

Bloggers Mount Hunt for Police Officer

By [Natalya Krainova](#)

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A man wearing a badge symbolizing Article 31 of the Constitution standing in the rain during an unauthorized gathering in Vladivostok on Saturday. **Yuri Maltsev**

The violent actions of a police officer caught on camera during an anti-Kremlin rally in St. Petersburg last weekend have prompted bloggers to launch an unprecedented campaign to find and prosecute him.

Video footage posted on YouTube [shows](#) the beefy policeman grabbing a young man by the hair and striking him with a baton before hauling him to a police bus with drawn curtains in the windows.

The unidentified officer pounced on the man after the man shouted "fascists!" in response to verbal abuse that the officer was directing at protesters, said Leonid Rumyantsev, a blogger at Ekho Moskvyy radio's web site.

The policeman also pulled the hair of a young woman who was filming the rally, [according to a photo](#) posted on the blog of prominent lawyer Alexei Navalny.

St. Petersburg police and the local branch of the Investigative Committee said no investigation has been opened into the officer's actions, and none would be considered unless the victims filed formal complaints.

The unsanctioned rally on Saturday was one of several staged in Moscow, St. Petersburg and other cities to draw attention to Article 31 of the Constitution, which guarantees freedom of assembly. The authorities have refused to authorize the rallies, organized by opposition and human rights activists on the last day of every month with 31 days since July 2009.

Washington has voiced concern over the crackdown at Saturday's rallies, which ended with the arrest of about 95 people, including opposition leader Boris Nemtsov in Moscow.

"The infringement of Russian citizens' rights to exercise these freedoms runs counter to our shared commitments to international norms and common interests in fostering modernization," said Mike Hammer, spokesman for the White House National Security Council.

"The United States reiterates the importance of embracing and protecting universal values, including freedoms of expression and assembly, enshrined in the Russian Constitution as well as in international agreements which Russia has signed," Hammer said in a statement.

Police have cracked down on previous so-called 31st rallies, but the actions of the St. Petersburg police last Saturday were markedly more violent than in recent memory, triggering the Internet backlash from a public weary of rampant violence and corruption in the country's police force.

The Internet campaign to identify the policeman had attracted hundreds of supporters Tuesday, although not everyone who posted online comments supported the protesters.

Marina Litvinovich, a prominent opposition activist and blogger, said by e-mail that this was the first time that the opposition had "a complete record of a crime" committed by a police officer at an opposition rally. She added that she could not recall another instance of the public trying to track down a policeman for his actions at a rally.

On her blog, Litvinovich [asked readers](#) to repost the officer's photo with the information about his actions on their own blogs to "help find this criminal in a uniform."

Ilya Yevseyev, a 36-year-old IT engineer who witnessed the baton attack, wrote on his blog that he was ready to testify in court against the officer, whom he called "a nasty character."

Yevseyev said by telephone that the officer "grabbed the guy by the neck and hit him with a baton in the face, then pushed him toward fellow policemen."

Another protester, Alexander Kormushkin, said by e-mail that the same officer had "squeezed" his eye and punched him twice in the jaw after he was detained.

Navalny, the lawyer, said on his blog that he would submit a complaint to law enforcement agencies against the "mongrel" policeman to "seek to bring him to justice or at least his dismissal." He said he would complain regardless of whether the officer was identified.

Navalny said the officer could be charged with saying obscenities in a public place, assault, unlawful use of a weapon, and illegal arrest. The policeman's actions may land him in prison for up to five years, Gazeta.ru reported, without listing possible charges.

The policeman worked at St. Petersburg's Primorskaya metro station several years ago and can be identified by a tattoo that says "For VDV" on his right arm, an apparent reference to his service in the paratrooper forces, abbreviated "VDV" in Russian, a blogger identified only as Nextly said on Navalny's blog.

An e-mailed request to Nextly for comment went unanswered Tuesday.

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