

Siberian Muckraker Who Investigated Oil Theft Jailed for Blackmail, Pornography

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Eduard Shmonin links his charges to his investigation alleging industrial-scale oil theft with FSB and police involvement. [svoboda.org](https://www.svoboda.org)

A Siberian muckraking journalist who investigated oil-theft schemes has been sentenced to eight years in prison on charges of blackmail and distributing pornography, authorities [said](#) Friday.

Eduard Shmonin, 50, was arrested in 2017 after he released an investigative documentary alleging industrial-scale oil theft with Federal Security Service (FSB) and police involvement in the Khanty-Mansiisk autonomous district. Authorities accused him of releasing a sex tape involving one of the investigation's subjects after failing to extort money out of them.

“In December 2016, [Shmonin] published a video recording containing pornographic information with the participation of another victim,” the regional prosecutor’s office said in a statement announcing his verdict.

Shmonin links the charges to his November 2016 “Criminal Oil” documentary, the U.S.-

funded Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty news outlet reported. According to RFE/RL, the muckraker denies releasing the sex tape involving a local deputy and another man.

The outlet [identified](#) the plaintiffs as former security workers for a subsidiary of Rosneft, the state oil giant whose CEO is a close ally of President Vladimir Putin.

RFE/RL reported that one of the plaintiffs, former FSB officer Roman Chernogor, has since been arrested and charged with oil theft.

The outlet further reported, using materials obtained by Shmonin, that the alleged oil theft from Russia's network of pipelines cost oil companies between \$1.8-\$3.5 billion and the federal budget around \$1 billion.

The Surgut City Court found Shmonin guilty of extortion and the illegal distribution of pornographic materials, regional prosecutors said in a statement Friday.

The court sentenced Shmonin to eight years in a maximum-security prison colony. Prosecutors had asked for an 11-year sentence.

Authorities originally charged Shmonin with 13 offenses, dropping all but two by the time of his conviction.

RFE/RL reports that a trove of evidence, which Shmonin insists includes alibis that would exonerate him, went missing or was damaged during the investigation.

Shmonin's trial was closed to the public.

Russia added RFE/RL to its registry of "foreign agents" in February 2020.

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