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Russian Independent Media Publish Investigation Linked to Journalist's Arrest

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Ivan Golunov **Yevgeny Feldman for Meduza (CC BY 4.0)**

Russia's leading independent media have coordinated to publish journalist Ivan Golunov's investigation into Moscow's funeral mafia that his colleagues say was tied to his shock arrest last month.

Golunov had reported receiving threats after beginning the investigation into the funeral business in February 2018. He reportedly filed a draft of the piece to Alexey Kovalev, his editor at the Meduza news website hours before his June 7 arrest on drug charges in central Moscow. Golunov was released days later and the charges against him were dropped after a public outcry that saw hundreds of arrests at protests in Moscow.

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About a dozen news outlets are publishing the full text of Golunov's investigation on Monday at 4 p.m., Kovalev told The Moscow Times.

When news of Golunov's arrest first broke, his colleagues at Meduza, along with fellow media professionals and friends at other independent Russian news outlets, decided to finish his work.

A team of 16 reporters and editors representing seven different publications teamed up with Meduza to help complete the investigation. Meduza editors Konstantin Benymov and Alexey Kovalev coordinated the collaboration.

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"I don't think there's ever been a joint project like this in the history of independent Russian journalism," Meduza's chief editor Ivan Kolpakov told The Moscow Times.

The investigation

"Bad Company" is the follow-up to Golunov's August 2018 investigation into corruption and criminal activity in Russia's funeral industry. It hones in on the industry in Russia's capital, where demand for burial plots has far outstripped the amount of land available. As a result, competing clans engage in violent wars for dominance in one of Moscow's most lucrative monopolies.

One of these clans, Meduza reported, is an alliance between two businessmen from the southern Russian city of Stavropol — the Mazaraki brothers — and high-ranking officials in the Moscow branch of the Federal Security Service (FSB).

Upon moving to the capital, the already-wealthy brothers took over several cemeteries in Moscow and appointed themselves and others from Stavropol to top positions in key sectors of the funeral industry. In doing so, they forced out the previously dominant clan from a town outside Moscow that had been known for its violent tactics. The brothers also bought several nightclubs in a posh area of Moscow.

Meduza's investigation also uncovered "considerable evidence" of suspicious ties between shady bankers from Stavropol and senior FSB officers, including several mansions outside Moscow that have mysteriously been transferred to the ownership of a private organization called "the Russian Federation."

Read the full investigation in English and in Russian on Meduza's website.

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