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‘I Was Ready for This’: Russian Journalist Who Protested War On-Air Faces New Charges

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A former Russian state television worker who protested the Kremlin’s invasion of Ukraine on the air faces new charges of “discrediting” the military and said she expects further pressure and intimidation from law enforcement following her return to the country.

Marina Ovsyannikova was briefly detained in Moscow on Sunday evening after a July 15 social media post showed her standing in front of the Kremlin with a poster reading "How many more children must die [in Ukraine] before you stop?"

She was stopped by police officers near her home as she went for a walk with her two dogs, she told The Moscow Times.

“I was ready for this scenario, but I didn’t expect this to happen near my house; now I’m afraid to leave it,” she told The Moscow Times in a phone interview.

The journalist said she was released three hours later and was charged with "discrediting" the Russian army during last week's trial of opposition politician Ilya Yashin, where she had joined activists who gathered there in his support.

“When I left the police department, they [police officers] told me that ‘my fun has just begun’ and this is not the last time we’ll meet,” Ovsyannikova said.

“They hadn’t disturbed me for the time being, but apparently their patience has run out and I will face more serious things,” she added.

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Ovsyannikova now faces a fine of up to 50,000 rubles ($900) under the administrative charges of discrediting the military's actions and will go on trial on July 21, her lawyer Dmitry Zakhvatov told The Moscow Times.

“Usually in such cases, courts impose a fine, but it’s difficult to assess the risks in the long run — it depends on the will of the authorities and it’s hard to imagine what's on their minds,” Zakhvatov added.

Russian authorities have not yet announced any criminal investigations against Ovsyannikova for her anti-war activities.

But Ovsyannikova herself said she doesn’t rule out new charges for the July 15 protest.

Following Moscow’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the country adopted laws imposing prison sentences of up to 15 years for “discrediting” Russia’s military or spreading information about the Russian army deemed false by authorities.

The journalist returned to Russia earlier this month to be with her children after a brief stint at the German newspaper Die Welt.

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Ovsyannikova made international headlines in March after bursting into state broadcaster Channel One’s studio and disrupting a live news bulletin to denounce the Ukraine war.

She was briefly detained and then released with a fine of 30,000 rubles ($500) for breaching Russian protest law.

Since then, she has faced harsh criticism from both ends of the political spectrum.

Russia’s opposition as well as many Ukrainians said her anti-war protest rang hollow due to her years of working for Channel One, while pro-Kremlin figures accused her of cooperating with foreign governments.

Ovsyannikova said she's taking advantage of this situation while she can.

"They [Russian authorities] are trying to denigrate me and to make me look like a Kremlin agent, so they haven't disturbed me so far. Since I'm back in Russia, I'm using it as an opportunity to express my anti-war position — but we'll see what happens next," she told The Moscow Times.

"Anyway, I'm not going to leave my country," she added.

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