

HÓTEL

TARGETED BY RUSSIA

Last Check-In: The Russian Strikes on Ukrainian Hotels Silencing the Press

Legal and Diplomatic Actions as a
Means of Intimidation

Following Ukraine's offensive into Russian territory and the occupation of parts of Kursk Oblast in August 2024, Russian authorities introduced a new method of pressuring journalists: criminal prosecutions for visiting Ukrainian-controlled areas of the region.

Under Part 3, Article 322 of the Russian Criminal Code,¹ several foreign journalists have been accused of 'illegally crossing the state border' while covering the conflict in Kursk Oblast. If convicted, they face up to five years in prison and inclusion on an international wanted list. Among the first to be targeted were Italian journalists Simone Traini and Stefania Battistini from *RAI*, prompting diplomatic tensions, including Russia summoning Italy's ambassador to Moscow to express their protest.² A Russian court has even requested the extradition of Traini and Battistini. Italian deputy prime minister and foreign minister Antonio Tajani condemned the move, calling it '*another form of persecution against press freedom*'.³

In addition to the *RAI* journalists, criminal cases have also been initiated against reporters from *France 2*,⁴ *ABC News*,⁵ *DW*,⁶ *CNN*,⁷ *HotNews*,⁸ and *Hromadske*.⁹ Organisations such as the International Federation of Journalists and the Committee to Protect Journalists have condemned these actions, viewing them as an assault on press freedom and a deliberate attempt to suppress the truth about the war.¹⁰

¹ Criminal Code of the Russian Federation Article 322. Illegal crossing of the State border of the Russian Federation.

² Yahyai, O.A. (2024). *Italy condemns Russia's arrest warrants for RAI journalists covering Kursk incursion*. Euro.news, URL: <https://www.euronews.com/2024/10/08/italy-condemns-russias-arrest-warrants-for-rai-journalists-covering-kursk-incursion> (accessed: 28.04.2025); Reuters staff(2024). *Russia summons Italian ambassador over journalists reporting from Kursk*. Reuters, URL: <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-summons-italian-ambassador-over-journalists-reporting-kursk-2024-08-16/> (accessed: 28.04.2025).

³ Decode39 (2024). *Italy unites against Russian extradition demands for journalists*. URL: <https://decode39.com/9586/italy-unites-against-russian-extradition-demands-for-journalists/> (accessed: 28.04.2025).

⁴ FRANCE 24 (2024). *Russian court orders arrest of FRANCE 24 journalist who reported from Kursk*. URL: <https://www.france24.com/en/europe/20241126-russian-court-orders-arrest-of-france-24-journalist-who-reported-from-kursk> (accessed: 28.04.2025).

⁵ ABC News (2024). *ABC crew becomes subject of Russian criminal investigation for crossing border from Ukraine*. URL: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-09-27/russia-launches-criminal-investigation-into-abc-journalists/1044407744> (accessed: 28.04.2025).

⁶ DW (2024). *Russia's FSB launches criminal case against DW reporter*. URL: <https://www.dw.com/en/russias-fsb-launches-criminal-case-against-dw-reporter/a-70057788> (accessed: 28.04.2025).

⁷ CNN staff (2024). *Russia opens criminal investigation into CNN correspondent for reporting in Ukrainian-occupied Russia*. CNN World, URL: <https://edition.cnn.com/2024/08/22/europe/russia-cnn-paton-walsh-investigation-intl/index.html> (accessed: 28.04.2025).

⁸ IMI (2024). *Russian court arrests Romanian journalist in absentia for reporting from Sudzha*. URL: <https://imi.org.ua/en/news/russian-court-arrests-romanian-journalist-in-absentia-for-reporting-from-sudzha-i64518> (accessed: 28.04.2025).

⁹ Melnyk, R. (2024). *FSB porushyla kryminalnu spravu shchodo zhurnalistky hromadske ta inshykh korespondentiv, yaki znimaly reportazhi z Kurschyny*. Hromadske, URL: <https://hromadske.ua/vivna/229919-fsb-porushyla-kryminalnu-spravu-shchodo-zurnalistky-hromadske-ta-inshykh-korespondentiv-iaki-znimaly-reportazi-z-kurschyny> (accessed: 28.04.2025).

¹⁰ IFJ (2025). *Russia: Authorities prosecute seven foreign journalists covering the war in the Kursk region*. URL: <https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/news/detail/category/press-releases/article/russia-authorities-prosecute-seven>

The journalists and media workers surveyed by TH and RSF also mentioned that Russian authorities have taken direct legal actions against journalists as part of a broader strategy to suppress independent reporting. One respondent reported that, after covering a Ukrainian counteroffensive, their work was discussed by a well-known pro-Russian analyst, leading to threats, the opening of a case against them by the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation, and an arrest warrant issued by a Russian court. Others described being placed on international wanted lists simply for reporting from certain locations.¹¹ These legal measures demonstrate how intimidation extends beyond rhetoric to concrete judicial actions, further restricting the ability of journalists to operate safely.

Russia reinforces its legal actions with diplomatic support as a means of intimidation. In August 2024, the Russian embassy in France issued a warning to the French media, cautioning against unauthorised border crossings and asserting that it meticulously tracks cases of foreign journalists 'illegally' entering Russian territory.¹² The embassy further stated that such information is relayed to the relevant authorities for further action. The repeated use of the term 'terrorism' serves to delegitimise journalistic activity and justify potential reprisals. Additionally, Russian foreign ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova characterised the presence of Western journalists in Kursk Oblast as direct involvement in hybrid aggression.¹³ Similarly, on 16 August 2024, when the Russian foreign ministry summoned the Italian ambassador, it accused the journalists of '*grossly violating Russian law*'.¹⁴ By framing their work in this manner, Russian authorities preemptively challenge their protected status under international law.

Russian authorities have consistently stated that their military operations target strategic and military objectives. However, attacks on hotels, often housing civilians and journalists, have raised significant concerns regarding adherence to IHL. As is explored in greater detail in the body of this report, the targeting of hotels has not only resulted in loss of life and injuries but has also disrupted the operations of journalists and media personnel in Ukraine. These incidents underscore the broader humanitarian impact of the conflict and highlight challenges in ensuring the safety of journalists and non-combatants in war zones. The combination of military means, political and diplomatic declarations, and criminal proceedings strongly discourages

[foreign-journalists-covering-the-war-in-the-kursk-region](#) (accessed: 28.04.2025); Committee to Protect Journalists (2024). *Russia retaliates against foreign journalists covering Ukraine advance into Kursk*. URL: <https://cpj.org/2024/08/russia-retaliates-against-foreign-journalists-covering-ukraine-advance-into-kursk/> (accessed: 28.04.2025).

¹¹ Based on responses to the TH and RSF survey, collected between January 29 and March 14, 2025.

¹² TASS (2024). *Russian embassy warns French reporters against crossing Russian border illegally*. URL: <https://tass.com/politics/1832235> (accessed: 28.04.2025).

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Pavliuk, O. (2024). *Russia threatens Italian journalists over video report from Kursk Oblast*. Ukrainska Pravda, URL: <https://www.pravda.com.ua/eng/news/2024/08/16/7470730/> (accessed: 28.04.2025).

journalists—Western journalists, in particular—from covering the conflict, especially to prevent the reporting of potential war crimes.