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Ukrainian Prime Minister Expels Reporters

By The Moscow Times

May 23, 2013

Ukrainian journalists standing with their backs to Prime Minister Mykola Azarov at a government meeting Wednesday.

KIEV — Ukrainian Prime Minister Mykola Azarov ordered a dozen reporters to be barred from covering government meetings after they staged a protest over attacks on journalists at a rally.

When reporters at the Cabinet meeting stepped in front of television cameras and turned their backs, emblazoned with slogans, on Azarov and his colleagues Wednesday, the prime minister reacted sharply. "What kind of show is this?" he said.

The reporters, members of a journalists' pool allowed to attend weekly Cabinet meetings, bore signs pinned to their backs reading: "Today it's a female journalist, tomorrow — your wife, sister, daughter. Do something!"

Azarov said they should be expelled from the journalists' pool. "Write down their names and revoke their accreditation," he instructed his aides. "We respect journalists' work, but please do not turn government meetings into a circus."

The two journalists who say they were attacked were covering clashes between supporters and opponents of President Viktor Yanukovych during a rally in Kiev on Saturday.

They say they were beaten by Yanukovych's supporters while police simply stood by. Police are investigating the allegations.

Condemning the attacks, the U.S. Embassy in Kiev said: "Such violent acts have no place where people are exercising their rights to peaceful assembly."

Protests by reporters have become frequent under Yanukovych, who came to power in 2010 and quickly consolidated power by installing his allies in key positions and reversing constitutional changes that had strengthened the parliament.

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