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# Why the Arrest of an Investigative Journalist Should Worry Everyone

## It should be obvious to even those with no interest in journalism that the ease with which the authorities break the law makes each of us a potential victim.

By Maria Zheleznova and Pavel Aptekar

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The Nikulinsky District Court, where the investigation of Ivan Golunov is being considered. **Meduza**

The detention of Meduza investigative journalist Ivan Golunov on suspicion of manufacturing and selling drugs sends an extremely worrying signal to Russian society.

Russian law enforcement agencies are once again taking the liberty of using a trumped-up drug bust to settle a score with a journalist — a method they can easily employ against anyone when they need to improve their job performance stats.

Golunov was detained in the center of Moscow on the afternoon of June 6, but was unable to

get word out until late that night.

In addition to preventing Golunov from calling his relatives or lawyer, investigators began their proceedings in his absence. According to his lawyer, Golunov was beaten after his arrest, but the police refused to let him call an ambulance until after his interrogation.

Golunov denied that the drugs allegedly found in his backpack or apartment belonged to him, but despite his pleas, the police refused to take swabs from his hands or fingernail samples to establish whether he had been in physical contact with the substances.

The journalist's friends and colleagues deny his guilt and claim the drugs were planted on him, arguing that nothing about Golunov's behavior had ever indicated that he used banned substances.

Meduza Executive Editor Galina Timchenko and Editor-in-Chief Ivan Kolpakov stated in an open letter that they believe Golunov's persecution is related to his professional activities.

Golunov has long been recognized as an expert in the type of investigative journalism that draws on publicly available information. His recent high-profile exposés examined the funeral services market in Moscow, the way microfinance organizations seize apartments from debtors, and the ties between Moscow officials and the businesses that land hugely profitable municipal contracts.

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In other words, there are probably dozens, if not hundreds of businesspeople and officials with money and connections — some with a great deal of money and very high-level connections — whose fortunes or reputations were damaged by Golunov's revelations.

In his own corner, Golunov has only his reputation as a meticulous and objective investigator and his colleagues who claim he was arrested in response to his journalistic work. Ms. Timchenko and Mr. Kolpakov report that Golunov repeatedly received personal threats.

And then there are the photos that the Main Internal Affairs Directorate of Moscow claims were taken in Golunov's apartment, but that people who have been to his home say look nothing like it. Later, the Internal Affairs Ministry admitted that all of the photos, with the exception of a shot of Golunov's passport, had been taken in a location unconnected with the journalist. Leveling narcotics charges is not the most common way that those aggrieved by an investigative journalist's work seek to settle accounts, but it is a very convenient way to fabricate a case with the help of unscrupulous law enforcement officials.

Such trumped up charges are often very clumsily done. Recall how Oyub Titiyev, the head of the Ingush branch of the Memorial human rights organization, was convicted for possession of drugs, even though those close to him explained that he was a faithful Muslim who not only never drank or smoked, but who openly condemned such behavior.

This did not prevent the court from finding Titiyev guilty and from defaming him in the eyes of those who were personally unfamiliar with his character.

Of course, the authorities level such false criminal charges against not only human rights activists and journalists, but also against numerous ordinary citizens.

Although dozens of Moscow journalists picketed a Moscow police precinct to protest Golunov's arrest — many of whom were temporarily detained — there is often no one to speak out in support of other, more defenseless individuals.

Perhaps not everyone understands how much Golunov's type of investigative journalism helps maintain a healthy society, but it should be obvious to even those with no interest in such journalism that the ease with which the authorities break the law and the impunity of the perpetrators make each of us a potential victim of such abuses.

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