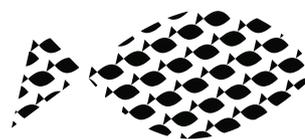


STOP TARGETING

RESPONDING TO THREATS TO CIVIL SOCIETY

ACTIVISTS

NOVEMBER
2018



COALITION
TO PROTECT
CIVIL
SOCIETY

IMPUNITY KILLS. WHO WAS KATERYNA HANDZYUK AND WHAT WAS SHE FIGHTING FOR

On November 04, Katya Handzyuk died in the burn treatment department of Kyiv city clinical hospital №2.

Her name became known all over the country when, on July 31, the activist **was sprayed with sulfuric acid** near her house. The attack sparked an intense reaction from Ukrainian society, while finding the real assailants became a significant test for Ukraine's law enforcement system, a test which the system is



failing.

The attack on Handzyuk was accompanied by a series of unsolved crimes against activists over the past few years.

WHO WAS KATYA HANDZYUK?

Katya Handzyuk was 33 when she was killed, having completed three higher education degrees in economics and management. She began engaging in social activism at the age of 18.

In 2004, she participated in the Orange Revolution. In 2012, she co-founded the Agency of Public Journalism "MOST", which published anticorruption investigations focusing on the Kherson oblast authorities.

In 2014, she became an active member of the EuroMaidan movement in Kherson. After the annexation of Crimea and the beginning of the war in Donbas, she provided assistance to internally displaced persons and worked as an assistant to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in the Kherson oblast.

Katya's friends and acquaintances remember her as a brave and energetic activist who was critical, meticulous and demanding. She was always ready to fight and all pro-Ukrainian and socially active people in Kherson consider themselves her friends.

POLITICAL ACTIVITY

In May 2014, Kateryna Handzyuk was elected deputy of the Kherson City Council on the list of the Batkivshchyna Party, but a year later Handzyuk quit the party to protest the removal of the Mayor of Kherson, Volodymyr Mykolayenko, as head of Batkivshchyna's Kherson branch. Batkivshchyna had accused Mykolayenko of refusing to carry out lustration as well as misappropriating funds from the city budget.

In recent years, Kateryna Handzyuk combined her public activism with public sector work as an adviser to the Mayor of Kherson and an official on the Executive Committee of the Kherson City Council.

WHICH HIGH-PROFILE CASES WAS KATYA HANDZYUK EXPOSING?

In September 2017, Handzyuk publicly accused Artem Antoshchuk, head of the Department for the Protection of the Economy in the Kherson oblast, of demanding a bribe from the City Council staff.

In November 2017, Handzyuk criticized Anastasiya Deyeva, who was Deputy Minister of the Interior at the time, for the ineffectiveness of her work and the lack of reforms within the State Emergency Service. During spring 2018, she published a list of more than 200 people who, over the past four years, had received permits to carry gas-powered guns and rubber bullets under the false pretense of being journalists (journalists in Ukraine have special access to such guns).

Shortly before she was fatally attacked, Katya criticized law enforcement officials for the

ineffective investigation of the attacks on the Kherson journalist Serhiy Nikitenko and local civic activists: "Cases are not being investigated. We have experience to know exactly why cases are not being investigated."

Handzyuk also criticized the law-enforcement system for its inaction in the fight against separatism.

On July 28, she published information stating that pro-Russian self-government bodies were being created in Kherson, noting that law-enforcement bodies had ignored this fact altogether. According to Handzyuk, the people who in 2014 incited pro-Russian rallies, hired and armed "titushky" thugs, and recruited militants for the "DPR" and "LPR" were behind these bodies.

In particular, Handzyuk publicly sparred with the pro-Russian activist and current member of Ilya Kiva's Party, Kyrylo Stremousov. In one prominent video, Stremousov verbally abuses Handzyuk and calls her a "crook".

ATTACK ON HANDZYUK

The attack on Kateryna Handzyuk was committed in the morning of July 31, in Kherson. The man who was waiting for near the entrance to her home poured concentrated sulfuric acid over her head. As a result of the attack, about 35% of Kateryna's skin was burned. She did not die immediately. During the subsequent months, she underwent about ten surgeries while staying in the intensive care unit.

At first, the case was classified as "hooliganism." But following public pressure, the police re-qualified the attack as "attempted murder with extreme cruelty".

On August 3, the Minister of the Interior, Arsen Avakov, announced the detention of Mykola Novikov, who was suspected of carrying out the attack. On August 6, he was formally arrested. However, Handzyuk claimed that Novikov was not the attacker, and after the publication of journalistic investigations and public pressure, Novikov was released.

In an interview with *Ukrainska Pravda*, Kateryna said that she believed that the attack was ordered by someone among law-enforcement bodies.

"It was the law-enforcement with whom I had ongoing ideological conflicts that were impossible to settle through discussions and who had threatened me. They sent people close to me with offers of a deal," said Kateryna.

Later, the police said they had identified five people involved in the attack on Handzyuk, among them the organizer, the attacker, and accomplices. All of them had fought in Ukraine's Anti-terrorist Operation in Donbas.

Four of them confessed to the crime. Serhiy Torbin, who is accused of organizing the attack, and Mykyta Hrabchuk, who is believed to be the attacker, are currently in custody.

DISCUSSIONS ABOUT HER DEATH

One hour after the news of the Handzyuk's death, President Petro Poroshenko commented on the tragic news.

Before her death President Poroshenko had not commented much on the attack. Now, even before a statement by the police, he described the attack as a "murder" and demanded that the police do everything possible to investigate the crime.

Moreover, the European Commissioner for Neighborhood Policy and Enlargement Johannes Hahn emphasized the need to bring Handzyuk attackers to justice.

Within a few hours of Handzyuk's death, the police re-classified the crime as "murder."

National Police spokesman Yaroslav Trakalo said that the case would be investigated "according to clauses 4, 6, 11, 12, part 2, Article 115 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine "intentional murder with mercenary motives, committed with extreme cruelty and through a premeditated conspiracy by a group of persons".

Source – [Ukrainska Pravda](#)

COALITION STATEMENT ON THE MURDER OF KATERYNA HANDZYUK

On November 5, members of the Coalition to Protect Civil Society published a statement demanding the effective investigation of Kateryna Handziuk's murder and the resignation of the Prosecutor General (Yuriy Lutsenko) and Minister of the Interior (Arsen Avakov). Below are excerpts from the statement. The full version is available on the [Coalition's website](#).

This brutal act of violence against Kateryna Handziuk is an attempt to intimidate all Ukrainian civil society activists fighting corruption and organized crime that have been festering in cities, towns and villages for decades.

The investigation into the attack on Kateryna Handziuk once again revealed the glaring inability of law enforcement to conduct efficient investigations, both of this and other assaults on civil society activists perpetrated in various regions of Ukraine since the Revolution of Dignity.

Those behind the murder of Kateryna Handziuk have not yet been identified, and even such possibility is in question due to procedural obstacles created intentionally or by mistake by the Office of the Prosecutor General of Ukraine. Thorough investigation of this murder, including the search for those who hired the attackers, is required by Art. 2 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

The Coalition for the Protection of Civil Society expresses deepest condolences to Kateryna Handziuk's family and friends. It is a heavy loss for all of us – loss of an honest, principled, courageous and fearless colleague devoted to the ideals of democratic and corruption-free Ukraine.

We are outraged by the progress of investigations

into the attacks and killings of civil society activists and demand dismissal of the leadership of Kherson police, which had been undermining the investigation into the attack on Kateryna Handziuk from the start, as well as the dismissal of Yuriy Lutsenko, Prosecutor General of Ukraine, and Arsen Avakov, Minister of Internal Affairs of Ukraine, who sabotaged the reform of law enforcement in Ukraine.

We demand a thorough investigation into the murder of Kateryna Handziuk and a public report on measures taken to identify and punish those behind this heinous crime, as well as a thorough investigation of this and a hundred other attacks on civil society activists perpetrated throughout Ukraine since the Euromaidan.

MORE ABOUT OUR ACTIVITIES CAN BE FOUND ON THE WEBSITE [CS-COALITION.ORG](https://cs-coalition.org)

[+ MAP OF THREATS TO CIVIL SOCIETY](#)

TEXTS: DIANA POLADOVA, DESIGN: ULIANA BYCHENKOVA

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