

Public appeal – Ukraine

Three years on: Who was responsible for the "disappearance" of Georgiy Gongadze?

Late in the evening of 16 September 2000, independent investigative journalist Georgiy Gongadze left a friend's house in the Ukrainian capital, Kyiv, but failed to return home to his wife and two children. Six weeks later, on 3 November, a decapitated body was found in a shallow grave by mushroom pickers in woodland in the Tarashcha Rayon, not far from Kyiv. The body is thought to be that of the missing 31-year-old journalist.



Georgiy Gongadze

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On 28 November 2000 the Georgiy Gongadze case escalated into a major political scandal when the leader of the Socialist Party of Ukraine, Olexandr Moroz, implicated President Leonid Kuchma in the "disappearance". Moroz claimed that former state security officer Mykola Melnychenko, while working in the presidential office, surreptitiously recorded President Kuchma discussing with two high-ranking officials how to silence Georgiy Gongadze.

President Kuchma has vociferously denied the allegations, denouncing the alleged tape recordings as a "provocation" and threatened both Olexandr Moroz and Mykola Melnychenko with libel action. As the editor of the Internet newspaper

Ukrayinskaya Pravda (Ukrainian Truth), Georgiy Gongadze became well-known for highlighting the alleged endemic corruption in government and business circles. His exposés, however, made him an object of police and security services' attention. The harassment reportedly became so intense in the weeks leading up to his "disappearance", that he was forced to complain publicly about the treatment he and his colleagues were being subjected to.

In the three years since Georgiy Gongadze "disappeared" relatively little progress has been made in determining who was responsible. This has resulted in considerable international criticism, from a range of international bodies, most notably the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in

Europe. On 12 March 2003 *Reporters Without Borders* announced that an expert examination of the body believed to be that of the missing journalist "is almost certainly" that of Georgiy Gongadze. *Reporters Without Borders* also stated that a two-hour meeting with the Ukrainian Prosecutor General, Svyataslav Piskun, in March had revealed that the ongoing investigation into the "disappearance" was focusing on officials in the Ministry of the Interior. A disturbing development occurred on 15 July 2003, when a former police officer alleged to have been involved in the incident reportedly died in custody in suspicious circumstances.

On the third anniversary of Georgiy Gongadze's "disappearance" Amnesty International calls on the Ukrainian authorities to:

- ensure that the "disappearance" of Georgiy Gongadze is investigated promptly, impartially and effectively by a body which is independent of the alleged perpetrators of the "disappearance" and has the necessary powers and resources to carry out the investigation;
- give access to the relatives of Georgiy Gongadze to information relevant to the investigation and allow them to present evidence;
- ensure that complainants, witnesses, lawyers, suspects and others involved in the investigation are protected from intimidation and reprisals.

Finally, Amnesty International believes that the investigation should not be curtailed until those responsible for the "disappearance" of Georgiy Gongadze are brought to justice.

Please write, calling for a full investigation into the "disappearance" of Georgiy Gongadze and for those responsible to be brought to justice. Send appeals to: Procurator General of Ukraine, Svyatoslav M. Piskun, Riznitska Str, 13/15, 252601 Kyiv, Ukraine.