

Kremlin Telegram-network: why Russia attacks judicial reform, honest judges, and activists in Ukraine?



Irina Fedoriv, Chair of the civic initiative “Holka”

Anonymous Telegram channels have become a tool for Russia’s information warfare. The social network where Ukrainians consume most of their news was founded by Russian Pavel Durov.

However, Ukrainian legislation regulates traditional media and hardly touches social networks. **At the same time, anonymous Telegram channels are legitimized at the highest state level.** For example, their representatives were invited to “off-the-record” meetings with the President Zelensky. Then, Oleksiy Danilov, Secretary of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine stated that, in his opinion, the President was set up. But by the end of the year, Telegram channels were accredited for **President Volodymyr Zelensky’s** press conference.

Judicial reform is one of the key tasks for strengthening statehood. The success of this reform determines not only the quality of justice but also the investment climate in Ukraine. A strong economy is one of the best allies for victory.

Hostile intelligence services work actively in the media space before and during the war, particularly on social networks, to propagate favorable Russian narratives. One of them is undermining trust in the judiciary system and in civil society organizations advocating for judicial reform and conducting monitoring of judges' integrity.

The civic initiative "Holka" ("Needle") uncovered connections between Telegram channels that provide information about the activities of courts and leading civil society organizations in the sector that might be under pro-Russian influence. This network includes channels previously mentioned by the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU), such as "Legitimny" ("Legitimate") and "Resident" ("Resident"). However, there is a significant number of others not previously mentioned in the context of pro-Russian influence.



Which channels are part of the network? HOLKA

Network analysis has identified key Telegram channels that discredit judicial reform and leading civil society organizations that help to implement it.

Posts from the "**Rostyslav Kravets**" channel on Telegram were spread the most. For context: Kravets is the lawyer who supported the "Maidan judges" in court and the traitor Oleg Gryvkovsky. Kravets appeared in "Vovk's tapes." He was used to file lawsuits in which **Pavlo Vovk**, the head of the partially liquidated District Administrative Court of Kyiv, who took anti-Ukrainian decisions. It was District Administrative Court of Kyiv that canceled the new Ukrainian orthography, which provided de-Russification of our language. Kravets' organization acted as the plaintiff.

It's not just the quantity of reposts or who spreads harmful content that matters, but also understanding the content constructed by these Telegram channels.



How does Kravets harm and whom? HOLKA

Kravets systematically undermines the Supreme Court as an institution (often adding words like “not of Ukraine” or “without Ukraine” to its name), its Grand Chamber, and honest judges. For example, when Supreme Court Judge **Ivan Mishchenko** decided to participate in a charity run to raise funds for pickups for the Armed Forces of Ukraine, Kravets turned it into populism and devalued the initiative by suggesting simply donating money from judges’ salaries. Although from the beginning of the full-scale invasion, it was the Supreme Court that initiated the practice of allocating part of judges’ salaries to support the Armed Forces and proposed that other courts join in.

Regarding the mentioned judge Mishchenko by Kravets, who is a father of three children, he took up arms and later became the commander of a platoon in the 93rd “Holodny Yar” (“Cold Ravine”) Brigade.



Photo from Mishchenko's Facebook page.

Mishchenko's front-line call sign is “Judge Dread”.

Why is it advantageous for the enemy to discredit judicial reform?



Ivan Mishchenko

Supreme Court Judge, front-line call sign "Judge Dread"

The reform that began almost 10 years ago marked the beginning of a long and quite painful process of change. Openness, the ability to call things by their names, and the systematic assertion of the rule of law compete with backroom deals, formalism, and political dependence. Of course, there are forces that have absolutely no interest in change, but with such an approach, they won't get into the EU. And this is the goal of the aggressor state. Both personalized and anonymous Telegram channels become instruments here, attempting to create an alternative reality, undermine and discredit the efforts aimed at changes in the judicial system and those who are making these changes. This is done helplessly. But there is a significant number of consumers of such Telegram channels. They must understand for what purpose this information field is being shaped.

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Kravets, whose posts are most widely spread on this social network, actively “works” not only to discredit Mishchenko but also shows interest in other honest judges of the Supreme Court. Recently, he filed a request to the Supreme Court inquiring about the work of **Viktor Prorok** and **Dmytro Gudyma**. Prior to this, Prorok satisfied the cassation appeal of “Automaidan,” with whom Judge Oleksandr Khrimli, known as the “Maidan judge,” was litigating to protect his honor and dignity. Kravets was the lawyer on the side of Judge Khrimli in that case. Judging from the data of the Unified State Register of Court Decisions, the related case of Khrimli in the Supreme Court is under the jurisdiction of Dmytro Gudyma.

The information field is shaped not only concerning judges. In Kravets’ post, which was widely circulated in this network, there is mention of **Roman Maselko**, a member of the High Council of Justice, whom Kravets repeatedly attributes to... support for Hitler (!).

Why have you become the target?



Roman Maselko

Member of the High Council of Justice

His first posts about me appeared about 10 years ago when I sought to hold the "Maidan judges" accountable, and Rostyslav often acted as their lawyer (for example, of Judge Chaus). Then there were the "NABU tapes" from the District Administrative Court of Kyiv, where Kravets' voice is heard, and it turned out he was part of the "Vovk scheme." Since then, he has made hundreds of negative posts about me with blatant nonsense. One of the themes he tries to attribute to me is support for Hitler. During one of our conversations, I said that Stalin was no better than Hitler. After that, Rostyslav immediately labeled me a fascist. Does this remind you of anything?

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Kravets’ posts targeting public figures from the Anti-Corruption Action Center (AntAC), including **Vitaliy Shabunin**, were also spread by **Dubinsky**.

This MP, like his ally Maxim Buzhansky, often refers to civil activists as “sorosyata” (a derogatory term) and the media that invite them as “sorosyatski” (derived from the same derogatory term, meaning those who associated with “sorosyata”). **Moreover, the discrediting campaigns on Telegram are now targeting not just the names of civil organizations, but mainly the leaders of the civil sector.**

In total, words related to “Soros” are used about 1,000 times across the channels of this network (most notably Equilibrium, “Pod mantiyei” (Under the Mantle), and Dubinsky.pro). It is advantageous for the enemy state to spread narratives that Ukraine is unable to build institutions without Western partners, and that civil society depends solely on donors.


The discrediting campaign of the civil sector also involved the Telegram channel “**Golubtsy s Bankovoy**” (“Cabbage Rolls From Bakova”). Previously, “Holka” wrote about this channel being part of the pro-Russian network.

As a result, a number of such Telegram channels systematically shape the information field in favor of the aggressor state. Similar narratives are spread not only on Telegram but also on certain Facebook pages, including “**Office for Cleansing the Judiciary**”.

One of the Telegram channels that actively spreads Kravets’ posts is “**Pod mantiyey**” (Under the Mantle) which, as reported by the Anti-Corruption Action Center, is associated with Pavlo Vovk. “Pod mantiyey” (Under the Mantle) also spreads fake news about leaders of the civil sector working on judicial reform, including the head of the DEJURE Foundation, **Mykhailo Zhernakov**.

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Why are these informational attacks happening right now?



Mykhailo Zhernakov
Head of the DEJURE Foundation

What is happening now is what we have been striving for since the Revolution of Dignity. The judicial system is being cleansed of dishonest judges. In other words, Russia is losing its agent network within the judiciary. The informational attacks are aimed at blocking judicial reform and discrediting those who are implementing it. I declare responsibly: they will not succeed. The people of Ukraine have sacrificed too much for these changes to happen, and hundreds of people stand behind these changes.

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Reposts confirm that “Pod mantiyey”(Under the Mantle) interacts with the “**Judicial-Legal Gazette**” just as “**Law and Business**” does with “**Equilibrium**”. It’s noteworthy that when [Roman Ratushnyi](#), the frontline defender of Protasiv Yar was killed, both the “Judicial-Legal Newspaper” and the pro-Russian outlet “Strana.ua” simultaneously reported: “A suspect in the Bankova Street riots, Roman Ratushny, was killed at the front.” This demonstrates the continued denigration of a lawyer and defender of Ukraine who advocated for quality judicial reform, even after his death. The chief editor of the “Judicial-Legal Newspaper,” **Sviatoslav Pohranychnyi**, appeared in “Vovk’s tapes” and also whitewashed Pavlo Vovk’s deputy, Yevhenii Abalov, known for the phrase “chief, let’s get all weird” and for banning the Maidan. Pavlo Vovk intended to appoint him as a member of the High Qualification Commission of Judges and gave him a very expressive characteristic – “idiot.”

One of the regular contributors to the “Judicial-Legal Newspaper,” **Viacheslav Khrypun**, justified the “DNR fighters,” claiming they were not terrorists, and stated that what was happening in Ukraine was not a war, suggesting that comments should be taken from both sides of the conflict.

Given the above, it’s intriguing to consider what connections Ukrainian judges have with this publication or its beneficiaries, as the newspaper regularly congratulates them on their birthdays on the front page. What prompts Stanislav Kravchenko, the head of the Supreme Court, to consider this newspaper a “long-standing partner”?

The “**Law and Business**” channel also became part of this network. The eponymous publication is associated with the aforementioned Andriy Portnov. It regularly covered his activities. Previously, Yuriy Petrenko was mentioned as the beneficial owner of “Law and Business.” A person with the same initials was an assistant to MP Pysarenko, a longtime associate of Andriy Portnov.

“Law and Business” praised Yanukovich for his reforms and warm relations with Russia, and he praised this newspaper for its “objectivity and impartiality.”

Both Portnov and Yanukovich received awards from the publication as the best lawyers of the year. Specifically, Viktor Fedorovich was nominated for “Reforms of the Year.”



How did the fugitive Portnov's channel operate?



Andriy Portnov is one of those who, during the time of the fugitive president, constructed the judicial system so that the judicial branch would never be strong and independent. The law “On Advocacy and Advocacy Activities,” which he was so pleased with, allowed Medvedchuk’s associates to monopolize the National Bar Association of Ukraine. Now, one of the key tasks of the relevant committee of the Verkhovna Rada, chaired by **Denys Maslov** (“Servant of the People”), is urgently to work on changes to the mentioned law. Especially since this is insisted upon by the European Commission in its report.


Organizations working on judicial reform in the country, such as the Anti-Corruption Action Center and DEJURE, are constantly under informational attacks from pro-Russian media. Portnov writes that the Anti-Corruption Action Center is a “thieving organization” that “imagines itself a foreign embassy.”

Of course, there is interaction with pro-Russian figures like Buzhansky and Dubinsky. The main blows are aimed at Vitaliy Shabunin, the head of the Anti-Corruption Action Center.

By the way, Kravets, mentioned earlier, once filed a statement to recognize the Anti-Corruption Action Center as an extremist organization. And Portnov is currently suing the Anti-Corruption Action Center because he does not consider himself a pro-Russian politician.

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Why have these Telegram channels chosen your organization and DEJURE as their target?




Daria Kaleniuk

Executive Director of the Anti-Corruption Action Center

We are accustomed to informational attacks from anonymous Telegram channels. But these attacks only confirm that we are hitting the interests of pro-Russian sympathizers and corrupt officials hard. Lately, other anonymous Telegram channels close to the President's Office have been continuing the case of pro-Kremlin propagandists like Buzhansky and Portnov. We know well who is behind these Telegram channels. The authorities continue to step on the same rakes. But once, even Medvedchuk considered himself untouchable and almighty.

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Because we are not proactively changing the system, even during times of full-scale war, Portnov could realistically win a court case in Ukraine. Judge Serhiy Vovk ruled in favor of Portnov in the first instance, stating that the Revolution of Dignity was an unconstitutional seizure of power. The Anti-Corruption Action Center filed an appeal.


Telegram channels associated with Portnov and “**Elena Lukash**”, named after former Justice Minister under Yanukovich, Olena Lukash, are currently inactive. Portnov’s channel has simply gone dormant, while Lukash’s is closed.

However, voluntary closure of such channels should not be celebrated. Even the Telegram channel of the late traitor Kyrylo Stremousov has been revived, functioning with about 40,000 subscribers.

Some YouTube channels have also resumed operation. For example, the banned channel “Nash” was cleaned of content on this platform and relaunched in January 2024 under the name “Vyshka,” as reported by “Holka.” Immediately, its existing 1.1 million subscribers began consuming content with the necessary Russian narratives and featuring speakers who previously shaped the media landscape on now-banned television channels.


The state already has experience blocking YouTube channels that violate Google’s rules, the owner of this video hosting platform. However, Telegram, founded by a Russian, remains completely unregulated, posing as unfair competition in the media market.

What is the danger of Telegram? ”



Kostiantyn Kvurt
Head of "Internews-Ukraine"

Telegram is cheap and dirty. Some traditional media outlets have built their reputation over centuries. Telegram, owned by Russian Pavel Durov, does not talk about moderation, does not involve civil organizations in developing rules. Ukraine de facto legitimizes Telegram at the state level and does not even attempt to regulate this social network. The Antimonopoly Committee should act decisively, as well as the Committee on Information Policy, and the National Council should raise questions. And the Office of the President should support this discourse, because the president is the guarantor of the Constitution. All businesses disclose their beneficiaries, and the same should apply here, including tax payments, because Telegram is also a business. And as long as the state does not do this, investigative journalists are left with only exposing anonymous channels or conducting network analysis.

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For reference, here are the names of all the Telegram channels in the network: Rostislav Kravets, Dubinskyi.pro, Max Buzhansky, Andrey Portnov, AO “Kravets and Partners”, Pod Mantiyey (Under Mantel), Sorosyata, Equilibrium, Resident, Bearded Grandmother, Notes of a Passerby, Ukraine News, Onion, WhisperUA Ukraine War, Untouchables, Shadow on the Braid, Country Politics, Antiraid, Scar, Ukrainian Independent Lawyers Foundation, Pavlovsky News, Pigeons from Bankova, Dark Knight, ZeRada, Legitimate, Law and Business, Judicial-Legal Gazette, Elena Lukash.

The study covered nearly 60 Telegram channels that were included in the selection (over 21,000 reposts). These reposts were analyzed for information about judicial reform and those associated with it. As a result, almost 30 Telegram channels were identified that create an information field to hinder judicial reform and discredit those who are implementing it.

Data collection and processing were conducted by Yulia Dukach (texty.org.ua). The public initiative “Holka” developed the methodology and conducted the research.