The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Russian Journalist Who Made Anti-War Protest on TV Describes Escape to France

February 10, 2023



Marina Ovsyannikova **Marina Ovsyannikova / instagram**

The Russian journalist who grabbed the world's attention last year when she protested against the war in Ukraine on live Russian state television, described her "extraordinary" escape to France on Friday.

Marina Ovsyannikova, who was facing 10 years in prison, fled Russia in October just before being sentenced.

The former editor at Channel One made global headlines in March when she barged onto the set of its flagship Vremya evening news program, holding a poster reading "No War."

She was assisted in her escape by the France-based Reporters Without Borders, using seven different vehicles and walking across the border into a forest at night.

"We had to navigate by the stars and it was a real challenge," she told a press conference at

the RSF headquarters in Paris.

"We were hiding from the lights of border guards and tractors that were circulating but we finally succeeded and reached the border."

The 44-year-old mother of two, who had been under house arrest and had to cut through an electronic bracelet during her escape, said she had been reluctant to leave Russia.

"It was still my country, even if war criminals have taken power, but they didn't give me a choice — it was either prison or emigration," she said.

French President Emmanuel Macron offered Ovsyannikova asylum a day after her TV protest and she is now living between various safe houses in France with her daughter.

"Of course, I fear for my life. Each time I speak to my friends in Russia, they say 'What do you prefer — Novichok, polonium or a car crash?'" she said, referring to different assassination methods allegedly used by Russian security services.

Related article: Protester Interrupts Russian TV News With Anti-War Poster

Ovsyannikova said she had faced a very difficult childhood — her family home in Chechnya destroyed during an earlier war there — and that this had motivated her to protest against the invasion of Ukraine.

"I was right in the middle of the bubble of propaganda," she said. "I searched for a way to pierce this bubble."

Ovsyannikova faced criticism from some quarters for having supported state propaganda for years before her protest.

She admitted she was knowingly complicit for years but buried her head in the sand, "taking refuge in daily life of friends and family" and was only shaken into action by the "enormous shock" of the war.

She moved to Germany after her initial protest on TV but returned after three months and held a one-woman protest near the Kremlin, holding a poster that read "Putin is a murderer" which led to her arrest.

The head of RSF, Christophe Deloire, said she had contacted them shortly before deciding to run.

"It was an extraordinary escape," he said. "Her evasion makes one think of the most famous escapes across the Berlin Wall."

Ovsyannikova said she lives in the hope of one day seeing Russia's leaders face a war crimes tribunal in The Hague.

"I think this regime is living its last days but I don't know how long this war and regime will last.

"But it must end with a total victory for Ukraine or there won't be any future for Russia," she said.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2023/02/10/russian-journalist-who-made-anti-war-protest-on-tv-describes-escape-to-france-a80202