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Stop using the justice system for political reprisals: statement by civil society organizations on the case of Vitaliy Shabunin

JULY 16, 2025

To the President of Ukraine

Volodymyr Zelenskyy

To the Prosecutor General of Ukraine

To Ruslan Kravchenko

To the Director of the State Bureau of Investigation

Alexey Sukhachev

STATEMENT

On July 11, 2025, the co-founder of the public organization "Anti-Corruption Action Center" Vitaliy Shabunin was searched.

At the time of the investigation, Shabunin was a sergeant serving in the 43rd separate mechanized brigade of the Armed Forces of Ukraine (ASU). According to his lawyer Olena Shcherban, the State Bureau of Investigation (SBI) conducted searches at several addresses at once: at his place of registration in Kyiv, where Vitaliy's family and young children currently live, and at his place of service in the Chuguyiv district of the Kharkiv region. The searches were preceded by a long and systematic discrediting campaign against Shabunin through anonymous Telegram channels.

According to the Anti-Corruption Center, the investigative actions were carried out with numerous violations by the State Bureau of Investigation, which lawyers who arrived at the scene managed to record after the fact: the absence of court orders, the organization of searches in such a way that lawyers were unable to arrive on time and take measures to

protect their rights, the absence of video recording of the process of seizing equipment and objects, which could be used in the future for further discrediting, the seizure of objects that are not related to the essence of the criminal proceedings, etc. Vitaliy Shabunin, as well as his relatives, had their mobile phones taken away and even children's tablets confiscated.

The State Bureau of Investigation (SBI) announced suspicion against Shabunin for "evasion of military service" and "fraud" (under Part 4 of Article 409 and Part 2 of Article 190 of the Criminal Code).

Recall that Vitaliy Shabunin voluntarily mobilized to the Armed Forces of Ukraine from the first days of the full-scale war, was in various regions of Ukraine at the location of the unit's deployment, where, in accordance with the military orders of the leadership, he performed military service. The SBI's accusations of his alleged evasion of service are based on the period when Shabunin was on a business trip to the National Agency for the Prevention of Corruption (NACP) in accordance with the official order of the command. Cases of military personnel being sent to government bodies and institutions are not unique. During his business trip to the NACP, Shabunin received standard monetary support as a military personnel in accordance with current legislation — without any "combat" payments.

The legislation did not provide for any special actions by Shabunin in the event of a business trip: his task was to go on a business trip, following the order. The issue of receiving or not receiving payments of a serviceman does not depend on his will and he does not calculate them. These issues are regulated by the state, and if it believes that an unjustified payment has been made, there is an institution of civil law under which a claim for the return of funds can be made.

So, Vitaliy Shabunin is suspected of committing actions committed by state bodies, because a serviceman does not decide how much he should be paid and by whom, he is a subordinate person who, during his service, is in the "hands" of the state and dependent on it.

The official SBI press release also contains a manipulative reference to the use of a volunteer car. However, according to the Anti-Corruption Center, this statement did not come under suspicion, since such a practice is legal and widely used in the Defense Forces. Moreover, private donors had previously publicly explained that the purchase was made with CEO Club funds, and the car was transferred specifically for the needs of serviceman Shabunin. Since the benefactors who financed the purchase of the car do not believe that their rights have been violated and have not applied to any law enforcement agencies regarding the restoration of their rights, the latter have no legal grounds to accuse the serviceman of using a car that is not owned by a state body or military unit.

Therefore, **the actions of the pre-trial investigation bodies can be regarded either as complete incompetence of the officials and inadequacy of the position held, or as a targeted attack aimed at putting pressure on Vitaliy Shabunin, who, while serving in the military, continued to criticize the work of state bodies .**

This criminal prosecution bears the hallmarks of being politically motivated, constitutes an abuse of law, i.e. it is carried out in violation of Ukraine's obligations under Article 18 (limits of application of restrictions on rights) of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms in conjunction with Article 6 (right to a fair trial) and Article 10 (freedom of expression) of this Convention.

This persecution is another episode **in the long-standing history of attacks on Vitaliy Shabunin personally and on the Anti-Corruption Center he heads** , which have been ongoing since 2016.

We, the undersigned representatives of human rights, anti-corruption organizations, and other public associations, **appeal to the President of Ukraine, the Prosecutor General, and the Director of the State Bureau of Investigation with a demand to prevent the use of the justice system for political reprisals and persecution of critics of the government .**

We call on :

The President of Ukraine should express a public position on the inadmissibility of politically motivated persecution of public figures.

The Director of the State Bureau of Investigation – in accordance with Clause 2, Article 39 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, to suspend the investigators who conducted the pre-trial investigation of this proceeding and initiate disciplinary proceedings against them; in accordance with Clause 4, Article 39 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, to eliminate violations of the requirements of the law committed by the investigators; to take personal responsibility and in accordance with Clause 5, Article 39 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, to personally conduct a full pre-trial investigation, while exercising the powers of an investigator.

The Prosecutor General – to ensure impartial procedural guidance of the pre-trial investigation and conduct an internal investigation against investigators in the event of gross violations of criminal procedural legislation; in the absence of elements of a criminal offense – to close the criminal proceedings against Vitaliy Shabunin.

Pressure on public activists is unacceptable in a democratic country like Ukraine.

1. ZMINA Human Rights Center

2. *Institute of Mass Information*
3. *Anti-Corruption Center MEJHA*
4. *Anti-corruption headquarters*
5. *Public initiative "Ilka"*
6. *Center for Economic Strategy*
7. *NGO "Human Rights Platform"*
8. *Kharkiv Anti-Corruption Center*
9. *Media Initiative for Human Rights*
10. *DEJURE Foundation*
11. *VGO "Institute of Political Education"*
12. *All-Ukrainian Association "Automaidan"*
13. *NGO "Women's Anti-Corruption Movement"*
14. *International Center for Ukrainian Victory (ICUV)*
15. *Center for Democracy and Rule of Law (CEDEM)*
16. *Ukrainian Independent Center for Political Studies*
17. *NGO "Zaporizhzhia Investigation Center"*
18. *Center for Investigative Journalism "The Power of Truth"*
19. *Platform "Public Control"*
20. *National Interest Protection Network (ANTS)*
21. *Civic Network OPORA*
22. *Bihus.Info*
23. *The HONEST movement*
24. *Center for Socio-Economic Research – CASE Ukraine*
25. *NGO "MINZMIN"*

26. *Interdisciplinary Research and Educational Center for Combating Corruption (ACREC)*

27. *Human rights initiative "Lawmaker"*

28. *Transparency International Ukraine*

29. *NGO "Crimean Process"*

30. *NGO "Zero Waste Lviv"*

31. *NGL.media*

32. *NGO "Ukrainian LGBT Military for Equal Rights"*

33. *NGO "Center for Reforms and Local Development"*

34. *NGO "Social Capital"*

35. *NGO "Rivne Center "Social Partnership" (Initiative "For a Fair Tender")*

36. *IAC "Public Space"*

37. *NGO "Initiative Community"*

38. *NGO "Coordination Center for Public Control"*

39. *Public Association "Human Rights House "Crimea"*

40. *Open Data Association*

41. *VBO "Ukrainian Legal Aid Foundation"*

42. *NGO "Center for Law Enforcement Research"*

43. *StateWatch Think Tank*

44. *NGO "Genealogical Community "Archisovist"*

45. *NGO "Volya Hromady"*

46. *NGO "Institute of Legislative Ideas"*

47. *Public holding company "GROUP OF INFLUENCE"*

48. *NGO "Center for Political and Legal Reforms"*

49. *Kremenchuk Anti-Corruption Center*

50. NGO "ZORAKS"
51. NGO "Ecosphere"
52. NGO "Green Leaf"
53. NGO "RIPO Patriot"
54. NGO "Coalition of Cultural Activists"
55. International Renaissance Foundation
56. Public organization "BCD"
57. Educational House of Human Rights – Chernihiv
58. Lobby X recruiting platform
59. Ukrainian Legal Advisory Group (ULAG)
60. NGO "Youth Organization "Interaction""
61. NGO "Code 21"
62. "Media Detector"
63. NGO "Cherkasy Information Agency "18000"
64. NGO "Horizon of Change"
65. The German Marshall Fund of the United States
66. Center for Liberation Movement Studies
67. Association "Energy Efficient Cities of Ukraine"
68. NGO "Institutional Development Foundation"

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