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Journalist Facing Separatism Charges in Russian-Annexed Crimea

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Russian security services in Crimea have opened a criminal case into a journalist from Ukrainian news service Radio Svoboda on charges of inciting separatism, the TASS news agency reported Tuesday.

According to Crimea's Prosecutor General Natalya Poklonskaya, the case was opened following a publication on the Krym.Realii news website calling for “violation of Russia's territorial integrity.”

Poklonskaya said that the article was devoted to the blockade of Crimea by Ukrainian activists and that such materials were considered to be justification of terrorism in Crimea.

Although the name of the journalist hasn't been disclosed by the prosecutor, he has been named by the Krym.Realii website as Crimean journalist Nikolai Semena. Semena is also a former reporter for the Russian newspaper Izvestia and the Ukrainian newspaper Den.

If found guilty, he faces up to five years in prison.

The initiation of criminal proceeding against the journalist was followed by raids at the houses of a number of other journalists published on the site. The Crimean prosecution also reported they were preparing documents needed to permanently block the Krym. Realii website.

“This is a harmful service. Their publications provide justification for acts of sabotage and extremism, and incite ethnic hatred,” Poklonskaya was quoted as saying by TASS.

Krym. Realii was launched by Radio Svoboda (Radio Liberty) in 2014 following Russia's annexation of the Crimean peninsula from Ukraine. The website positions itself as an alternative to the local media, “providing news without censorship.”

Radio Svoboda has not commented on the incident so far.

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