



# Prosecutions of Journalists

In 1993, the UN General Assembly established World Press Freedom Day, which has been celebrated on 3 May ever since. Each year, this day provides an opportunity to assess the state of press freedom around the world and to honour the memory of journalists who have lost their lives in the course of their duties.

Every year on this day, the international organisation Reporters Without Borders publishes its World Press Freedom Index. In 2025, Russia [ranked](#) 171st out of 180 countries, dropping nine places since the previous year.

In current circumstances, it is not possible to speak of freedom of the press in Russia. In recent years, hundreds of independent publications have been designated with the discriminatory labels of 'foreign agents' or 'undesirable organisations' and blocked within the country. Hundreds of media workers have been subjected to prosecution under administrative or criminal law and forced to leave Russia or suffer imprisonment.

We have analysed the criminal prosecutions of journalists currently deprived of liberty. Our data may be incomplete, yet it reveals significant trends.

## Key findings:

1. At least 57 journalists are currently imprisoned on politically motivated charges.
2. In 2024, 13 journalists were sentenced to serve terms of imprisonment, more than in any previous year. In 2025, seven journalists have already been convicted and sentenced to terms of imprisonment.
3. The average term of imprisonment for male journalists is seven years and eight months; for women, the average term is four years and three months.
4. Most of those imprisoned – 33 individuals - are between 30 and 50 years old.
5. Most of the imprisoned journalists worked in Moscow (16 journalists). In second place is occupied Crimea (11 journalists).
6. Under **Article 163 CC RF**<sup>1</sup> (*'Extortion'*), 16 journalists have been imprisoned. Such prosecutions are usually merely a pretext to end a journalist's ability to work.
7. Under **Article 205.2 CC RF** (*'Public calls to carry out terrorist activity, public justification of terrorism or propaganda of terrorism'*), at least seven journalists have been imprisoned. The most common grounds for such prosecutions have been publications on social media.

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<sup>1</sup> CC RF – abbreviation for Criminal Code of the Russian Federation.



8. Seven journalists have been imprisoned for participating in an extremist group (**Article 282.1 CC RF**). Five of these were accused of working for the Anti-Corruption Foundation, founded and run by Aleksei Navalny, which the authorities consider extremist.

9. At least six journalists have been imprisoned on a charge of spreading 'fake news' about the Russian army (**Article 207.3 CC RF**).

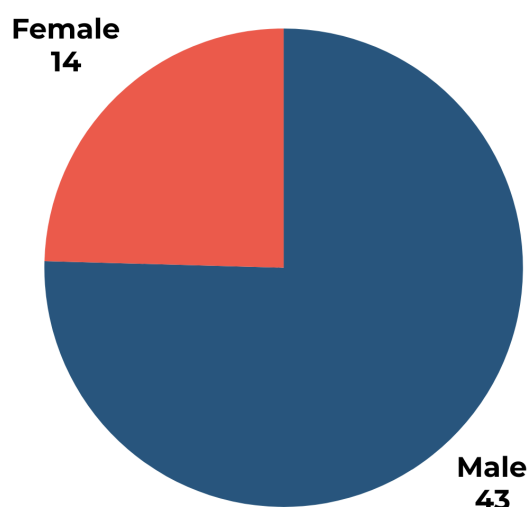
10. Those prosecuted on a charge of espionage (**Article 276 CC RF**) have primarily been foreign journalists, above all Ukrainians (five journalists have been imprisoned on such charges).

## Prosecutions in figures

According to the 'Political Prisoners. Memorial' human rights project, at least 57 journalists are currently imprisoned. 37 of these have already been sentenced; another 20 are on remand awaiting court decisions. Of these, we have recognised 29 journalists as political prisoners. We also see clear signs of political motivation and unlawfulness in the imprisonment of the remaining 28 journalists. However, for various reasons, we have not yet been able to fully analyse the charges brought against them.

While some of the journalists were imprisoned before 2022, most of the convictions for which imprisonment was the punishment (34 cases) were handed down after the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. From that time, the scale of repression against journalists steadily increased. In 2024, Russian courts sentenced 13 journalists to terms of imprisonment. In 2023 there were nine such cases and in 2022 there were five. This trend continues. In the first four months of 2025, seven journalists have already been sentenced to terms of imprisonment.

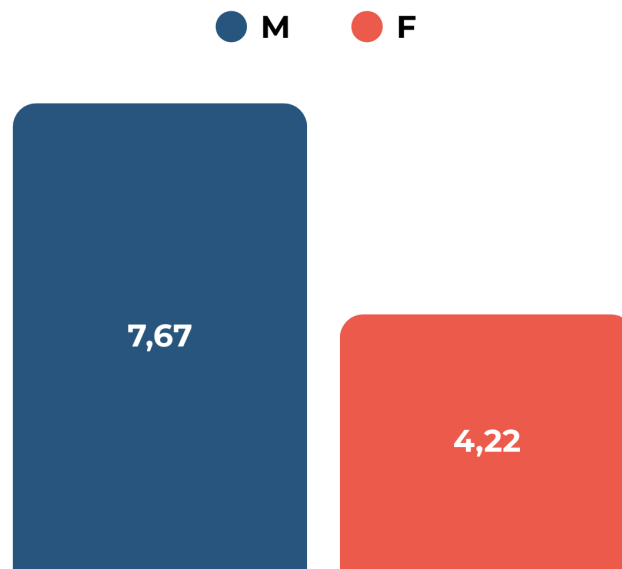
### Gender of imprisoned journalists





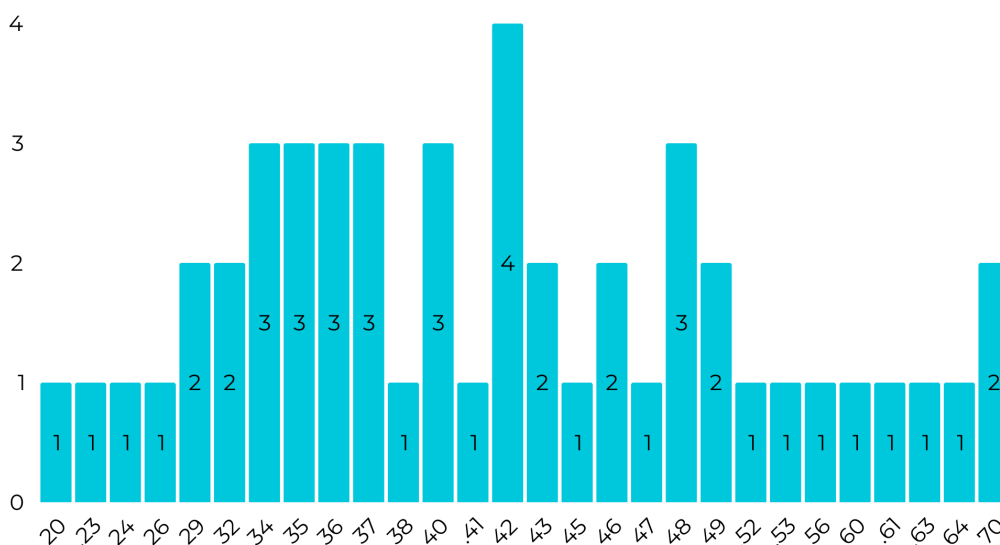
Three-quarters of imprisoned journalists are men. Men tend to be given harsher sentences. The average term of imprisonment for men is seven years and eight months, while the average length of imprisonment for women is four years and three months.

## Average length of sentence by gender



The age of imprisoned journalists ranges from 20 to 70 years. Those aged between 30 and 50 years are the largest cohort of prisoners, numbering 33. The age of nine imprisoned journalists is not known.

## Age of imprisoned journalists

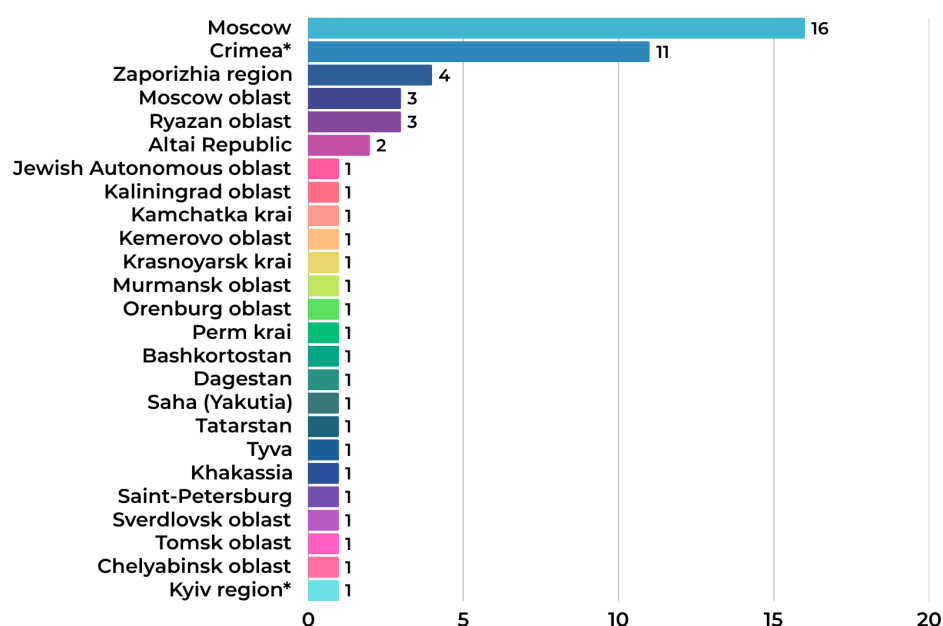




Thirteen percent of imprisoned journalists have children who are minors, and 13 percent of prisoners suffer from some kind of illness. Five per cent of those imprisoned have elderly relatives who are still alive.

The geographic range of prosecutions of media workers is broad and includes both a large part of the Russian Federation (22 regions) and the occupied territories of Ukraine (Crimea and Zaporizhzhia Oblast).

## Regions where prosecutions of imprisoned journalists were initiated

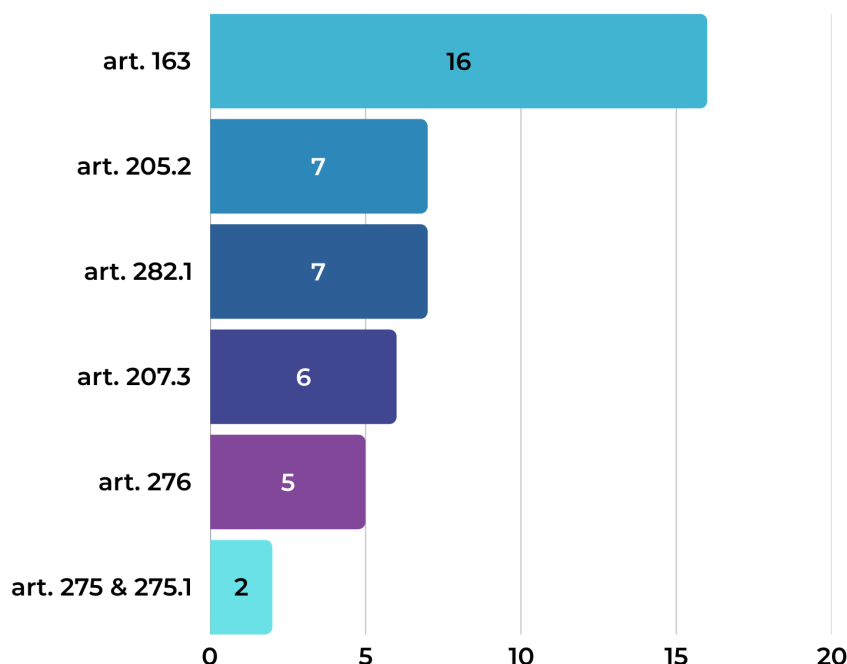


***\*Territories of Ukraine currently or previously occupied by Russia***

The city of Moscow remains the leader in terms of the number of imprisoned journalists, with 16. The region in second place in terms of intensity of prosecutions is occupied Crimea (11 journalists). At least four media workers have been imprisoned in connection with criminal prosecutions in the occupied part of Zaporizhzhia Oblast. The top five regions in terms of the numbers of prosecutions of journalists include Ryazan and Moscow Oblast.



## Articles of the Russian Criminal Code



According to our data, journalists imprisoned in Russia have most often been charged under **Article 163 CC RF** (*Extortion*), **Article 205.2 CC RF** (*Public calls to carry out terrorist activities, public justification of terrorism or propaganda of terrorism*), **Article 282.1 CC RF** (*Organisation of an extremist group*), **Article 207.3 CC RF** (*Public dissemination of information known to be false about the use of the armed forces of the Russian Federation*) and **Article 276 CC RF** (*Espionage*).

### 'Extortion' (Article 163 CC RF)

**Article 163 CC RF** is the law under which journalists are most frequently deprived of liberty, with 16 journalists currently imprisoned. Conviction for 'extortion' [carries](#) a sentence of up to 15 years' imprisonment.

This was the law used, for example, against [Yan Katelevsky](#) and [Aleksandr Dorogov](#), Moscow Oblast bloggers and journalists with the publication *Rosderzhava*. For several years they [investigated](#) corruption and police abuses. Their final publication concerned predatory takeovers of funeral businesses in Moscow Oblast that were accomplished possibly with police help. In 2020, Katelevsky and Dorogov were accused, among other things, of extorting 1.5 million roubles from a traffic police inspector in exchange for not publishing defamatory information. They were beaten up both at the time of their arrest and while they were held on remand. In November 2023, Lyubertsy City Court sentenced both men to long terms of imprisonment: Katelevsky was given nine years and six months while Dorogov received ten years and six months. The project 'Political Prisoners. Memorial' considers them political prisoners.



Another striking example, from 2025, is a case in which security forces opened an investigation into extortion against Aleksei Frolov, editor-in-chief of *Novaya gazeta – Ryazan*, journalist Natalya Smolyaninova, and Konstantin Smirnov, a member of the Yabloko party and editor-in-chief of the publication *Ryazan. Vid sboku*. The investigative authorities [believed](#) the suspects extorted 300,000 roubles from the CEO of a local company in exchange for not publishing negative articles about him. The defendants maintain their innocence. Smirnov has called the case retribution for his campaign against the abolition of local self-government in the region. In February, the court placed Smolyaninov under house arrest while Frolov and Smirnov were remanded in custody. Against this backdrop, *Novaya gazeta – Ryazan* suspended operations.

In similar cases, charges of extortion have been linked either to direct fabrication of evidence or to clear bias on the part of the investigative authorities and the court, aimed both at stopping the activities of specific journalists or intimidating the journalistic community as a whole.

### **‘Public calls to carry out terrorist activity, public justification of terrorism or propaganda of terrorism’ (Article 205.2 CC RF)**

At least seven journalists have been imprisoned under **Article 205.2 CC RF**, which [provides](#) for punishment of up to seven years’ imprisonment or a fine of up to 1 million roubles. This law has mainly been used, without justification, to prosecute critics of the authorities; its application in most cases constitutes a violation of the right to freedom of expression.

One of those accused of ‘justifying terrorism’ is Yakutsk journalist Sasha Aleksandrova who worked with several local publications and launched her own website, ZIMA. After the war began, Aleksandrova left Russia in protest and published articles criticising the Russian authorities. However, in 2024 she returned to Yakutia and on 20 March Yakutsk City Court [remanded](#) her in custody until 19 May. The exact nature of the charges against her remains unknown, but previous experience suggests the journalist’s prosecution is most likely related to her anti-war stance. In recent years, Article 205.2 has mostly been used to prosecute cases involving entirely legitimate support for Ukraine and disagreement with the war and dictatorship.

Another example is the case of [Sergei Kornilevsky](#), a journalist with the Bira state television and radio company in the Jewish Autonomous Oblast convicted for a comment on Telegram. On 26 September 2022, after the announcement of mobilisation in Russia, he commented on a post about an attempt to shoot a military recruitment officer in Irkutsk Oblast: ‘*What’s the difference if he’s wounded or not, he’ll still get 10 years [...] At least that way it wasn’t for nothing.*’ A year and a half later, on 7 February 2024, the journalist’s home was searched. A few days after the search, Kornilevsky attempted to fly to Israel but was detained in Moscow and then remanded in custody. Law enforcement agencies considered the journalist’s commentary to constitute justification of terrorism. Despite gross violations



during the psychological and linguistic forensic tests, exposed by independent experts, in May 2024 the 1st Eastern District Military Court in Khabarovsk [sentenced](#) Kornilevsky to two years and six months in a penal colony. We consider him a political prisoner.

### **‘Organisation of an extremist group’ (Article 282.1 CC RF)**

**Article 282.1, Part 1, CC RF** (*‘Creation of an extremist group or leadership of such a group’*) [provides](#) for imprisonment of up to 10 years or a fine of up to 800,000 roubles; **Article 282.1, Part 2, CC RF** (*‘Participation in an extremist group’*) provides for up to six years’ imprisonment or a fine of 600,000 roubles.

Of the seven journalists imprisoned under this article, five were convicted for collaborating with the Anti-Corruption Foundation. Four of these were prosecuted in a single case: *Sota Vision* staff [Antonina Favorskaya](#) and [Artyom Kriger](#), as well as freelance journalists with the *Navalny Live* YouTube channel, [Sergei Karelin](#) and [Konstantin Gabov](#). The details of the charges were unknown because the trial was held behind closed doors. According to available information, the journalists were accused of making publications and videos for the Anti-Corruption Foundation, which the Russian authorities consider an extremist organisation. On 15 April 2025, Nagatinsky district court in Moscow sentenced Favorskaya, Kriger, Karelin and Gabov each to five years and six months’ imprisonment. We consider them political prisoners.

The case of Olga Komleva from Ufa, an activist and a journalist with *RusNew*, was also linked with the Anti-Corruption Foundation. On 27 March 2024, security forces [detained](#) Komleva on charges of ‘participation in an extremist group’ (**Article 282.1, Part 2, CC RF**) and the next day Komleva was [remanded](#) in custody. In April 2024, Komleva was [transferred](#) to Moscow and in July she was [charged](#) with spreading ‘fake news’ about the Russian army (**Article 207.3, Part 2 [e], CC RF**). We consider Olga Komleva a political prisoner.

The prosecutions of Favorskaya, Kriger, Karelin, Gabov and Komleva has also been part of a wider process in which the Russian authorities have been prosecuting activists, such as volunteers from Navalny’s regional headquarters.

### **‘Public dissemination of information known to be false about the use of the armed forces of the Russian Federation’ (Article 207.3 CC RF)**

We consider **Article 207.3 CC RF**, added to the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation in March 2022, contrary to the Russian Constitution and fundamental principles of law. **Article 207.3, Part 2, CC RF**, under which at least six journalists have been imprisoned, [provides](#) for imprisonment of up to 10 years or a fine of up to 5 million roubles.

One of the first journalists convicted under **Article 207.3 CC RF** was [Sergei Mikhailov](#), publisher of the Altai newspaper *Listok*. He was accused of





publishing information on *Listok*'s website and Telegram channel about crimes committed by Russian military personnel in Bucha and Mariupol. Before this, both *Listok* and Mikhailov personally had come under pressure from the authorities. Attempts had been made to hack the journalist's Telegram channel and the newspaper and its management were fined several times under administrative law for 'discrediting the Russian army' (**Article 20.3.3, Part 1, CAO RF<sup>2</sup>**) and for making calls for sanctions against Russia (**Article 20.3.4 CAO RF**). In addition, officers of the anti-extremism police ['Centre E'] in Altai sought to intimidate printing houses and advertisers that had done business with the journalist. Mikhailov was remanded in custody on 13 April 2022. On 30 August 2024, he was [sentenced](#) to eight years' imprisonment. We consider Sergei Mikhailov a political prisoner.

Another example of a prosecution for spreading 'fake news' under **Article 207.3 CC RF** is that of journalist [Maria Ponomarenko](#). Ponomarenko worked for the *RusNews* portal and, according to the investigative authorities, participated in running the Telegram channel 'No Censorship.' Ponomarenko was prosecuted for a criminal offence for a post she allegedly made on this channel about the Russian army's strike on the drama theatre in Mariupol on 16 March 2022 which killed more than 300 civilians. In April 2022, Ponomarenko was detained and remanded in custody. In September, she slit her wrists in protest at the conditions in which she was being held. She was later transferred to house arrest but was soon taken back into custody. Despite having two children who are minors, in February 2023 a court in Barnaul sentenced Ponomarenko to six years' imprisonment with a subsequent five-year ban on working as a journalist.

In November that year it became known Ponomarenko had been accused of attacking prison staff. She was charged under **Article 321 CC RF** ('*Disruption of the activities of institutions ensuring isolation from society*'). On 27 March 2025, she was convicted on this charge and sentenced to one year and ten months' imprisonment. The conditions of Ponomarenko's detention remain extremely difficult for her. In March, she [declared](#) a hunger strike and said she had cut her veins again because of constant abuse from penal colony staff. According to Ponomarenko, the security forces are seeking to drive her to suicide. We consider Maria Ponomarenko a political prisoner.

Another *RusNews* journalist prosecuted for 'fake news' is [Roman Ivanov](#). In addition to his work for *RusNews*, Ivanov also ran the protest online page 'Honest Korolyovskoe!' Posts he made on the Telegram channel and VK group of the same name led to criminal proceedings against him under **Article 207.3 CC RF**. Three of these posts dealt with war crimes committed by the Russian army, including the killing of civilians in Bucha, missile strikes on civilian targets in other Ukrainian cities and a UN report on these

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<sup>2</sup> CAO RF – abbreviation for Code of Administrative Offences of the Russian Federation.





crimes. For these three posts, on 6 March 2024 Korolyov town court in Moscow Oblast [sentenced](#) Ivanov to seven years in a general regime penal colony. The 'Political Prisoners. Memorial' human rights project considers Ivanov a political prisoner.

### **'Espionage' (Article 276 CC RF)**

**Article 276 CC RF** on espionage [provides](#) for imprisonment for up to 20 years. One of the most prominent journalists prosecuted for espionage has been Evan Gershkovich, a reporter for *The Wall Street Journal*. Detained in Yekaterinburg in March 2023, according to the prosecution he worked for the CIA and had been gathering information about the activities of a defence enterprise in the region. The journalist's colleagues [related](#) he was working on a story about how the war was perceived in different Russian regions. In July 2024, after a closed trial, Sverdlovsk Oblast Court [sentenced](#) Gershkovich to 16 years in a strict regime penal colony. In August 2024, the reporter was handed over to the United States as part of a prisoner exchange between Russia and Western countries.

At present, at least five Ukrainian journalists are being held in Russia on charges of 'espionage': Heorhiy Levchenko, Yana Suvorova, Anastasia Hlukhovska, Vladyslav Hershon, and [Serhiy Tsyhupa](#). The journalists were detained or [kidnapped](#) in occupied Ukrainian territories. They were all charged under **Article 276 CC RF** ('*Making public calls to carry out terrorist activities*') and all except Tsyhupa were also charged under **Article 205.2 CC RF** ('*Public justification of terrorism or propaganda of terrorism*'). We consider Serhiy Tsyhupa a political prisoner. There is also clear evidence that the prosecutions of the other journalists are politically motivated and unlawful. However, because of a lack of information about their cases, we are not yet able to include them in the corresponding list.

### **'Treason' (Article 275 CC RF) and 'Collusion with foreigners' (Article 275.1 CC RF)**

A number of journalists have also been prosecuted for 'treason' and 'collusion with foreigners.' **Article 275 CC RF** ('*Treason*') [provides](#) for imprisonment for up to 20 years with a fine of up to 500,000 roubles, or life imprisonment. The penalties under **Article 275.1 CC RF** ('*Collusion with a foreign state or organisation*') are terms of imprisonment for [up to eight years](#) with a fine of up to 1 million roubles.

[Ivan Safronov](#), a former correspondent for *Kommersant* and *Vedomosti* and an ex-advisor to the head of Roscosmos, remains a prisoner. As a journalist, he specialised in sensitive topics such as the military-industrial complex, the army and space exploration. On 7 July 2020, he was detained in Moscow under **Article 275 CC RF** ('*Treason*') and accused of passing secret information about Russian military cooperation with an unspecified



African or Middle Eastern country to Czech intelligence. Safronov himself considers his prosecution retribution for his journalistic work.

No convincing evidence of his guilt has been presented to the public. Journalists from *Proekt* who studied the case files [found](#) no evidence that the journalist committed a crime. Despite this, on 5 September 2022 Moscow City Court sentenced Ivan Safronov to 22 years in a strict regime penal colony with a fine of 500,000 roubles and two years' probation on his release. We consider Ivan Safronov a political prisoner.

The first known prosecution of a journalist for the offence of collusion with a foreign state or organisation (**Article 275.1 CC RF**) is that of Chita journalist and poet [Nika Novak](#). She was prosecuted for [working](#) with *Sibir.Realii*, a regional project of *Radio Liberty*. On 26 November 2024, Novak was sentenced to four years in a general regime penal colony. On 31 March 2025, the sentence was upheld on appeal. We consider Nika Novak a political prisoner.

### Other articles of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation

The authorities have repeatedly [used](#) **Article 318, Part 1, CC RF** (*'Use of violence not dangerous to life or health against a representative of the authorities'*), which provides for [imprisonment](#) for up to five years and a fine of up to 200,000 roubles, to prosecute civil society activists, and this practice has also affected journalists. For example, [Evgenia Mandrygina \(Shelkovnikova\)](#), a correspondent for the Krasnoyarsk online publication *NGS24*, was prosecuted after she was sent to film events at a military recruitment office on 22 September 2022, the first day of mobilisation in Russia. On that day, the officer in charge of the centre provoked a conflict with Mandrygina and assaulted her. He later told law enforcement officers and the court that he himself had been assaulted by the journalist. The court sided with the military official and, on 11 June 2024, sentenced Mandrygina to three years' custodial compulsory work. On 17 October the sentence was upheld on appeal. We consider the journalist a political prisoner.

Some journalists have also been prosecuted on 'terrorism' charges. One example is that of the Crimean Tatar citizen journalist [Remzi Bekirov](#), a member of Crimean Solidarity and a correspondent for *Grani.ru*. Bekirov had streamed live coverage of politically motivated searches and the trials of Crimean residents, including prosecutions for involvement with Hizb ut-Tahrir, an organisation banned in Russia. He himself was then accused of involvement in Hizb ut-Tahrir and charged with offences under **Article 205.5, Part 1, CC RF** (*'Organisation of the activities of a terrorist organisation'*) and **Article 30, Part 1, CC RF in conjunction with Article 278 CC RF** (*'Preparation for the violent seizure of power'*). On 10 March 2022, he was sentenced to 19 years' imprisonment in a strict regime penal colony. We consider Bekirov a political prisoner.



## Torture and death

Like many others prosecuted in Russia, journalists are often subjected to beatings and torture at the time of their arrest or while in custody. The Ukrainian freelance journalist [Vladyslav Yesypenko](#), who worked for *Radio Liberty*, was detained in occupied Crimea in March 2021. He was charged with offences under **Article 222.1, Part 1, CC RF** (*'Illegal acquisition, transfer, sale, storage, transportation, shipment or carrying of explosive substances or explosive devices'*) and **Article 223.1, Part 1, CC RF** (*'Illegal manufacture of explosive substances, as well as illegal manufacture, alteration or repair of explosive devices'*). According to the investigative authorities, Yesypenko had a grenade in his car, which he had taken from a 'hideout' of the Ukrainian intelligence services, for whom he was gathering information in Crimea. According to Yesypenko himself, the grenade was planted on him by FSB officers.

Yesypenko reported that he was beaten and tortured with electric shocks to extract a confession from him. On 12 March, Yesypenko was remanded in custody and subsequently his detention was repeatedly extended. On 16 February 2022, Simferopol district court sentenced him to six years' imprisonment. On 18 August, the sentence was [reduced](#) by one year.

At least one female journalist has died in custody in Russia. Ukrainian citizen [Victoria Roshchyna](#), who worked with the outlets *Hromadske*, *Ukrainska Pravda* and *Radio Svoboda*, disappeared on 3 August 2023 after passing through Russian border control as she entered occupied Ukraine via Russia. It was only in April 2024 that Russian security forces acknowledged they had detained Roshchyna. It is not known whether a criminal case had been opened against her. According to [Tetiana Katrychenko](#), executive director of the Media Initiative for Human Rights, after her disappearance, Roshchyna was held at various times in Penal Colony No. 77 in occupied Berdiansk in Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia Oblast and in Remand Prison No. 2 in Taganrog in Russia's Rostov Oblast, the latter infamous for torture. On 10 October 2024, it [became known](#) Roshchyna had died while being transferred to Lefortovo Remand Prison in Moscow, from where she was to be sent to Ukraine as part of a prisoner exchange. Her body was [returned](#) to her family only at the end of February 2025. In April 2025, the Ukrainian Prosecutor General's Office [reported](#) that Roshchyna's body showed numerous signs of torture, including abrasions and bruising, a broken rib and marks caused by electric shocks. It later [emerged](#) that some of the deceased's organs were missing from the body returned to Ukraine.