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German Student Expelled and Told to Leave Russia After Writing Article About Protests

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Lukas Latz / Facebook

A German exchange student has reportedly been expelled from a Russian university and ordered to leave the country after writing an article about environmental protests.

Lukas Latz, a Freie University student studying abroad at St. Petersburg State University, published an article in April on a German news website about an ongoing protest movement against copper mines in the central Russian city of Chelyabinsk. Activists in the industrial city have for years rallied against the construction of a new copper mine that they say would exacerbate an already dire environmental situation.

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In late May, Latz was reportedly questioned by police and ordered to pay a 4,000 ruble ($62) fine for publishing the article without having a work visa.

“I tried to explain to [police] that I had been interviewing the protesters for educational purposes since I am a student of eastern European studies in Berlin,” Latz wrote on his Facebook on May 31.

Police said that by publishing the article, Latz had violated the terms of his student visa, which didn’t permit him to work in Russia. Latz has told media that he wrote the article as part of his master’s thesis on environmental activism in Russia.

Last Friday, St. Petersburg State University informed Latz that he was expelled and ordered him to leave the country within seven days, he told the police-monitoring OVD-Info website.

In a Facebook post Saturday, Latz claimed that university staff hadn’t given him an official reason for the expulsion. When asked for comment, a university representative told The Moscow Times that Latz had been expelled based on two administrative protocols, without disclosing further details.

Latz has told OVD-Info that he plans to appeal the police fines with a lawyer from the “Civil Control” human rights organization.

“It's a shame and [I'm] very sad to be forced to immediately leave the beautiful city of St. Petersburg and the country of which I have become a patriot over the past nine months,” he wrote.

Latz was scheduled to depart Russia on Monday afternoon, according to a post on his Facebook page.

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