Man Who Attacked Independent News Chief Granted Amnesty

By Gabrielle Tetrault-Farber

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Yevgeny Mezdrikov, the editor-in-chief of news site Tayga.info

A court in the Siberian city of Novosibirsk has granted amnesty to a man who pleaded guilty to having attacked the editor-in-chief of an independent news site in December, regional prosecutors said in a statement Monday.

On the night of December 8, the chief editor of the Taiga news site, Yevgeny Mezdrikov, was attacked in his newsroom by 33-year-old Alexei Anikin, who had entered the unguarded premises by posing as a courier along with another man, media reported at the time.

Mezdrikov received numerous blows to the face during the attack, suffering bruises and abrasions, according to Russian media.

At the time of the attack, the news portal had been working on an investigative report about local companies that supposedly owed 1.2 billion rubles ($22.5 million at the current exchange

rate) to the city of Novosibirsk for the leasing of land plots, local news site Our Home Novosibirsk reported at the time. Taiga had also been targeted by a cyber attack the same day Mezdrikov was beaten.

A court in Novosibirsk's Zheleznodorozhny district ruled that the beating was a domestic matter and was unrelated to Mezdrikov's professional activities, the TASS news agency reported Monday.

Anikin was initially sentenced to one year in prison for perpetrating the attack at a court hearing Monday, but prosecutors announced shortly thereafter that he had been granted amnesty.

During the investigation into the attack, Anikin claimed that he had mistaken Mezdrikov for another man who had insulted him at a local restaurant, the RIA Novosti state news agency reported.

"Anikin fully admitted his guilt, confessed and has repeatedly apologized to the victim," the regional Prosecutor's Office said in a statement, apparently explaining the logic behind Mezdrikov's absolution.

Mezdrikov's defense has said it would appeal the court's decision, TASS reported.

In April, Russian lawmakers voted to enact an amnesty proposed by President Vladimir Putin for certain categories of crimes in honor of the 70th anniversary of the allied victory over Nazi Germany. Individuals convicted of serious crimes such as murder, terrorist activity, bribery and racketeering are not eligible for release under the amnesty, which is expected to affect up to 400,000 people.

Some recent amnesty cases have raised eyebrows in the Russian media. An Irkutsk motorist — who happened to be the daughter of a regional official — was granted amnesty without spending a day in prison after she drove onto a city sidewalk, mowing down two pedestrians. One was killed and the other was permanently disabled in the crash, which made headlines due largely to security camera footage that revealed the driver examining the damage to her own car, seemingly ignoring the two victims.

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