The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

'Freed' Russian Journalist Says British RT Stringer Held by Ukrainian Soldiers

By Allison Quinn

July 24, 2014



A Russian journalist was set free Thursday after having been held captive in Ukraine with British reporter Graham Phillips, who is still missing, Russian state-run television channel Rossia-24 reported.

Anna-News reporter Vadim Aksyonov had been detained along with Phillips, an RT stringer, by "a group of 18 armed soldiers who put bags over their heads" before driving off with them, according to Rossia-24, which cited Konstantin Knyrik, head of the Anna-News agency's eastern Ukraine bureau.

Relaying a conversation with Aksyonov, Knyrik said a third journalist had also been detained, though no further details were given.

Aksyonov said he was beaten by his captors, but that Phillips was left untouched.

Both Aksyonov and Phillips work for news agencies widely considered to be sympathetic to the Kremlin, and Aksyonov had served among the ranks of the pro-Russian separatists until a wound put him out of commission earlier in the conflict, Vesti reported.

On Wednesday, news of the two journalists having gone missing prompted Russia's Foreign Ministry to issue a statement calling for their release, as well as a statement from the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic banning all journalists from working in the region. The area has become increasingly dangerous for journalists as fighting rages between pro-Russian rebels and Ukrainian troops.

The Foreign Ministry statement described the incident as "another encroachment on the freedom of the press," adding that "Kiev is afraid of the truth."

The Ukrainian side has not yet commented on whether the journalists are in custody. On Thursday, RT reported that it had still not managed to get in touch with Phillips.

A Ukrainian journalist was also reportedly abducted during violence near Donetsk Airport on Tuesday night. Anton Skiba, a fixer working for CNN, was taken by pro-Russian separatists near his hotel, according to the news channel. CNN reported Thursday that they had still not managed to secure his release.

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Ukraine President Orders Hotline for Soldiers' Wives and Mothers

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Original url:
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