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Russian Confectioner Fined for Anti-War Cakes Vows to Keep Baking

By Samantha Berkhead

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bakery_xoxo / Instagram

A Moscow confectioner fined for making cakes decorated with anti-war slogans told The Moscow Times that she plans to keep opposing Russia's invasion of Ukraine despite harassment from pro-war figures and the risk of jail.

Anastasia Chernysheva was ordered to pay 35,000 rubles ($446) last month on charges of "discrediting" the military over cakes with the blue-and-yellow of the Ukrainian flag and messages like "F*** war," "Freedom to Russia, peace to Ukraine" and "Putin will die, but we will remain."

"When the [discreditation] law was passed, I didn't think they would be coming for literally everyone," Chernysheva, 22, told The Moscow Times.

"But I realized that at some point they would come for me and they did."

The Kremlin has rapidly expanded a crackdown on dissent since the invasion of Ukraine last year, which has not only led to the jailing of opposition politicians, activists and journalists, but also hundreds of ordinary people opposed to the war.

"Absolutely everyone who opposes the war in Russia is now in danger," said Chernysheva's lawyer, Yulia Yevdokimova.

If convicted a second time under the country's draconian wartime censorship laws, Chernysheva could be sent to prison for up to seven years.

In addition to the fine, Chernysheva said she has also faced an overwhelming online backlash from war supporters.

"[At first] the reaction from the public was incredible, everyone supported me and wrote really cool, warm words. Then, information about me was posted on right-wing channels. That's when the horror started because they start to demoralize you," she said.

"They would write absolutely horrible things about how exactly they will kill me, where I should be sent and that I am a traitor."

Chernysheva's Bakery XOXO creates made-to-order cakes and sweets that often feature memes, cartoonish animals as well as slogans raising awareness for social causes.

She started selling anti-war cakes in April last year, shortly after Russia invaded Ukraine.

They were, she said, her way of opposing the war without risking arrest and jail by protesting on the streets.

But the cakes caught the attention of pro-war figures — and, later, of Russian law enforcement.

The far-right Tsargrad television channel in January published an article criticizing Chernysheva, saying her bakery "supports Ukraine" and expresses "hatred for Russia," as well as alleging it raises funds for the Ukrainian army.

Soon after, an official complaint was made about Bakery XOXO, according to lawyer Yevdokimova. "It was essentially a denunciation," she said.

Police detained Chernysheva at her home on April 27, releasing her later that night after charging her with "discrediting" the Russian Armed Forces.

While investigators found no evidence that Bakery XOXO had sent funds to Ukraine, Yevdokimova told The Moscow Times that the case file contained 16 screenshots of anti-war cakes from the bakery's Instagram page.

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Chernysheva, who did not deny the charges, was found guilty by Moscow's Izmailovo district court the day after her detention.

Since the court's decision, Chernysheva said she has switched her and her bakery's social media pages to private to avoid online harassment.

Nearly all of the cakes customers have ordered from her since her detention have been with anti-war decorations, she said. "That was really nice."

She even made one that was decorated with a section of text taken from her case file.

While Chernysheva does not want to leave Russia in the immediate future, she said she was considering emigrating to Germany.

In the meantime, she will continue baking — and trying to get her anti-war message across in more creative and subtle ways.

"Until I get jailed, I'm just planning to bake cakes," she said.

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