

# 200 Russian Journalists Protest 'Clampdown on Free Speech' After Kommersant Firings

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Yekaterina Shlushen / RBC / TASS

The firing of two veteran reporters from Russia's Kommersant business daily is “an obvious clampdown on freedom of speech in Russia,” more than 200 employees of the company have [said](#) in an online statement.

On Monday, 11 Kommersant journalists said they were resigning from the publication after two of their colleagues were reportedly fired for writing an article about a possible reshuffle among President Vladimir Putin's close allies. The media scandal spilled light on the tensions between publishers and journalists in Russia's closely controlled media landscape, which is dominated by pro-Kremlin state outlets.

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In the open letter published on Facebook Monday, at least 203 Kommersant employees [called](#) the firing of their colleagues, Ivan Safronov and Maxim Ivanov, “an example of direct pressure against journalists.”

Safonov and Ivanov were reportedly dismissed Monday for an article they wrote, published on April 17, that cited unnamed sources in saying that Valentina Matviyenko, the speaker of Russia’s upper house of parliament, could be replaced by Sergei Naryshkin, the head of the SVR Foreign Intelligence Service, in the coming months.

Safronov and Ivanov wrote in separate Facebook posts that they were dismissed for reporting on the Russian senate leader’s rumored resignation by Kommersant’s owner, Kremlin-aligned billionaire Alisher Usmanov.

A spokesman for Usmanov denied the reports, saying that the businessman had played no role in the dismissal of the journalists.

“Kommersant’s shareholder does not interfere in the editorial policy of the newspaper, and furthermore, is not involved in decisions on the dismissal or hiring of journalists. In the case of the two Kommersant journalists, Alisher Usmanov played no role and found out about their dismissal from media reports,” the spokesperson said.

Kommersant's editor-in-chief Vladimir Zhelonkin was earlier cited as saying that the journalists were let go "because the editorial standards of Kommersant were violated while writing the article."

*Reuters contributed reporting to this article.*

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