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Voina's New Year Gift for Police

By Sergey Chernov

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ST. PETERSBURG — police have filed a new criminal case against the award-winning Voina art group for setting fire to an armored police truck on New Year's Eve.

Late on Dec. 31, a Voina activist climbed over a fence surrounding Police Precinct No. 71 on the Petrograd Side and set fire to a massive Ural truck using Molotov cocktails as an art stunt called "Cop's Auto-Da-Fe, or Fucking Prometheus," Voina spokesman and chronicler Alexei Plutser-Sarn wrote on his LiveJournal blog.

The statement said the armored Ural police truck was targeted because it was a prison-on-wheels used for holding and transporting detainees.

"This is our modest New Year present to political prisoners from a group of artists," Voina's Oleg Vorotnikov said in an e-mail interview this week.

"It's undisputable that political prisoners are forgotten by Russian society — because they remain locked up in prisons. Political prisoners have become the norm in Russia, and this

norm is a despicable crime of the state and its cowardly and indifferent citizens."

According to Vorotnikov, the group came up with the idea of "giving the gift of a burning prisoner truck" when activist Filipp Kostenko, who spent 15 days in custody after being arrested at the Dec. 6 protest against electoral fraud, was arrested again as soon as his term had finished on Dec. 21 and sentenced to another 15 days on what he called fake charges.

Vorotnikov believes that "Cop's Auto-Da-Fe" had an immediate effect: The court declined to put Kostenko in a pretrial detention center at the end of his second prison term on Jan. 4, despite an investigators' request. He was released on Jan. 5 after spending 30 days in custody.

"There are characters who act arrogantly and pretend to be kings," Vorotnikov said. "Once they are given a rap on their forehead, such characters quiet down and start behaving respectfully and politely. Such are the cops from the political police in Russia."

Published on Jan. 2, Plutser-Sarno's posting included photos and a video of the arson. Police initially issued a statement saying the damage was "minor," but they later opened a criminal case into "hooliganism" or criminal mischief over the incident and addressed Voina via Fontanka.ru, a local news web site.

Police suggested that the artists should get in touch with the investigator in charge of the case and "present their artistic views." "In turn, the police officers promise to pass the results of these conversations to journalists in full," Fontanka.ru reported.

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