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Russian Activist Found in North Ossetia Jail After Disappearing in Georgia

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Rafail Shepelev. **IvanA (CC BY-SA 4.0)**

A Russian left-wing nationalist activist has been placed inside a detention center in southern Russia after going missing in neighboring Georgia a month ago, the independent news website Mediazona reported Wednesday.

Rafail Shepelev went missing on Oct. 12 in the Georgian capital of Tbilisi, where he has lived since 2021, according to the human rights project Perviy Otdel.

A court in southern Russia's republic of North Ossetia, which borders Georgia, issued a so-called "administrative arrest" against Shepelev on petty hooliganism charges the following day.

Citing the court's press service, Mediazona reported that Shepelev was placed in pre-trial detention in North Ossetia on an unspecified criminal case after serving 15 days in jail for hooliganism.

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Perviy Otdel cited an anonymous source as saying that Shepelev faces new charges of terrorism.

It remains unclear how Shepelev was transported from Georgia to Russia.

Shepelev was identified as a member of Artpodgotovka (Russian for "artillery preparation"), an ultranationalist opposition group spearheaded by exiled video blogger Vyacheslav Maltsev.

Russian authorities banned Artpodgotovka as an extremist organization in 2017 after Maltsev staged an anti-government rally on the centenary of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution.

News of Shepelev's disappearance in Georgia and reappearance in Russia comes less than a week after rights groups reported on a similar incident in Kyrgyzstan, another former Soviet republic.

Left-wing activist and anarchist Lev Skoryakin was found inside a Moscow detention center after being abducted from jail in Kyrgyzstan on Oct. 17 and flown to Russia the next day, according to the Memorial human rights group. Skoryakin faces charges of armed "hooliganism" in Russia for staging an anti-FSB protest in 2021.

Russian authorities have cracked down on domestic critics since Moscow invaded Ukraine in February 2022 with a slew of criminal prosecutions aimed at stifling dissent.

Several anti-Kremlin activists have been extradited from or refused entry to countries neighboring Russia since the invasion of Ukraine.

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