quoted Ukrainian activists' calls to isolate the Crimean peninsula and to conduct military action to wrest the region from Russian control. On the same day, Poklonskaya's office said in a statement that she was overseeing the case against an unnamed Krym.Realii reporter, and that the prosecutors were looking to ban the website in Crimea arguing that their review of the publications showed that the news outlet is allegedly aiming to "discredit the actions of the Russian Federation on the territory of Crimea, incite inter-ethnic hatred, and make calls to extremism." Mykola Semena was detained on 19 April and later released on bail, with travel restrictions, according to his lawyer. Based on the lawyer's statement, CPJ concluded

that Crimea prosecutors are overseeing the probe against Semena.

This is at least the second time since the annexation of Crimea that the Russian authorities in Crimea have investigated a journalist on separatism charges. In March 2015, FSB agents raided the house of the parents of journalist Anna Andriyevskaya, telling her family that she was being sought on charges of making public calls for Crimean independence in a November 2014 article.

UPDATES

28 Sep 2018: In September 2018, Mykola Semena's lawyers filed a complaint to the ECtHR, contesting the verdict on the basis of article 10, 6 and 8 of the Convention.

20 Dec 2017: On 18 December 2017 the top Court in Crimea upheld the verdict against Semena, confirming his conviction on charges of separatism. The Court also shortened from three years to two the period of time during which the journalist is barred from undertaking "public activities".

➔ **Article published by RFE/RL: "Russia-Imposed Court In Crimea Upholds Journalist Semena's Verdict"**

22 Sep 2017: On 22 September 2017, the Court handed Mykola Semena a 2.5 years suspended sentence on a charge of separatism and barred him from "public activities" for three years. Semena's lawyer said he would appeal the ruling.

➔ **Article published by Radio Free Europe: "Crimean Journalist Semena Handed Suspended Sentence In 'Separatism' Case"**

➔ **Statement from EFJ: "Crimea: EFJ condemns Mykola Semena's conviction"**

10 May 2017: On 10 May 2017, the trial of Mykola Semena has resumed in Simferopol.

➔ **Article by Radio Free Europe: "Trial Of RFE/RL Contributor Semena Resumes In Crimea"**

02 Mar 2017: On 28 February 2017, Simferopol's Zheleznodorozhny District Court announced that the trial against Mykola Semena will begin on 20 March 2017.

➔ **Article published by Radio Free Europe : "Crimean Court Sets Date For RFE/RL Journalist's 'Separatism' Trial"**

07 Dec 2016: On 7 December 2016, Semena's lawyers Emil Kuberbinov and Andrei Sabinin said their client has received the final written charges from the Russian-imposed authorities in Crimea: Semena is charged with spreading "calls for undermining Russian territorial integrity via mass media." He could be sentenced to five years in prison if convicted.

➔ **Article published by Radio Free Europe: "Lawyers For Crimean Journalist Charged With Separatism Start Studying Case "**

02 Sep 2016: On 2 September, IFJ/EFJ launched an appeal, urging Russia to let a Ukrainian journalist return to Kiev for urgent treatment

[IFJ/EFJ Appeal](#)

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- [Report published on the Mapping Media Freedom platform: "Crimea/Крим: Radio Free Europe journalists' homes searched, criminal case filed"](#)
- [Press statement from CPJ: "Russian security forces raid homes of Crimean journalists"](#)

STATE REPLIES



22 Feb 2017 | Reply from the Government of Ukraine

[Official position of Ukraine](#)

FOLLOW-UPS



26 Sep 2017 | General Rapporteur of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) on Media Freedom and the Safety of Journalists calls for the conviction of Crimean journalist Mykola Semena to be annulled

[Statement by Volodymyr Ariev](#)

OSCE **22 Sep 2017** | OSCE Media Freedom Representative takes note of release of Ukrainian journalist Mykola Semena from house arrest, but condemns his conviction.

[Statement by Harlem Désir](#)