

Russian Dissenter Faces Jail for Calls to Kill Journalist

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Pavel Shekhtman

A little-known liberal opposition activist was charged with extremism Wednesday, apparently over calls to kill a journalist.

A Moscow court refused a request by police to place Pavel Shekhtman in custody until December, TASS reported.

But he still faces up to five years in prison over "extremism," a vaguely defined legal term that critics say is routinely used to oppress political opposition, though usually on the nationalist flank.

Neither police nor the Investigative Committee had commented on the incident as of this article's publication.

Shekhtman, 38, is in hot water over a Facebook post from August about photojournalist

Andrei Stenin of the Russian state-run RIA Novosti agency, the Rusplt.ru news site said.

The acclaimed war photographer went missing while covering the civil strife in eastern Ukraine, blamed on the Kremlin by many Russian liberals. He was eventually confirmed dead.

Before Stenin's fate became clear, Shekhtman called on Ukraine to execute the photographer if he was in custody for his work with RIA Novosti, reputed for its pro-Kremlin stance.

Nationalist activists pledged at the time they would report Shekhtman to police over the post, which has since been deleted.

Shekhtman is a Moscow-based liberal activist with 38 short-term arrests for his political protests, according to opposition site Grani.ru, where he runs a blog.

He is not a prominent fixture on the Russian opposition scene, his main claims to fame being his work for Grani.ru — which was blacklisted in Russia earlier this year — and a lawsuit from a controversial anti-extremism policeman whom Shekhtman claimed was implicated in the death of a radical opposition activist in 2007, a move that cost the activist 50,000 rubles (\$1,200) in defamation fines.

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