

After Ukraine Official 'Backtracks' on Statement, Russian Journalist's Whereabouts Remain Unknown

By [Gabrielle Tetrault-Farber](#)

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The  Moscow Times

A Ukrainian official denied Tuesday that he knew the whereabouts of a Russian journalist who went missing last week in eastern Ukraine, contradicting an interview he had previously given to another media outlet, RIA Novosti reported.

Andrei Stenin, a photojournalist from the Russian state-run news agency Rossia Segodnya, went missing in Donetsk on Aug. 5.

According to RIA Novosti, Andrei Gerashchenko, an advisor to the Ukrainian interior minister, said in a radio interview that Stenin had been arrested on suspicion of "terrorist" activity.

"Our security forces arrested him [Stenin]," Gerashchenko told Latvian radio station Baltcom, RIA Novosti reported. "This person participated in torture and murder in Shakhtersk. The whole world was outraged by pictures of him filming a wounded soldier, and then a dead

one. We believe that Andrei Stenin may be supporting terrorists. This is not journalism, but complicity in terrorism and its glorification."

Gerashchenko later revised his initial statement in an interview with RIA Novosti, saying that, in fact, he was not positive Stenin was being held by the country's security forces.

"I do not know where he [Stenin] is," RIA Novosti quoted Gerashchenko as saying. "I am only suggesting that our security forces could have detained him. He is either alive, with the terrorists, or with our security forces. We don't have him at the Interior Ministry."

Speculation that Stenin had been taken into custody by the Ukrainian security forces emerged in Russian media last week, but reports on his whereabouts have not been confirmed.

The Russian Foreign Ministry released a statement Tuesday, saying the possibility that Stenin had been attacked by Ukrainian authorities could not be ruled out in light of what it referred to as the country's "practice of detaining and kidnapping representatives of the media."

Russia's Investigative Committee also announced Tuesday that it had launched a criminal case into Stenin's "kidnapping."

Dozens of journalists have been detained or taken hostage by Ukrainian security forces and pro-Russian separatists since the outbreak of the conflict.

Six journalists have been killed and more than 200 injured or attacked in Ukraine since the beginning of the year, according to Reporters Without Borders.

Contact the author at g.tetraultfarber@imedia.ru

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