

STATEMENT OF THE BUREAU FOR COMBATTING ORGANISED CRIME OF THE PRESIDIUM OF THE POLICE FORCE ON THE COMPLAINT AGAINST THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC ON THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE'S PLATFORM FOR THE PROTECTION OF JOURNALISTS, DISAPPEARANCE OF A JOURNALIST

Regarding the importance of Statement against the Slovak Republic on the Platform for the Protection of Journalists of the Council of Europe concerning the disappearance of journalist Pavol Rýpal, the Bureau for Combatting Organised Crime of the Presidium of the Police Force as the investigating authority in the given case allows the following to be stated:

The investigation of the disappearance of journalist Pavol Rýpal is undoubtedly protected, thus, public interest as well as uninvolved parties cannot be provided with detailed information about the ongoing investigation, since the publication of details could threaten the success of the investigation. Both, all evidence as well as information provided to investigators and all statements by suspected or witnesses are being verified with the purpose to eliminate inconsistencies. Moreover, in the given matter, an EMBARGO on informing about the ongoing investigation has been imposed by the District Prosecutor's Office in Nitra.

The case falls into the competence of the Bureau for Combatting Organised Crime of the Presidium of the Police Force which denotes a complex case with possible connections to organized crime and committing crimes in a particularly serious manner. In such cases, concealing information is even more important, both for reasons of witness protection, prevention of potential attacks on informants and co-participants, but also for reasons of protecting investigative methods. Premature disclosure of information could damage the reputation of persons who are only suspects, but whose guilt has yet to be proven.

In the case of Pavel Rýpal, investigators are working with information from a (not yet lawfully) convicted murderer, Norbert Kost'ov, which requires particularly careful verification and confidentiality regarding further steps in the investigation. The testimony of a currently (not yet lawfully) convicted criminal of the most violent crime requires extremely thorough verification – it may be an attempt to gain advantages in exchange for information, or an effort to mislead investigators and reverse the direction of the investigation. At the same time, we would like to point out that Norbert Kost'ov is in custody in Hungary, which requires international cooperation, extradition proceedings, and more complicated legal procedures.

With regard to the above, we would like to state that members of the Police Force are intensively investigating the case and searching for the journalist's remains in a forest near the village of Mužla near Štúrovo in the Nitra region. The case of Pavel Rýpal's disappearance has been ongoing for an exceptionally long time – the journalist disappeared in 2008, but without finding his remains, it is extremely difficult to prove not only murder, but also what exactly happened. There is a lack of physical evidence, forensic clues, and the possibility of accurately reconstructing the events. Almost two decades after the crime was committed, the memories of witnesses are less reliable, evidence has been degraded, and mobile phones, GPS locators, and camera systems, which today aid in investigations, were not as widely available in 2008 as they are today. Therefore, in the years following his disappearance, no evidence was secured with a focus on his presumed murder, as the case was investigated as a missing person case until 2025 and only actions related to his search were taken. Although journalist Pavel Rýpal disappeared in 2008, it was not until 2025 that the first specific person (suspect) willing to talk about the details appeared. This was the subject of further procedural steps, and it was not until 2025 that criminal proceedings were initiated for the first time in this case. This fact also points to the difficulty and complexity of solving cases linked to organized crime.

Countless procedural steps have been taken in the case so far - statements have been taken from suspects and witnesses, procedural verification of statements on site, repeated inspections of the site of the possible discovery of an "illegal grave" using specially trained dog handlers with service dogs, spectral and infrared measurements using special drones, lidar measurements and outputs of specially made maps, georadar measurements, maps from satellite images from the year in question, 2008, but also from previous and subsequent years (for the purpose of mapping the probable excavation of an "illegal grave," the occurrence of trees and other landmarks), outputs from cartographic and hydrometeorological institutes were taken into account, groundwater measurements in the area were taken, members of hunting and historical associations were consulted, excavation work was carried out on an area of approximately 22,000 cubic meters, searches were carried out using a large number of police officers with soil piercing and determination of the occurrence of "illegal graves", personal consultations were held with university professors focusing on soil composition, the development and occurrence of self-sown trees and woody plants in the area, exploratory drilling, geodetic surveying, and a number of other activities were carried out in order to find the "illegal grave," but so far with negative results.