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Ukrainian official charged in acid attack on activist after outcry

Ukrainian prosecutors said Monday (11 February) they had charged a high-ranking regional official with organising a deadly acid attack on a prominent anti-corruption activist that prompted widespread outrage.

EURACTIV (11.02.2019) - <http://bit.do/eJqhT> - Kateryna Gandzyuk, who worked as an adviser to the mayor of the southern city of Kherson, was an outspoken critic of corruption in law enforcement agencies.

She was attacked in July and had about a litre of acid poured on her by several attackers. The 33-year-old died in November after months of treatment, including more than 10 operations.

Her murder has prompted widespread outrage, with civil society activists accusing the authorities of failing to complete the investigation or find out who ordered the attack.

On Monday, less than two months before Ukrainians go to the polls to elect a president, General Prosecutor Yuriy Lutsenko pointed the finger at the head of the local council in the southern region of Kherson.

Vladyslav Manger is accused of "organising the murder of Kateryna Gandzyuk," Lutsenko said on Facebook.

According to the charge sheet released by Lutsenko, Manger was guided by "personal animosity" towards Gandzyuk because she opposed illegal logging in the region.

Lutsenko's spokeswoman Larysa Sargan said Manger was accused of "intentionally and unlawfully causing the death of another person... with special cruelty and by prior agreement with a group of individuals".

Speaking to AFP, Sargan said that Manger was not yet arrested.

"Searches are under way in Kherson," she said.

Expelled from the party

If found guilty, the 48-year-old faces up to life in prison.

Manger was a member of the Batkivshchyna (Fatherland) political party of former prime minister Yulia Tymoshenko, a key rival of President Petro Poroshenko in the 31 March presidential election.

He was expelled from the party last week.

Gandzyuk's death has sparked condemnation of the government and drew renewed attention to dozens of assaults on other anti-corruption campaigners in Ukraine over recent months.

In August, police detained five people in connection with the case, three of whom were placed under house arrest.

In November, a former aide to a ruling party lawmaker was arrested on suspicion of being involved in the attack.

Both the European Union and the United States have called the attacks on activists unacceptable and urged authorities to bring the perpetrators to justice.

Fellow activists accused police and prosecutors of reluctance to investigate the case, insisting the detention of those possibly involved in the attack was made only after a wave of protests across the country.

Lutsenko in November submitted a letter of resignation to Poroshenko over the affair but the Ukrainian leader refused to fire him.

More than 50 attacks on anti-graft activists, environmental and human rights campaigners including five murders were recorded last year.

Number of Ukrainians who trust church falls 6% last year - opinion poll

Interfax Religion (30.01.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2UKIpwG> - Kiev, January 30, Interfax - Ukrainian citizens most of all trust people living nearby (68%), volunteers (63%), church (51%), and the Ukrainian Armed Forces (51%), according to the results of an opinion poll conducted by the Kiev International Institute of Sociology.

According to the findings of the opinion poll, which has been carried out between November 30 and December 14, 2018, the lowest number of Ukrainians believes in the Ukrainian government (11%) and the Verkhovna Rada (8%).

"The pro-European opposition (Batkivshchyna, Samopomich and others) has a better balance of trust and distrust (24% trust them and 47% distrust them) than the opposition to the former authorities (the Opposition Bloc, the Opposition Platform - For Life), as 16% believe in them and 58% do not believe in them, but both balances are negative," according to sociologists.

Besides, the level of trust to Ukrainian President Pyotr Poroshenko stands at 16%.

Meanwhile, according to the opinion poll, the level of confidence in the Ukrainian Armed Forces did not change much and now amounts to 51% against 2017. According to the findings of the opinion poll in regions, the Ukrainian Armed Forces are mostly trusted in the western region (62%), and they are the least trusted in the eastern region (28%).

The church is still among the leading factors of Ukrainians' trust over all the years of monitoring.

"However, the level of confidence dropped 6% (from 57% to 51%) last year. The highest number of those who believe in the church most of all was revealed in western regions (69%), while the lowest number [of such respondents] in central regions (42%)," the statement reads.

A total of 31% of Ukrainians trust domestic media, while 29% the Ukrainian National Police, and 21% the Ukrainian Security Service.

The opinion poll was conducted by a method of individual interviews among 2,034 respondents, who live in 110 Ukrainian populated localities. The statistical margin of error does not exceed 3.3% for figures close to 50%, and 2.8% for figures close to 25%, 2.0% for figures close to 10%, and 1.4% for figures approaching 5%.