The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Read Arrested Anti-Corruption Reporter Ivan Golunov's Biggest Investigations

June 10, 2019



Belsat_TV / Twitter

The arrest of investigative journalist Ivan Golunov on drug charges last week has led to an outpouring of support from Russia's journalists and civil society activists. His colleagues have said they believe the evidence against him was fabricated as punishment for his investigations.

Golunov is a correspondent for the Meduza news website who is best-known for investigating alleged corruption among Moscow city officials. However, his investigative work covers a wide range of sectors, from Russia's funeral industry to federal officials to the FSB.

Meduza has published a comprehensive list of Golunov's reporting for the website in both English and Russian. All of these stories are available to republish under a Creative Commons license.

We've compiled a list of some of his largest investigations here, with links to the full versions:

The evictors

For the past five years, loan sharks have forced more than 500 Muscovites from their homes. Here's how the industry works.

In Moscow and the surrounding region, there's a whole industry of what are known as "black creditors" — microfinance institutions (MFOs) that deceive and seize debtors' homes. Meduza managed to find almost 500 apartments lost by their owners over the past five years without so much as a court order. In fact, this scheme involves more than simply "squeezing" people from their homes, and it is possibly part of a wider, international money-laundering system.

Read in English / Russian

A coffin, a cemetery and hundreds of billions of rubles

An organization scheming to take over Russia's funeral industry has ties to officialdom and neo-Nazis

About two million people die in Russia every year. The funeral industry officially sees approximately 60 billion rubles (currently about $926 million) in annual revenue, but government estimates put the underground sector of the industry at up to 250 billion ($3.86 billion). In the last 30 years, the Russian funeral market has been divided several times, and those deals involved organized criminals, law enforcement officials, and government bureaucrats. The results have ranged from a shootout at Moscow's Khovansky Cemetery to the practice of tossing corpses over a fence in Yekaterinburg, from illegal mass graves in Tolyatti to the suicide of a cemetery owner in Omsk. Golunov investigated the structure of the Russian funeral market and discovered that control over the market has gradually migrated from individuals close to organized crime to individuals with strong government ties.

Read in English / Russian

The penthouse family

How relatives of Moscow's deputy mayor earned billions on city contracts, amassing a fortune in real estate

December 22, 2015, was a good day for the sales managers at the elite "Legend of Tsvetnoy" residential complex in Moscow. That day, somebody bought nine of the ten apartments on the top two floors of the central tower — enormous homes with panoramic glass windows and a view of the Kremlin that (in the developer's words) "erases the boundaries between man and city, opening up the possibility of enjoying an unlimited view of the capital." The total value of the apartments, according to Russia's public registry, is more than 820 million rubles ($12.4 million). Based on the prices of similar penthouses in the Legend of Tsvetnoy, their market value could be as high as 1.6 billion rubles ($24.2 million).

Read in English / Russian

‘A roughly painted, cheap fake’

The restoration of Moscow’s Stone Flower Fountain cost more than a billion rubles. Why?

In early April, photos of the newly renovated Stone Flower Fountain began popping up on social media. The Moscow landmark is one of four historic fountains located in the VDNKh exhibition park, and a total of almost three billion rubles ($46.3 million) were spent to restore all four. Local activists expressed frustration at the fountain’s “coarse” new look, and restoration specialists advised the public to wait a few years for the elements to return the flower to a more natural-looking state. The company that renovated the fountain has won almost every major restoration contract in western Russia in recent years — and it has been involved in a string of corruption scandals. The company even offered to help the French government restore the Notre Dame cathedral.

Read in English / Russian

‘Musicians remain silent and afraid’

How Russia’s legendary Sound Recording State House changed hands, and became linked to a presidential agency and Dmitry Medvedev’s sneakers

Since last summer, two state enterprises have been exchanging property in Moscow: the All-Russia State Television and Radio Broadcasting Company (VGTRK) and the “Izvestia” publishing house (which no longer has any connection to the newspaper or website that bears the same name). The main asset being transferred from VGTRK to Izvestia is the Broadcasting and Sound Recording State House (GDRZ), which was traded for the building that houses the studio for a national TV talk show hosted by Olga Skabeeva and Evgeny Popov. Since last August, Russia’s musical public has been petitioning the country’s leaders, warning that GDRZ’s new owners plan to liquidate the unique studios that recorded generations of classical musicians, closing down a space where two national orchestras rehearsed until recently. The head of the Izvestia publishing house is 38-year-old Ekaterina Smirenskaya, whose father is business partners with Vladimir Dyachenko. According to an investigative report released two years ago by Alexei Navalny’s Anti-Corruption Foundation, Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev sometimes uses Dyachenko's name when placing orders through foreign online stores.

Read in English / Russian

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2019/06/10/read-arrested-anti-corruption-reporter-ivan-golunovs-biggest-investigations-a65938