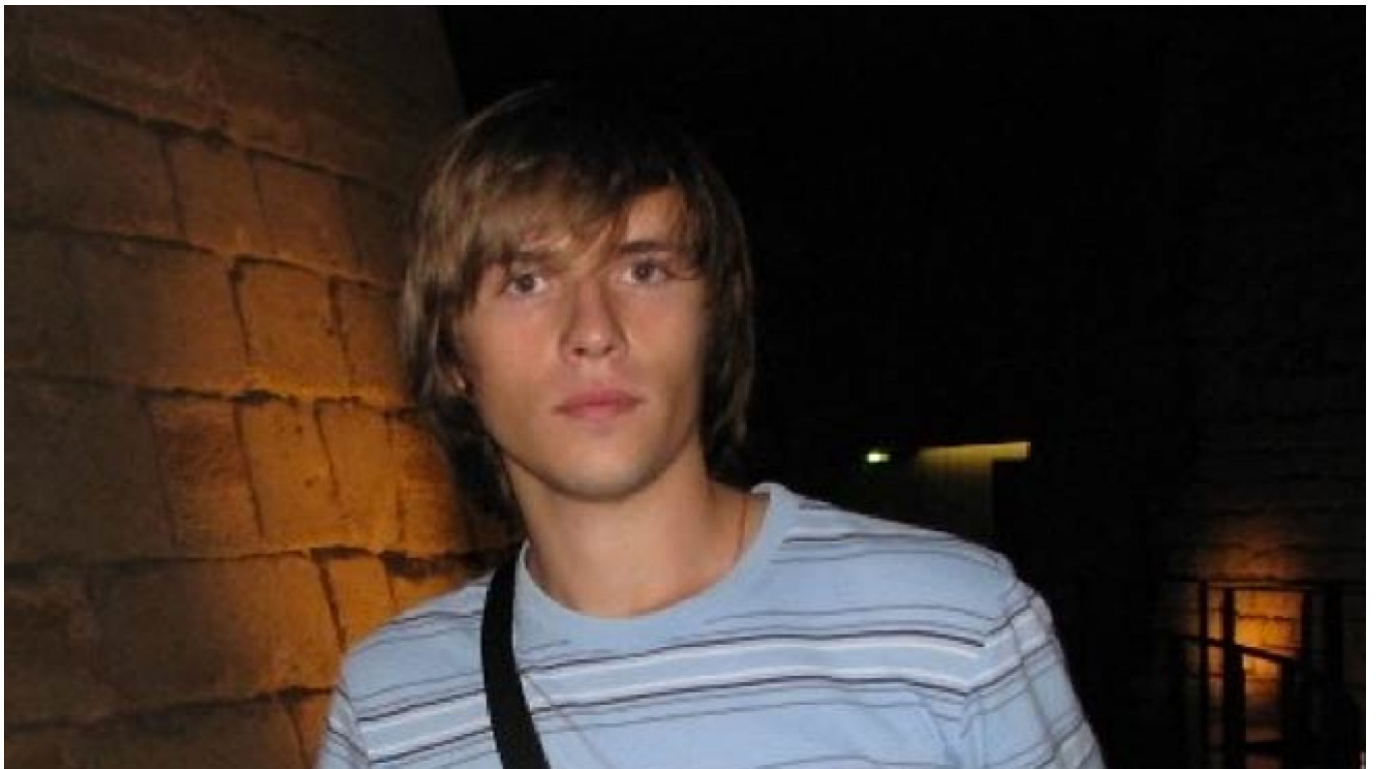


Spoof Interview Propels Young Opposition Lawmaker Into Spotlight

By [Ivan Nechepurenko](#)

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Moscow municipal deputy Alexei Gusev.

When Moscow municipal deputy Alexei Gusev read a spoof interview purporting to be with himself in an obscure local newspaper, he took it as a complimentary reflection of his growing influence in the Cheryomushki district that he represents.

But when he was summoned and questioned by the local Prosecutor General's Office on suspicion of extremism last Friday, he was not so pleased.

The spoof interview was published in the March issue of *Molodaya Vlast*, which claims to have a print-run of 777 and describes its genre as "political fantasy."

In the interview, Gusev, 24, ostensibly described his experience working for the U.S. State Department in central Kiev during the mass protests last winter that led to the change of government in Ukraine, playing on claims that unrest in Ukraine and Russia is fomented

by foreign agents.

"The payment was fair: [We were paid] for each Molotov cocktail and each rock that hit the riot police. The food was great: American burgers and french fries," he said in the fabricated interview.

"I invested the money into passing my university exams. What can I say, I even had enough money left to have fun with some boys!" he said in the interview.

Gusev is a final-year student at Moscow State University's history faculty, where he specializes in Russian-Ukrainian relations and Ukrainian nationalism. The budding young politician plans to run for the Moscow City Duma in September.

"The goal of this campaign was to lower my ratings, but the opposite happened: People were coming up to me and saying that if I was attacked in such a way, it means I am honest," Gusev said in a real phone interview Tuesday.

"This demonstrates to what extent the government lacks talented people, as the campaign was done in a very coarse way," he said.

In contrast to the less-than-flattering "interview" with Gusev, the front page of the newspaper was splashed with an article commending another municipal Duma Deputy, Alexei Silnov.

Neither the newspaper nor Silnov could be reached for comment. The paper has a Twitter blog in which it tweeted at Gusev: "When will you pay for the launchpad?" implying that its publication had brought fame to the young politician.

The prosecutor's office had not responded to a comment request by the time of publication.

Gusev supported anti-Kremlin blogger and politician Alexei Navalny in last year's Moscow mayoral election and identifies himself as belonging to the political opposition.

According to elections expert Andrei Buzin, the publication of fake interviews and subsequent questioning by law enforcement officers is not uncommon.

"This could actually help him in his political career: He could sue the paper in court for libel, which is a criminal offense, or for damage caused to his reputation, which could spark charges of an administrative offense," said Buzin, who is co-chair of the Golos election watchdog, in a phone interview.

"He should definitely exploit this situation as he can benefit from it," he added.

Contact the author at i.nechepurenko@imedia.ru

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