



## **OCCRP Condemns Planned Interrogation of our Editor in Ukraine**

**May 8, 2020**

The Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP) condemns Ukrainian authorities' ongoing harassment of our local member center Slidstvo.Info in its pursuit of a baseless, politically motivated pre-trial investigation.

OCCRP learned today that Ukraine's national police have summoned Slidstvo.Info's chief editor, Anna Babinets, for questioning on Wednesday, May 13. Babinets is also a regional editor for OCCRP.

This summons is part of a pre-trial investigation by Ukraine's Ministry of Internal Affairs grounded in an inexplicable and false claim that Slidstvo.Info reporters engaged in "espionage," including illegally spying on U.S. Ambassador Marie Yovanovitch. The investigation was launched in response to Slidstvo.info's submission of Freedom of Information (FOI) requests late last year, following a complaint from a deputy of Ukraine's parliament, Oleksandr Dubinsky, who was a recipient of one of the FOI requests.

"These political games are dangerous — and cost citizens access to information at a time when there is an historic need for trustworthy reporting," said Drew Sullivan, OCCRP co-founder and publisher. "This is state-sanctioned intimidation of the media from a government with a popular mandate to stamp out corruption, backed by Western democracies. This case is a direct assault on freedom of expression and democracy in Ukraine."

In December 2019, Slidstvo.Info sent FOI requests to 14 Ukrainian government officials, politicians, and agencies, seeking information on a range of matters in the public interest related to the U.S.-Ukraine relationship. Among the recipients of these requests were Minister of Internal Affairs Arsen Avakov and Mr. Dubinsky.

In January, Dubinsky announced that he was filing a criminal complaint against Slidstvo.Info. On March 3, the Ministry of Internal Affairs announced that it had accepted material from Dubinsky and incorporated it into an ongoing investigation into alleged surveillance of the former U.S. ambassador under Article 163 of Ukraine's Criminal Code, which covers the violation of the privacy of mail, telephone, electronic, and other correspondence.

The punishment for Article 163 is imprisonment of three to seven years, and Slidstvo.Info journalists could be subject to raids and the seizure of confidential journalistic materials in the course of this pre-trial investigation.

OCCRP reiterates its call on Ukrainian authorities to drop the investigation and all legal harassment of Slidstvo.Info immediately.

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