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## More Reporters Die in Eastern Ukraine

Should journalists killed in action be mourned less because they were working for the Kremlin?

### *Ще більше журналістів загинуло в Україні*

*Чи слід менше сумувати за журналістам, загиблим у Східній Україні, від того, що вони працювали на Кремль?*

*Минулого тижня у Східній Україні при виконанні професійних обов'язків був убитий ще один журналіст - цього разу кореспондент одного з російських державних телеканалів. Його смерть стала поштовхом до болісної дискусії про роль російських журналістів у все більш поляризованому конфлікті. Ігор Корнелюк працював над сюжетом про біженців і стоючи на узбіччі разом з групою проросійських ополченців, він потрапив під стрілянину з мінометів, його було поранено і він помер на операційному столі. Смерть Корнелюка незабаром стала предметом палких перепалок між активістами і "патріотами" про роль журналістів, що працюють в державних ЗМІ. Реакція офіційного Києва на смерть Корнелюка не відрізнялася особливим співчуттям. Генпрокурор України незабаром прийшов до висновку, що Корнелюк був вбитий антиурядовими повстанцями. До цього висновку важко поставитися інакше як зі скептицизмом, якщо врахувати свідчення багатьох людей, які перебували на місці смерті Корнелюка. Але чи прийде офіційне російське розслідування до результатів, що більше заслуговують довіри? Як сказав колись хтось: "На війні першою гине правда".*

[http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2014/06/23/more\\_reporters\\_die\\_in\\_eastern\\_ukraine](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2014/06/23/more_reporters_die_in_eastern_ukraine)



Last week, another journalist was killed on the job in eastern Ukraine -- this time a correspondent working for one of Russia's state TV channels. His death prompted an agonized discussion about the role of Russian journalists in an increasingly polarized conflict.

Igor Kornelyuk was working on a story about refugees in eastern Ukraine. On June 17 he was standing at the side of a road with a group of pro-Russian militia when unknown assailants (presumably

the Ukrainian military) opened fire on them with mortars. Kornelyuk was hit. He died not long after on an operating table at a local hospital.

Kornelyuk's colleagues recalled that he had zero experience of covering conflict. He spent years running a newspaper for children, then reported court and shipyard news for a TV channel in Russia's northern port city of Murmansk. Nobody could explain to me why the reporter eagerly accepted an assignment to cover the civil war in eastern Ukraine, where dozens of victims die each week. Apparently I wasn't the only one to wonder. A reporter for the Russian service of U.S.-sponsored Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty asked why the country's main TV channel was sending reporters to the front lines without body armor or any special training for work in hostile conditions. Kornelyuk left behind a wife and a 7-year-old daughter in Moscow. (He was buried on Friday.)

On the day after Kornelyuk's death, a Russian TV cameraman identified the body of another colleague, video engineer Anton Voloshin, who was found dead near a checkpoint in the region of Luhansk, close to the Russian border. (Like Kornelyuk, he also had no prior experience covering a conflict zone.) That brought to four the number of reporters killed in less than three weeks in Ukraine. The deaths of Kornelyuk and Voloshin topped news reports in Russia. Kornelyuk's colleagues accused the Ukrainian military of specifically targeting him, saying that his status as a journalist should have been visible to those who fired on the group.

Journalists covering wars always risk their lives. When they die, we find in the eulogies differing degrees of truth about who is blame for our tragic losses. This time around, leading Russian officials quickly got into the act: the Russian parliament demanded that Ukraine open an investigation into the deaths. On Thursday, the deputy head of the State Duma, Sergei Zheleznyak, declared that the killing of the Russian reporters was an intentional act: "our reporters are being hunted, arrested, taken hostage for money, and deliberately killed." Zheleznyak blamed Ukrainian authorities for destroying reporters' lives, to silence "the truth they are trying to make public."

Tatyana Lokshina, of the Moscow chapter of Human Rights Watch, told me she agreed that parliament should investigate the deaths of the Russian reporters in eastern Ukraine. At the same time she drew a distinction between the "the deaths of journalists traveling in hostile war zones with a high professional risk" and the "targeted killings" of Russian journalists like Anna Politkovskaya and Natalia Estemirova, two reporters who met untimely deaths after long careers after publicizing truths that ran contrary to the Kremlin-approved version of events. Both Politkovskaya and Estemirova earned official disfavor for their highly critical coverage of the wars in Chechnya, where they threw a spotlight on human rights violations and atrocities committed by both sides. (Putin famously went out of his way to dismiss Politkovskaya, after her death, as someone whose "influence on political life within Russia was very minimal.") Earlier this month, a court in Moscow sentenced five men to prison (two of them for life) for their involvement in Politkovskaya's killing. But trial left Politkovskaya's defenders with little sense that justice had been done, since the people who ordered her killing remain at large.

Lokshina has an all-too-intimate knowledge of the dangers facing journalists on the front. Last month, she and her colleagues made a narrow escape from mortar fire outside of the city of Slovyansk -- just a day before two other journalists, Andy Rocchelli and Andrei Mironov, were killed on the same road.

Kornelyuk's death quickly became the object of heated exchanges among activists and "patriots" over the role of state-employed journalists. Reporters at the independent Internet publication *Slon* started their obituary for Kornelyuk this way: "In spite of ideological contradictions, the editors at Slon.ru express sincere condolences" to the state TV company that employed him. That prompted a bitter reply from Aleksandr Kots, a correspondent for the popular newspaper *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, in which he assailed the *Slon* journalists: "He who expresses sorrow while adding 'but' or 'in spite of' is no longer a person." "I feel disillusioned by the entire journalist community," wrote Alexander Raskin, an experienced war reporter for the state-owned newspaper *Izvestia*. "This isn't an appropriate time to blame each other; it's a time to be together and to mourn our loss."

The reaction to Kornelyuk's death by official Kiev wasn't exactly characterized by sympathy. President Petro Poroshenko called for an investigation into the deaths of Kornelyuk and Voloshin, but then went on to report that the Ukrainian military had responded to "terrorist attacks" on its forces by killing "ten terrorists" (referring to members of the rebel groups that are trying to establish independent republics in Ukraine's East). By Thursday, the Ukrainian prosecutor general had begun its inquiry into the deaths of the two Russian reporters, and quickly concluded that both were killed by anti-government rebels rather than by Ukrainian forces. It's hard to regard that finding with anything other than skepticism, given the testimony of many who were at the scene of Kornelyuk's death. But will the official Russian report arrive at a more trustworthy result? As someone once said: "In war, the first casualty is the truth."