
Kyrgyzstan: Corruption-busting journalist facing prison after new punitive charges

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International Partnership for Human Rights (IPHR), the Norwegian Helsinki Committee (NHC), the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights (HFHR) and Civil Rights Defenders (CRD) condemn the spate of criminal charges initiated in Kyrgyzstan against journalist Bolot Temirov as politically motivated. The charges represent a serious assault on freedom of expression in Kyrgyzstan in apparent retaliation for Temirov's investigations into high-level corruption. **We call on the Kyrgyzstani authorities to drop the charges against Bolot Temirov and ensure that he is able to carry out his legitimate journalistic work without intimidation and harassment.**

On 19 April 2022, Temirov learned that additional charges of alleged document forgery and illegal border-crossing had been filed against him, coming on top of earlier drug related charges initiated against him earlier this year. On both occasions, the charges came in the immediate aftermath of the publication of high-profile corruption investigations on Temirov Live, a YouTube-based news outlet run by Temirov.

"The timing of the charges brought against Bolot Temirov clearly indicates that they are intended to punish him for his courageous efforts to expose and fight against government corruption. The international community should insist that the Kyrgyzstani authorities immediately drop these politically motivated and punitive charges – not only for Temirov's sake, but for all independent journalists in Kyrgyzstan," said Brigitte Dufour, Director of IPHR.

According to the [most recent charges](#), Temirov – who also holds a Russian passport -- is alleged to have used falsified documents when obtaining and renewing his Kyrgyzstani passport, which he has regularly used to travel in and out of the country since 2008. Temirov has dismissed the charges brought under Criminal Code articles 379 ("forgery of documents") and 378 ("illegal crossing of the state border") and his lawyer has stated that the charges [are absurd](#) because the allegedly forged documents were issued by authorised state bodies and Temirov has been using the passport in question for 14 years when travelling abroad, having it checked and stamped at the border each time. Moreover, according to the lawyer, the statute of limitations for the alleged offences has already expired.

The day before the new charges were filed, Temirov Live published a [video](#) which alleged that the family of the head of Kyrgyzstan's State Committee for National Security (SCNS) Kamchybek Tashiev were involved in corruption. In particular, the video revealed that Tashiev's children had won lucrative government tenders.

Earlier this year, Temirov was charged under a different [provision](#) of the Criminal Code, which penalises

the manufacturing, acquisition, and possession of drugs (Article 283), following a dramatic [police raid](#) on the Temirov Live office on 22 January 2022, during which police are believed to have planted a package of drugs in the journalist's pocket. During the raid, police also [seized](#) computers and other equipment containing investigative journalistic materials, despite this having no connection to the drug charges. The results of Temirov's drug test were negative. After first being detained in connection with the raid, Temirov was [released](#) the following day with an order not to leave the city.

Just two days before the raid, Temirov Live had published an [investigation](#) which implicated relatives of the head of the SCNS in another alleged corruption scheme, this time related to the export of fuel produced by a state company. Prior to the raid, Temirov and his colleagues had reported surveillance, intimidation, and threats in response to their investigative work. The raid was thus the [culmination](#) of months of harassment directed at Temirov and his team.

"It is no coincidence that the criminal cases against Temirov were opened directly after the publication of corruption reports which are highly inconvenient to a highly placed official. What we are seeing is an orchestrated campaign of persecution, of that there can be little doubt," said Gunnar Ekeløve-Slydal, acting Secretary General of the NHC.

If convicted, Temirov could face a lengthy prison sentence.

The criminal charges against Temirov have been widely condemned by [media organisations in Kyrgyzstan](#), as well as by foreign [media](#) and [human rights watchdogs](#). This is not the first time that Temirov has come under pressure because of his investigative work. Most notably, in January 2020, Temirov – then chief editor at Factcheck.kg - was [physically assaulted](#) near his office in central Bishkek. Prior to the attack, Factcheck.kg had repeatedly published investigative reports on government corruption, including a report exposing the lavish lifestyle of the wife of a former top customs official implicated in a high-profile media corruption investigation. While four people were later [convicted](#) of carrying out the attack, they were immediately granted amnesty and those who ordered the attack have never been identified.

"The prosecution of Bolot Temirov represents a shameful new milestone for freedom of expression in Kyrgyzstan. This brave journalist is being made an example of for the apparent purpose of intimidating the wider journalistic community," said Lenur Kerymov, Director of International Programmes at the HFHR.

The criminal prosecution of Temirov comes amid a [deteriorating climate](#) for free speech in Kyrgyzstan under President Sadyr Japarov, with increasingly frequent reports of intimidation and harassment of those who criticise the authorities. In the last few months, the government has pushed ahead with the implementation of controversial legislation against supposed "false" information, while decision-makers have made renewed calls to designate foreign-funded NGOs and media as "foreign agents", and investigative authorities have initiated criminal cases against two other media outlets (Kaktus.media and Next TV) in relation to their independent coverage.

"The Kyrgyzstani authorities should bring this alarming trend of harassment and intimidation to a halt, safeguard freedom of expression in accordance with the country's international obligations, and protect independent media and journalists from persecution," said Anders Pettersson, Executive Director at CRD.