

Russian Journalists Sign Letter Demanding U.S. Reporter's Release

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Evan Gershkovich at Moscow's Lefortovsky court. **Alexander Zemlianichenko / AP / TASS**

At least 200 Russian journalists have signed an open letter calling on the Russian government to [release](#) American journalist Evan Gershkovich after he was detained and charged with espionage last week.

The signatories dismissed allegations that Gershkovich had been collecting state secrets about Russia's defense industry while reporting a story for his employer, the Wall Street Journal, as "preposterous and unjust."

Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) had "provided no evidence to support this claim; it expects us to take its investigators at their word," the journalists said in a scathingly worded open letter published by several news organizations on Tuesday.

"The FSB's reputation, on the contrary, has been destroyed by its own agents over the years," the letter continued.

“There is no reason for society to trust these ‘professionals’.”

Related article: [Evan Gershkovich's Arrest Means No Journalist Can Feel Safe in Russia Today](#)

The letter’s authors compared Gershkovich’s espionage case to that of Russian defense reporter Ivan Safronov, who was last year found guilty of treason and sentenced to 22 years in prison, in a case that his supporters allege was brought against him as punishment for his journalism.

“The similarities between this new ‘espionage’ case and the case against Safronov give us reason to seriously doubt the accusations against Evan Gershkovich,” the letter said.

“We demand that our colleague Evan Gershkovich be set free immediately,” it added, stressing the “great risks” taken by foreign correspondents who continue to report from Russia.

At least 218 Russian journalists, news organizations, and members of civil society had signed the letter demanding as of Wednesday morning.

The arrest of Gershkovich, a former journalist for The Moscow Times and AFP, has prompted an outcry from U.S. media outlets and rights groups, as well as from senior U.S. government officials.

Both the WSJ and the reporter deny the charges. Gershkovich on Monday appealed against his detention, which is scheduled to last until at least May 29.

Espionage charges carry a maximum 20-year jail term under Russian law.

AFP contributed reporting.

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