



## **Ukraine: The authorities should stop harassing independent television channel TVi**

We, the undersigned organisations, call on the Ukrainian authorities to stop the continued harassment of TVi, the country's only independent television channel. We also call on them to ensure that media freedom and freedom of expression are respected in Ukraine.

On Thursday 12 July, tax officials raided the office of TVi in Kiev as part of a criminal investigation into the television channel's head, Mykola Kniazhytsky, for large-scale tax evasion. The raid obstructed the work of the channel, interrupting scheduled programmes. We consider the tax officials' actions to be disproportionate and in actions violation of TVi's right to freedom of expression.

Although the charges brought against Kniazhytsky do not carry the sanction of imprisonment, the tax authorities requested his medical records, something which they would only have needed if his arrest was imminent. This request should therefore be viewed as additional harassment of TVi's head, who fears that he could be charged with a criminal offence that could lead to a prison sentence.

This is the latest incident in a long string of incidents harassing TVi.

- In April 2012 TVi fought the tax authorities on another issue, that time concerning the channel's official address.
- In 2011, TVi, the only national broadcaster not to be directly or indirectly controlled by the government, was denied a broadcasting license as part of Ukraine's digital switchover in 2015. TVi's often critical coverage of the authorities, and of President Viktor Yanukovich in particular, is thought to be the reason why the channel was denied the licence.

While the authorities have a legitimate responsibility to investigate everyone for tax crimes, this should not be applied selectively. the ongoing focus on TVi, and on Mikhail Kniazhytski in particular, raises serious questions about the actions of the Ukrainian tax authorities.

We remind the Ukrainian authorities that Ukraine has made commitments in the Council of Europe and the OSCE to protect freedom of the press.

We call on the authorities to:

- Stop the harassment of TVi, and specifically its head Mykola Kniazhytsky
- Carry out an independent and impartial parliamentary investigation into the tax officials' raid at the TVi premises
- Recompense TVi for the temporary interruption of its broadcasting on 12 July
- Refrain from any action which might have a chilling effect on media freedom in Ukraine.

### **SIGNATURES**

#### **ARTICLE 19**

**Freedom House**

**Reporters without Borders**

**Open Society Foundation**

## **Background Information**

In June 2012, the following organisations released a joint mission report on press freedom in Ukraine:

- World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA)
- ARTICLE 19
- Freedom House
- Open Society Foundations (OSF)
- Ukrainian Association of Press Publishers.

[\*"Make freedom of expression a reality, Mr. President" - A Report on Press Freedom in Ukraine\*](#) outlines the findings of a research mission conducted at the beginning of April 2012. The mission found serious problems, including corruption, and recommended steps to improve freedom of expression in the country.

During the mission, the delegation met with Serhii Liovochkin, Head of the Presidential Administration of Ukraine, to discuss the freedom of expression issues facing the country. They expressed concern about the following issues:

- An environment of corruption and lack of transparency that affects the press, the judiciary and society as a whole
- The need for a free market so that a truly independent press can flourish
- The lack of independence and pluralism of broadcasters and the politicisation of news coverage
- Frequent cases of impunity and lack of prosecution for those who attack the media.

[\*"Make freedom of expression a reality, Mr. President" - A Report on Press Freedom in Ukraine\*](#) subsequently made a series of recommendations, including calls for:

- The authorities to allow media professionals to report openly and without fear of repercussions
- An immediate end to "envelope" payments to journalists and other media professionals
- The Interagency Working Group to establish an effective dialogue about issues of press freedom between media professionals, the government, and the public
- The authorities to ensure that the Access to Information law is respected, with requested information being provided in a timely manner
- Transparency of media ownership
- Increasing the availability of digital channels for regional and local broadcasters
- An open inquiry into why new companies without experience in digital broadcasting were granted licences, rather than long-established regional broadcasters, such as TVi
- An independent, transparent and fair judicial process in Georgiy Gongadze's murder Case. This would help restore the confidence of the public and the international community that the media in Ukraine will be able to report freely on issues of public interest, without fear of reprisal.