2006:

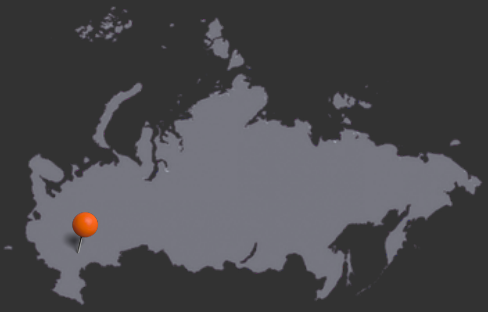
# The murder of Anna Politkovskaya



Photo: Maria Söderberg

## 20 years without justice

On 7 October 2006, Russian journalist and human rights defender Anna Politkovskaya was fatally shot in the lift of her block of flats in Moscow. In 2018, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) held that Russia had failed to conduct an effective investigation into the person(s) who commissioned Politkovskaya's murder, despite the convictions of those who carried out the killing. 20 years after her death, the mastermind(s) remain unidentified.



**ISSUE**

- Failure to investigate
- Attacks on independent journalism

**CRIMES**

- Contract killing
- Torture and inhuman treatment



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## Attacked because of her work

Politkovskaya was a prominent investigative journalist, best known for exposing human rights abuses during the Second Chechen War, including allegations of torture, enforced disappearances, and extrajudicial killings. The war began in 1999 and officially ended in April 2009. However, there is disagreement over whether that date marks the actual end of the conflict, as violence and insurgent activity continued afterwards.

Her reporting challenged official narratives of the war by the Russian federal government under Vladimir Putin (b. 1952) and documented the widespread suffering of civilians despite state censorship.

Russian military and security personnel detained, intimidated and abused Politkovskaya, including a mock execution. She also endured a suspected poisoning while travelling to cover the 2004 Beslan school hostage crisis.

## The ineffective investigation must be addressed

In 2009, the initial suspects in Politkovskaya's murder were acquitted, but subsequent retrials led to convictions. Dmitri Pavliuchenkov, a former police lieutenant colonel, admitted to helping organise the crime and was imprisoned in 2012. In 2014, Rustam Mkhmudov and Lom-Ali Gaitukayev were sentenced to life imprisonment, while three others received lengthy prison terms.

In 2018, the ECtHR found that the State's continued failure to identify who ordered the murder rendered Russia's investigation ineffective. Although six people had been convicted, the organisers of the crime remain unprosecuted.

Politkovskaya's story demonstrates the power of independent journalism to counter authoritarianism and expose human rights abuses. It also underscores the need to protect journalists who undertake this work. To meet its international obligations, Russia must prosecute those who ordered the murder. International organisations and states should continue to press for accountability.

**1999:** Anna Politkovskaya began reporting from Chechnya for Novaya Gazeta

**7 October 2006:** Murder of Anna Politkovskaya

**November 2008-February 2009:** First major trial of three suspects

**February 2009:** All defendants acquitted

**September 2009:** The Supreme Court overturned the acquittals

**May 2011:** Rustam Makhmudov arrested

**2012-2014:** New trials against five defendants

**20 May 2014:** A Moscow court found five men guilty and determined that the murder was a contract killing. Those who ordered it have not been identified

**2023:** Sergei Khadzhikurbanov, one of the convicts, reportedly received a presidential pardon after serving in Russia's war against Ukraine