Ukrainian Reporter Was Tortured in Russian Prison Before Her Death, Investigation Finds

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Viktoriia Roshchyna. **Social media**

Ukrainian journalist Viktoriia Roshchyna was tortured during the year she spent in Russian detention, and her body was returned to Ukraine with several organs missing, according to a joint investigation published on Tuesday.

Roshchyna, 27, disappeared in the summer of 2023 while reporting on black site prisons in Russian-occupied eastern Ukraine. She died under unclear circumstances while being held at a Russian prison in September 2024. Her remains were returned in February 2025 as part of an exchange of bodies between Russia and Ukraine.

Ukrainian forensic experts confirmed the remains were a 99.9% DNA match with her parents, according to a collaborative investigation led by Forbidden Stories, an international network of journalists.

"There were numerous signs of torture and ill-treatment on the body," the exiled Russian news outlet IStories [quoted](#) Yuriy Belousov, head of the Ukrainian Prosecutor General's Office war crimes unit, as saying.

Related article: [Moscow Returns Body of Ukrainian Reporter Who Died in Russian Detention](#)

According to The Guardian, medical examiners [documented](#) burn marks on her feet from electric shocks, abrasions on her head and hip, a broken rib and a fractured hyoid bone — a possible sign of strangulation.

"Experts have not yet been able to determine the cause of death due to the body's condition," Belousov said.

Investigators said the body was returned without a brain, eyes or larynx. A Ukrainian law enforcement source told IStories that Russia sometimes attributes missing organs to standard autopsy procedures.

"However, this may be a way to hide traces of violence," the source said.

One anonymous medical examiner called it "unusual" to remove the larynx, which can contain evidence of strangulation. "When someone is strangled, the hyoid bone often breaks. If suffocated, bleeding can be found in the eyes, and lack of oxygen in the brain," they told IStories.

Ukrainian authorities opened a war crimes investigation into Roshchyna's death in March.

A freelance journalist, Roshchyna had reported for outlets including Ukrainska Pravda and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's (RFE/RL) Ukrainian service. In 2022, she received the Courage in Journalism Award from the International Women's Media Foundation for her frontline reporting.

She was previously detained for 10 days in March 2022 in Russian-occupied Berdyansk.

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The Forbidden Stories investigation said Roshchyna was captured in late July or early August 2023 near the Russian-held Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant. She reportedly endured four months of torture at a black site in occupied Melitopol before being transferred to a pre-trial detention center in the Russian city of Taganrog in December 2023.

She was held without charge or legal representation. Russia's Defense Ministry only confirmed her arrest in a letter to her parents in April 2024.

After nine months in Taganrog, Roshchyna was expected to be part of a September 2024 prisoner exchange brokered via Vatican backchannels.

But according to The Guardian, an anonymous detainee said a security officer told them Roshchyna never made it to the handover. "It's her own fault," the officer reportedly said.

Ukraine's Prisoners of War Coordination Headquarters announced Roshchyna's death in October, citing a message from Russia's Defense Ministry to her father stating she died on Sept. 19.

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