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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Leading Russian Journalists Detained for Protesting in Support of Jailed Colleague

May 28, 2020



Ekho Moskvy journalist Tatyana Felgengauer was detained outside the Interior Ministry headquarters in central Moscow. **Vladimir Gerdo / TASS**

Several prominent Russian journalists were detained in central Moscow on Thursday for staging solo pickets in support of a fellow journalist who was jailed earlier that day.

Mediazona chief editor Sergei Smirnov and Ekho Moskvy journalists Tatyana Felgenhauer and Alexander Plyushchev had been protesting the arrest of popular journalist and activist Ilya Azar. Azar was jailed for protesting the jailing of Vladimir Vorontsov, a former policeman who works to expose law-enforcement abuses.

Embed:

> Всем привет! pic.twitter.com/JoofRDoLC4
>
> — Смирнов (@sssmirnov) May 28, 2020

Police detained Smirnov, Felgenhauer and Plyushchev outside the Interior Ministry headquarters, the independent Dozhd broadcaster reported, and brought them to the Tverskoy district police station.

The three journalists were allowed to hold onto their phones and posted photos of themselves in the back of the police van to social media.

Takie Dela chief editor Anastasia Lotareva was detained shortly after, the independent Novaya Gazeta newspaper reported, as were photographer Victoria Ivleva and writer Alisa Ganieva.

News of Azar's sentencing to 15 days in jail for repeat violations of a protest law had sparked outrage among his supporters earlier on Thursday.

"Bloody hell! A 15-day sentence for a one-man picket," Azar wrote on the popular messaging app Telegram following the court ruling.

Police detained the 35-year-old municipal lawmaker and journalist for the independent Novaya Gazeta newspaper on Tuesday during a demonstration in support of Vorontsov.

Vorontsov was arrested in early May on extortion charges. He was later accused of also illegally distributing pornography.

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Vorontsov has denied the charges, saying police are seeking to punish him for his activism.

Police said Tuesday that Azar was being detained for violating a ban on rallies during Moscow's citywide quarantine to slow the spread of coronavirus.

"Azar had every right to hold this rally according to law, the constitution, and common sense," leading opposition politician Alexei Navalny wrote on Twitter.

Russia has recently cracked down hard on opposition demonstrations, and the single-person protest is the only kind allowed without prior permission from the authorities.

Azar last summer helped organize a series of anti-government rallies in Moscow demanding fair elections which drew tens of thousands of people.

AFP contributed reporting to this article.

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