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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Mediazona Editor Held in Overcrowded Cell After Mass Navalny Arrests

February 04, 2021

Mediazona editor Sergei Smirnov. **Moscow Court Press Service / TASS**

The jailed editor-in-chief of the independent Mediazona news website has been placed in an overcrowded cell amid reports of detention centers overflowing after mass arrests at rallies in support of jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny, his Twitter account said Thursday.

Sergei Smirnov was jailed for 25 days Wednesday for retweeting a joke about his resemblance to a rock musician who appeared in a promotional image for a rally in support of Navalny. Prosecutors accused him of "inciting participation in an unauthorized rally" with the retweet.

Embed:

> Камера переполнена, свободных мест в Сахаровском центре явно не хватает. Может, дальше их и перераспределят, но сейчас Смирнову и многим другим просто даже негде лечь после всех этих часов в отделах,

> судах и автозаках. (вообще-то это просто пытка какая-то)
> pic.twitter.com/TaPnI3t9nU
>
> — Смирнов (@sssmirnov) February 4, 2021

Smirnov was placed in an eight-person cell with 27 other people at the Sakharovo detention center outside Moscow, where “there is clearly not enough free space,” said a post on his Twitter account, which is temporarily being run by Mediazona staff.

Independent monitors estimate that more than 10,000 people have been detained at recent pro-Navalny rallies across Russia, filling detention centers in Moscow to bursting point.

“Maybe they will be redistributed further, but now Smirnov and many others simply have nowhere to lie down after all these hours in police stations, courts and police wagons. Actually, it's just some kind of torture,” Smirnov's account tweeted alongside a photo showing detainees crowding the cell without face masks.

Smirnov's account later tweeted that he had been relocated to a four-person cell and given a mattress, but that his phone has been taken away. Hours later, his account said he has been moved to a third cell where he is the only occupant, saying "He fears it could mean that he'll face certain problems."

Video posted by Mediazona cofounder Pyotr Verzilov shows Smirnov standing in the packed cell, which is equipped with four bunk beds without mattresses as well as a squat toilet and a discolored sink.

Embed:

> Теперь посмотрите это видео - условия в камере где сейчас содержатся арестованные в Сахарово. Спят по трое на нарах без матраса. В конце видео видим Смирнова у двери - он пытался спать сидя, но к утру перестал пытаться заснуть и просто стоит у двери. pic.twitter.com/EPprHii5sd
>
> — Пётр Верзилов (@gruppa_voina) February 4, 2021

Other video clips shared by Russian media showed similar conditions in women's cells at the detention center.

Meanwhile, Moscow's human rights ombudswoman said Thursday that she saw empty beds and no sign of police truck lines when she visited the Sakharovo detention center the previous day.

A number of Russian news outlets have called for Smirnov’s release, including Kommersant, RBC, Forbes Russia, Novaya Gazeta, Meduza and Dozhd.

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