

## The New York Times

# *Kateryna Handziuk, Ukrainian Activist, Dies From Acid Attack*

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KIEV, Ukraine — Three months ago, an attacker splashed a liter of sulfuric acid over Kateryna Handziuk's head, burning 30 percent of her body. But Ms. Handziuk, an anticorruption activist, continued to speak out from her hospital bed about unsolved attacks on dozens of civic activists in Ukraine this year.

On Sunday, after 11 surgeries and numerous skin grafts, she died from complications from her wounds.

Her scarred face had already become a rebuke of the foot-dragging of the government of President Petro O. Poroshenko on anti-corruption measures — a key demand of the protesters who ushered him to power in 2014.

“Yes, I know that I look bad, but at least I am being treated,” Ms. Handziuk told Hromadske Television from her hospital bed in September, two months after the attack. “And I'm sure that I look better than fairness and justice in Ukraine, because they are not being treated by anybody today.”

The attack on Ms. Handziuk has drawn attention to a recent rise in the number of assaults on anticorruption activists in Ukraine, something that she was working to publicize. Rights groups say that at least 50 activists have been attacked this year in Ukraine, most while tangling with corrupt officials.

The Western-backed government has pushed through overhauls of the police and military, but critics say that corruption in state-owned companies, the courts and local government remains rampant. The International Monetary Fund has delayed some aid disbursement, in part because Ukraine has failed to establish a specialized anticorruption court.

Supporters of Mr. Poroshenko say that progress has been made, but that not all of Ukraine's problems can be solved quickly. Criticism of his administration's shortcomings, they say, distracts from Russia's military intervention in Ukraine.

Ms. Handziuk was known as a vocal critic of corruption in law enforcement agencies, particularly the police in her city, Kherson, near the border with Russian-occupied Crimea. She had campaigned against pro-Russia separatism but had recently shifted her focus to corruption and attacks on civic activists, accusing the police of passiveness in investigations of the attacks.

Mr. Poroshenko expressed condolences on Sunday to Ms. Handziuk's family and called for a thorough investigation. “I appeal to law enforcement to do everything to find the murderers, to punish the murderers, and to put them on trial,” he said.

After the attack, the police detained five suspects and claimed to have detained the person who organized the assault. But local courts reportedly released two suspects to house arrest pending trial, despite the gravity of the assault.

Despite routine promises of robust investigations, high-profile killings have languished in Ukraine's courts. No suspects have been detained in the 2016 bombing that killed Pavel G. Sheremet, a journalist who had been critical of far-right paramilitary groups.

Sunday evening, after news emerged of Ms. Handziuk's death, protesters gathered in five cities to demand a transparent investigation and justice. About 200 held a candlelight vigil at the main police department in Kiev, the capital.

"Those who ordered the murder of Handziuk now watch how society reacts," Mustafa Nayyem, a member of Parliament, said in a telephone interview. "Will we accept this murder, or will we fight?"

In her interview with the Ukrainian television station, Ms. Handziuk had also demanded answers about the attacks on activists. "Why do we encourage people to be socially active but we cannot protect them?" she said.

But Ukraine could change, she said, adding, "Each of us will be free, and there will be no fear in our hearts."