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Country: Russia

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Last month, journalists around the world marked the tragic anniversary of Russian journalist Anna Politkovskaya's death, thirteen years ago. On 6 October 2006, Anna Politkovskaya, who served as Novaya Gazeta's Special Correspondent on the War in Chechnya, was shot four times in the lift of her condo in Moscow. Many around the world believe her murder "[killed free media in Russia](#)," and remember her as a fearless investigative journalist. But is her legacy remembered by Russian media today?

Politkovskaya's main 'crime' was questioning Russia's state-sanctioned narrative about the War. Her reports revealed human rights abuses perpetrated by the Russian Army against Chechen civilians and pervasive corruption inside the puppet administration of Chechnya's Russian-backed Prime Minister Ramzan Kadyrov.

On Politkovskaya's death anniversary this year, her former employer Novaya Gazeta published a photo of blank sheet of paper on their website. The caption read,

“13 Years Ago Novaya Gazeta Correspondent Anna Politkovskaya Was Killed. This Is What the Prosecutors Have Done to Find the People Who Commissioned Her Murder.” Why might that be?

Few people know that Politkovskaya's was killed on Putin's birthday. This detail is significant as [many believe](#) that the Russia's federal government or Ramzan Kadyrov were behind the murder. Some, even say that the journalist's murder was “[Putin's birthday present](#)”.

A recent ruling by the European Court of Human Rights indirectly supports this version. In 2014, a Russian Court found a number of Chechen men and a Moscow policeman guilty of planning and carrying out the journalist's murder. But, it failed to establish who ordered it. Convinced that Russia's Federal Prosecution Office was shielding their boss from suspicion, Politkovskaya's children and family took the Russian state to the European Court of Human Rights. In July 2016, [the Court ruled in their favour](#). It explained that Russian prosecutors had breached Politkovskaya family's fundamental human rights by intentionally botching their investigation. The Court [emphasised](#) that lawyers representing the Russian government failed to explain why Prosecutors had only pursued one line of inquiry. All thirteen years, they maintained that Boris Berezovsky, a fugitive Russian billionaire who died in 2013 in London, was behind the murder.

“However, they had not provided any documents from the actual case file, had not given details of the international requests for help they had sent in connection with that theory nor explained what investigative steps had been taken to shed light on that person's role in the crime in the years after his death,” reads the ECHR ruling.

“The Government had also not explained why the authorities had chosen to focus on that single

line of enquiry, despite its own submissions to the Court that such killings required a multi-stranded approach. The State should have explored the applicants' allegations that FSB [Federal Security Service, the successor of KGB] officials or representatives of the Chechen administration had been involved in arranging the murder."

Equally telling is the fact that Putin took more than three days to react to the journalist's murder. When he finally spoke out, Putin [claimed](#) that her murder, while tragic, was of little significance.

"She was famous in journalist and human-rights circles, but her influence on Russian politics were minimal."

Kadyrov's went even further by questioning Politkovskaya's professional integrity, while paying lip service to her life.

By contrast, news of Politkovskaya's death sparked [an uncharacteristically large protest in Moscow](#) and [demonstrations in other Russian cities](#)

The reverberations of Politkovskaya's death were also felt internationally. RAW in War (Reach All Women in War), a UK based charity that works to support women and girls survivors of war, instituted the annual [Anna Politkovskaya Award](#). RAW presents this award to a woman "human rights defender from a conflict zone who, like Anna, stands up for the victims of this conflict, often at great personal risk." In the past, this award has gone to Pakistan's girls education campaigner [Malala Yousafzai](#) (2013), the Belorussian-Ukrainian Nobel Literature Prize-winner and pacifist [Svetlana Alexievich](#) (2018) and [Dr Halima Bashir](#) (2010) who spoke out against the Sudanese Army for using rape as a weapon of war in Darfur.

This year's award went Alex Crawford, Sky News Special Warzone Correspondent. On receiving the Award, Anna urged us not to forget about Anna Politkovskaya and all the other women tortured, raped and abused in war.

"This award is for all the women journalists out there – who you don't know about – who are being tortured, killed, raped and harassed – right now – while trying to expose the truth," she said as she accepted the award.

"Is this the world we want? Can you honestly sleep at night knowing a woman who could be your mother or your daughter – is being gang raped for being a journalist and challenging a Government? Or is being blown up for exposing corruption? Are you ok with thinking it's happening far away, to a journalist you don't know in countries you're not familiar with? Because it's happening on all our doorsteps, right now. We must not forget them. We must not forget Anna. Because Anna is all of us. And if we don't defend her, and stand up for all journalists, evil will have won."

While, Politkovskaya is being remembered abroad, Russian media increasingly follow 'the party line' in their coverage of her death and other issues considered 'touchy' by the Kremlin. [Journals who dare to dissent](#) are prosecuted, threatened, attacked or even killed. Publications that cross the line of acceptability get taken over.

The most recent example is the RBC Media Group, the last editorially-independent mainstream media in Russia. In May 2016, RBC published [an article about a proposed Oyster farm](#) in the vicinity of the so-called 'Putin's Palace' on Russia's Black Sea coast. Soon after, RBC's respected editor-in-chief Elizaveta Osetinskaya, its newspaper editor Maxim Solyus and web editor Roman Badanin resigned. It is [widely believed](#) that the Kremlin forced RBC's owner, Russian oligarch Mikhail Prokhorov to sack the editors.

They were replaced by Igor Trosnikov and Elizaveta Golikova, who were both deputy editors at state-owned TASS news network. In [a notorious staff meeting](#), a recording of which was leaked to the press, Trosnikov and Golikova ironically told the group's journalists that everything will stay the same but they will need to self-censor.

Inevitably, this lack of media freedom affects public opinion. [According to Nastoyashee Vremia](#), a mere 17 percent of Russians believe federal authorities were to blame for Politkovskaya's murder. In 2011, this figure stood at 28 percent.

But, a glimmer of hope remains. For one, Novaya Gazeta has kept Politkovskaya's legacy alive. On a symbolic level, her desk had been kept empty – a silent memorial to her work. On a practical level, Novaya Gazeta's Special investigations desk headed by [Elena Milashina](#) continues to produce hard-hitting independent journalism, including the extralegal [anti-Gay](#) and [other purges](#) in Chechnya. In many cases, this provides the much-needed counterbalance to the [disrespectful, othering and sensationalist coverage by Western journalists](#), which more often than not fail to examine the nuances and sensitivities of covering diversity in this part of the world.