

Chief Investigator Apologizes to Reporter for 'Emotional Outburst'

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June 14, 2012



Sergei Sokolov

The nation's most senior investigator apologized to a reporter Thursday after being accused of threatening the reporter to such a degree that the man feared for his life.

Investigative Committee chief Alexander Bastrykin apologized for an "emotional outburst" during a personal conversation with the journalist, Novaya Gazeta deputy editor Sergei Sokolov, a little over a week ago.

That "outburst" stemmed from Bastrykin's reaction to a June 4 [article](#) in which Sokolov calls Bastrykin a "servant" to a murderous gang, the official told a meeting attended by Sokolov and other journalists Thursday.

Novaya Gazeta editor-in-chief Dmitry Muratov, who was in attendance, had the day before in an open letter accused Bastrykin of threatening Sokolov after the official had the reporter

driven out to a Moscow region forest.

But in an interview with Izvestia also on Thursday, Bastrykin attested that the incident did not occur in a forest. "I have not been to a forest in I don't remember how long," he said.

He said it was "strange" that although the conversation happened more than a week ago, the left-leaning Novaya Gazeta published the accusatory letter shortly after Bastrykin's committee searched the homes of opposition leaders.

As part of an investigation into violence at a May 6 rally, authorities scoured the residences of opposition leaders Ilya Yashin, Alexei Navalny and Sergei Udaltsov on Monday, a day before a large protest march in downtown Moscow.

Bastrykin admitted to Izvestia that his conversation with Sokolov was "intense." He added, "I do not hide that my reaction to that article was emotional."

Bastrykin reportedly even summoned Sokolov to a duel — but eventually backed down.

Sokolov's article, titled "10,000 and Some Odd Rubles for One Life Is the Government's Price," accuses Bastrykin and other law enforcement officials of "covering up" the crimes of a notorious gang that murdered 12 people in the North Caucasus town of Kushchyovskaya in 2011.

In that article, Sokolov said he was shocked that one reputed member of the gang, Sergei Tsepovyaz, was let off with a 150,000 ruble (\$4,600) fine.

Bastrykin had previously accused the media of manipulating the facts of that case and said Tsepovyaz was not part of the actual gang.

Two gang members who share Tsepovyaz's family name were convicted of murder and sentenced to 20 years in prison.

Bastrykin told Izvestia that Sokolov's article was "malicious and sloppy."

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<https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2012/06/14/chief-investigator-apologizes-to-reporter-for-emotional-outburst-a15433>