

Identifier	Created	Classification	Origin
07KYIV2165	2007-08-29 11:57:00	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Kyiv

Cable title: **UKRAINE: LITTLE PROGRESS IN INVESTIGATION OF**

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KYIV 002165

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/24/2016

TAGS: PHUM PGOV UP

SUBJECT: UKRAINE: LITTLE PROGRESS IN INVESTIGATION OF
ATTACK ON JOURNALIST

Classified By: Political Counselor Kent Logsdon for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) Summary and Comment: Journalist Artem Skoropadiskiy, who claimed that an August 13 assault on him by two assailants was because of a critical story he wrote on Kyiv Mayor Leonid Chernovetskiy, told PolOff on August 21 that there had been no progress in the police investigation. Although he admitted there was no proof linking the attack with Chernovetskiy, he maintained that city hall's angry reaction to the story implicated the mayor, or someone close to him. He was grateful for the support he received from NGOs, the Kyiv journalist's trade union, and from Chernovetskiy's opponents in the Kyiv City Council, but doubted that the case would be solved. He was not concerned about further attacks or more pressure to retract his story and was undecided if he would pursue a legal fight to push the investigation forward since he will soon return to his native Russia - a return he planned before the assault. He noted that despite this incident, he felt the status of media freedom in Ukraine was significantly better than in Russia.

2. (C) Comment: The timing of the assault and the city administration's clear displeasure with Skoropadiskiy's article give some credence to claims that he was targeted for his reporting. We have not seen any evidence to link Chernovetskiy with the attack, but he was accused of using rough tactics in December 2006 when a group of toughs, supposedly hired by Chernovetskiy, beat up BYuT members at a televised Kyiv City Council meeting. Skoropadiskiy did not seem intimidated by the assault and was encouraged - even a bit surprised - by the outpouring of interest and support in his case. We are following up with the Kyiv City Police to inquire on the status of the investigation. End Summary and Comment

3. (U) On the evening of August 13, Artem Skoropadiskiy, a journalist for Kommersant-Ukraine, was attacked by two unidentified assailants at the entry way to his home. Skoropadiskiy, a Russian citizen who has been living in Kyiv



since 2005, tried to fight off the attackers. He believes that his attackers were disoriented in the dark hallway and therefore, were only able to land a few punches to his face before running off. Skoropadiskiy reported that the attackers did not try to rob him and that they did not utter a word. By the time he met with PolOff, a week after the attack, the bruises on his face from the attack had nearly faded away.

4. (U) The assault took place the same evening that representatives from the mayor's office reportedly threatened the newspaper with libel charges and demanded that it retract Skoropadiskiy's article. The article in question had described a meeting between Chernovetskiy and a group of souvenir vendors; Chernovetskiy's administration had been seeking to close down the vendor's stalls at Kyiv's central Independence Square. Skoropadiskiy, who sat in on the closed-door session, reported that Chernovetskiy made several rude comments. Following release of the article, Kommersant-Ukraine reported that city hall told its editor that the report distorted what Chernovetskiy said during the meeting.

5. (C) Skoropadiskiy told PolOff that local police arrived twenty minutes after he reported the assault. He submitted a written complaint to the police that evening and was contacted by a police investigator three days later but had heard nothing since. Skoropadiskiy complained that the investigation had stalled and he doubted that the case would be resolved.

6. (C) Skoropadiskiy seemed pleased with the support he received after the attacks. The Kyiv Independent Media Trade Union, in a written statement, demanded that the beating be thoroughly investigated, and agreed that the pressure exerted by the city administration regarding his article gave grounds to link the assault with Skoropadiskiy's article. He was contacted by a local NGO that offered to publicize his case as a human rights violation, and Paris-based Reporters Without Borders promised to write a letter of inquiry to Ukraine's Prosecutor General's Office. He received an offer of legal support from the Vitaly Klitschko faction on the Kyiv City Council but he was undecided if he would take them up on it since it would require returning to Ukraine from Russia to attend hearings. He said that he did not feel threatened with further violence and noted that the environment for media in Ukraine was freer than in Russia - especially since the Orange Revolution. He wryly added that in Ukraine, he was beaten up for offending the mayor, but in Russia his article would never have been published at all.

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7. (U) Visit Embassy Kyiv's classified website:
www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/kiev.
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