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Editor, Kremlin Critic Decry YouTube Video

By Alexander Bratersky

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Fishman

Russian Newsweek editor Mikhail Fishman and opposition politician Ilya Yashin cried foul Thursday after a video surfaced on YouTube that seemingly shows them giving bribes to traffic police officers.

The traffic police suggested that the officers depicted in the video were actually actors, and Yashin linked the recording to Nashi, the youth group known for hounding people critical of Prime Minister Vladimir Putin's policies.

The three-minute video, posted by an anonymous user and titled "Words and Actions," shows Fishman, Yashin and liberal political analyst Dmitry Oreshkin being asked by someone off-camera to share their opinions about the widespread practice of bribing the traffic police.

Fishman and Oreshkin say they have bribed officers in the past to avoid fines, while Yashin

says he prefers “to convince police officers with words."

The video then shows Yashin being stopped by the traffic police and apologizing for speeding. The camera then cuts to a police officer's hand holding 3,000 rubles ($100). An officer is then shown telling Yashin not to give money directly to the police but to pay the fine as required by law.

Similar scenarios are repeated with Fishman and Oreshkin.

Yashin denounced the video as "an ordinary provocation by the security forces."

“I don’t even see any reason to complain to the police because the policeman himself acted as a political provocateur,” he told The Moscow Times.

He said the incident in the video occurred in September when he was stopped by traffic police near his house. He said the officers tried to extort a bribe but he convinced them to back off.

Yashin noted that the video does not show him handing over money and suggested that it had been doctored.

Fishman wrote on his LiveJournal blog that the incident involving him happened a year ago. He said a black Mercedes and a traffic police car had followed him that day, and that during a document check the police had uncovered an outstanding fine.

“I didn’t think about bribing anyone. But the people who placed the footage on the Internet edited it to make it look like I am trying to bribe the policeman,” Fishman said.

He said he would file a complaint with the police.

Oreshkin, a leading liberal pundit, could not be reached for comment Thursday.

Yashin said the video first surfaced on the web site of the pro-Kremlin Nashi youth group and accused it of involvement in the incident.

Nashi spokeswomen Kristina Potupchik denied that the group had any connection to the production of the video and said it had only posted it on its web site because of large public interest.

She said she believed that the video was genuine.

“If they are going to urge others not to give bribes, let them start with themselves. Everyone should see that they are hypocrites,” Potupchik said.

A traffic police spokesman expressed doubt that real officers were depicted in the video. “It could have been just some dressed-up actors. All this looks like some kind of film,” he said.

He said traffic police officers do not carry cameras to videotape traffic violators.

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