

Remembering Slain Russian Journalist Anna Politkovskaya

Former friends and colleagues pay tribute to campaigning journalist, shot dead outside her home 10 years ago today.

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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A man holds a portrait of Russian journalist Anna Politkovskaya during a memorial event outside the Novaya Gazeta newspaper offices, Oct. 7, 2016. **Alexander Shcherbak / TASS**

Right across the North Caucasus, she came to be known as the people's voice and their protector. There were journalists who came before her, and came after. Some were killed in the line of their work. But no one were quite so mourned in these troubled parts. When Anna Politkovskaya's funeral was held on Oct. 10, 2006, three days after her death, thousands came to pay tribute to her memory.

Beginning in 1999, Politkovskaya had reported on the atrocities of the Second Chechen War in a series of memorable articles. Later, once the region was pacified, and once Ramzan Kadyrov

came to power in 2005, Politkovskaya turned her attention to the political repressions and rights violations that flourished under new regime in Chechnya.

And this is when things started getting darker.

Human rights defender Natalya Estemirova was, for a long time, Politkovskaya's right hand woman in Chechnya when it came to finding victims of Ramzan Kadyrov and his security forces. In an interview she recalled a famous 2004 encounter between the warlord president and journalist. Kadyrov had invited Politkovskaya to his family estate in Tzentoroy, and introduced her to a fighter who had told Politkovskaya about how Kadyrov had beaten him and threatened his family.

Now, in Kadyrov's home, the fighter, not surprisingly denied that he had ever said this. "The atmosphere was very scary," Estemirova recalled.

Estemirova was among those who took part in Politkovskaya's funeral procession in 2006.

Less than three years later, she would be found dead on the Chechen-Ingushetia border, shot in the chest and head five times.

Her employer, the Memorial human rights group have accused Ramzan Kadyrov of her murder.

Ilya Yashin, Activist and Politician

Long before what happened, she was destined to represent a large chapter in Russia's history.

Anna was very open, very sincere and extremely brave. Deep down, she knew how it would eventually end for her — as it did. When she talked about the attacks and intimidations that went before, she was amazingly calm. She spoke as if it was happening to someone else.

I remember how she dealt with her poisoning on her way to Beslan on Sept. 1, 2004. Chechen terrorists had captured a whole school, and she was supposed to act as a negotiator. Two days later, security forces staged an assault, and 314 hostages were killed, 186 kids among them.

Anna talked about the ordeal philosophically.

It was shameful to be afraid standing next to her. Anna is an example for future generations of civil activists and reporters. She is a symbol of the new Russia.

Andrei Soldatov. Former colleague at Novaya Gazeta newspaper

She had a reputation for being tough. In reality, she was friendly and helpful.

The courage she showed daily was very impressive. If you were in the North Caucasus in the early 2000s, all you had to do was say the name Novaya Gazeta and people asked to pass on their best wishes to Anna, and instantly had respect for you. There was only one person who was so trusted.

After her death, the Kremlin immediately said her work was insignificant, had no impact. This is just not true.

It is also easy to see her death was useful to the Kremlin. The flow of information about Russia's security services in the North Caucasus pretty much dried up after she died. It is incredibly difficult to get a picture of what went on in the North Caucasus between 2010–2012, for example.

It is impossible to understand the political culture and political history of post-Soviet Russia without reading her books and articles. She, more than anyone, pioneered post-Soviet journalism.

Lyudmila Alexeyeva. Leading Human Rights Advocate, Head of the Moscow Helsinki Group

She was a person to whom everything mattered. We know Anna from her coverage of the Chechen war. This, in essence, is her legacy. But I remember another story she covered in the early 2000s about police in Blagoveshchensk, who had beaten up several hundred people.

There was only one way of getting there — a once-weekly rickety bus from Ufa. But that did not stop Anna from going there. She researched the issue, wrote about it, and told the world about how the locals were being pressured into withdrawing statements.

She defended everyone.

Pavel Kanygin. Former Colleague at Novaya Gazeta Newspaper

Politkovskaya's death will remain a weight around Putin's neck. She was a gigantic character, and her bravery set her apart from the crowd. True to herself and an attacking style which she made her own.

Anna will appear in journalism textbooks as an example of the very best in uncompromising journalism. She did incredibly important, critical work at a moment when society was becoming apolitical and apathetic.

Her achievements are many, but perhaps her greatest are her first interview with Ramzan Kadyrov, her research into the Nord Ost hostage crisis, and her work documenting torture.

Ed Lucas. The Economist's Moscow Correspondent, 1998-2002

Anna was criticized sometimes for chaotic and over-emotional writing, but I think that's unfair. She never claimed to be an academic, or a political scientist, or a politician. She was just very good at going to tough places and digging out stories.

Sometimes she got dragged into other roles -- a go-between, a human-rights campaigner -- but that was because the stories she was dealing with were so awful. It was not her fault, and not her intention.

Nadezhda Prosenkova. Former Colleague at Novaya Gazeta Newspaper

Anna was great with everyone at the paper. She knew everyone by name. There would be queues of readers in the corridor waiting for her — simple people who just wanted to talk to her, receive help and advice. I came to think it was great that such a great person worked with me.

Two hundred years could go by like this and we still won't get any proper answers about who killed her.

But all I know is that when they did kill her, they killed a part of us. A black atmosphere engulfed the paper after her death. Many of us thought about closing the paper. It was a breaking point.

The main reason we kept going was to carry on her work.

Tanya Lokshina, Russia Program Director, Human Rights Watch

Anna went to great risks to tell the stories of civilians in Chechnya affected by the bombing, the killings, disappearances and torture. It is largely because of her dedicated work that the world knows about what happened during the second Chechen war.

Anna is a hero for ordinary Chechens.

The views expressed in opinion pieces do not necessarily reflect the position of The Moscow Times.

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