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Liberal Russian Paper Calls for Putin's Help to Protect its Journalist

By Anna Dolgov

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The Novaya Gazeta newspaper, one of Russia's last remaining independent media outlets, has appealed to President Vladimir Putin's administration and law enforcement agencies to look into apparent threats made against its journalist by government-backed forces in Chechnya.

Journalist Yelena Milashina is being "threatened with murder," the investigative weekly said in a headline Tuesday. The perceived threat came from an article published by Chechnya's leading news portal, Grozny Inform, that proclaimed that Milashina would join the fate of another Novaya Gazeta correspondent, Anna Politkovskaya, who was shot and killed in the elevator of her apartment building in Moscow on Oct. 7, 2006, Putin's 54th birthday.

See also: Court Gives Life Sentences in Murder of Politkovskaya

"Let's remember," the Grozny Inform article said. "There was Anna Politkovskaya, [who] used to run around with human rights activists, constantly smearing mud on her motherland and received various kinds of awards for Americans and Europeans."

"As a result, at the right moment she was killed, and horrible wailing was raised in all liberal media about a police state. If one were to dig into Milashina's biography, about the same is happening with her as with Politkovskaya. The same tactics are being used, and quite probably the next sacrificial victim will be Yelena Milashina, only the triggermen this time will definitely not be from the Caucasus," it read.

Politkovskaya was a sharp critic of Russia's brutal wars against separatists in Chechnya and had frequently traveled to the war-torn republic. Her reporting and activism earned her the admiration of many, but also the anger of the administration in Grozny, installed to reign the republic after the end of the second military campaign in the mid-2000s.

Milashina's best-known work has also sought to expose the doings of government forces in the republic.

The journalist broke the story about a wedding between a 17-year-old Chechen schoolgirl and a middle-aged local police chief, reporting at that time that the official was already married and that the young woman's family had appealed to the journalist for help.

See also: Chechen Police Chief Marries Teen Bride Amid Mounting Scandal

The wedding has since taken place, and Chechnya's leader Ramzan Kadyrov accused Russian journalists of inventing the bride's family objections to the wedding. Milashina cut short her trip to the North Caucasus republic to cover the event, saying she had received warnings her life may be in danger.

Grozny Inform said in its article that the threats Milashina received "are not the last 'horrible incidents' that will happen to her."

The Grozny Inform article also blamed the brutal wars in Chechnya on the West and on Russia's oligarchs, and credited the end of the fighting to "two patriots — Putin and Kadyrov."

Grozny Inform was founded by Chechnya's regional ministry for national policies, foreign affairs, print and information, Novaya Gazeta reported, adding that "according to some information," the news portal's editorial policy is set by Kadyrov's spokesman Alvi Karimov.

Novaya Gazeta reprinted the article before commenting that it wanted to "draw the attention" of Putin's administration and Russia's law enforcement agencies to the "dangerous situation around our correspondent Yelena Milashina."

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