Retired Police Officer Admits to Killing St. Petersburg Journalist 20 Years Ago

By Phoebe Hennell

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Retired policeman Mikhail Smirnov. **Fontanka.ru**

A retired police officer in St. Petersburg confessed to murdering a journalist more than two decades ago, the Fontanka news outlet reported Monday, as law enforcement searched for the victim's body in a forest.

Fontanka correspondent Maxim Maksimov was investigating corruption in St. Petersburg law enforcement agencies when he disappeared in June 2004. His reporting had led him to police colonel Mikhail Smirnov, then the deputy head of the corruption department in the local customs authority.

Smirnov, long suspected of involvement in multiple murders, was arrested in June on separate charges of killing a businessman and admitted last Wednesday to killing Maksimov, according to Fontanka.

Law enforcement authorities are [combing a forest](#) northwest of St. Petersburg for Maksimov's remains, according to media reports, but significant changes to the terrain over the past 20 years have complicated the search.

Fontanka reported that an associate of Smirnov lured Maksimov to a house under the pretense of collaborating on a story, where Smirnov and three accomplices strangled him. They then buried the journalist's body.

Smirnov [allegedly](#) murdered Maksimov after failing to dissuade him from pursuing reports of suspected corruption.

After confession to other murders, the retired police officer [asked](#) to be sent to the front lines in Ukraine to have his criminal record expunged in exchange for military service. It was not immediately clear whether authorities would grant his request.