

Russian Independent Media Uncover Dozens of Faked Stories by Freelance Reporter

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Zan Lazarevic / unsplash

Several independent Russian media outlets are embroiled in a scandal surrounding revelations that a freelance journalist supplemented her reporting with fabricated details in dozens of different stories they published.

The reporter, who wrote under the pseudonym Asiya Nesoevaya, contributed articles to publications like Meduza, Novaya Gazeta Europe, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's (RFE/RL) Russian service, IStories and Holod. Much of her work focused on Russian soldiers and the war in Ukraine.

Following the reports of fabrication, some of the affected news outlets issued apologies and announced that they planned to improve their fact-checking standards.

Russian journalist Oleg Kashin appears to have been the first to publicly accuse Nesoevaya of falsifying information. In a YouTube stream on Tuesday, Kashin [claimed](#) that “emigre and foreign agent publications are deleting her articles” after they had carried out additional fact-checks.

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Nesoevaya has since made conflicting statements about the allegations. She initially [told](#) the Telegram news channel Baza that she had “never fabricated quotes, events or people” in her stories. However, she later [admitted](#) to the RTVI broadcaster that she had falsified articles to “negatively portray life in Russia” and targeted certain outlets for publication.

In the same RTVI interview, Nesoevaya acknowledged the possibility of facing criminal charges for working with media organizations labeled as “undesirable” in Russia. “Obviously, I’m afraid. I’m not the kind of person who would be proud of this,” she said.

In a message sent to The Moscow Times on Thursday, Nesoevaya admitted to deliberately fabricating stories, describing her actions as “long-running trolling and a planned strategy.” However, she declined to elaborate on her motives, citing a wave of online harassment she has faced in recent days.

The ensuing media frenzy over the fabrication scandal could leave a blemish on the reputation of independent news publications already struggling with Russian government censorship and the difficulties of operating in exile, as well as [waning interest](#) among audiences who have grown increasingly tired of news mostly focused on Russia’s war on Ukraine.

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The exiled news outlet Holod published a [report](#) on Wednesday detailing an internal investigation it had launched in early January after it suspected Nesoevaya had sent them a draft article containing falsified information.

“Nesoevaya was a new freelancer who first contacted us in November 2024, presenting an impressive track record,” the report read.

Holod later re-checked two of Nesoevaya’s articles it published last year and found fabricated information in a piece about deceased Russian soldiers. Holod informed other outlets where Nesoevaya’s work appeared, leading to several publications taking her articles down.

“We apologize to our readers for publishing an article that was insufficiently fact-checked. We will revise and improve our fact-checking processes,” Holod said.

Novaya Gazeta Europe [acknowledged](#) publishing two articles by Nesoevaya, one of which was found to contain falsifications. “We apologize to our readers for publishing false information,” it said.

IStories disputed journalist Kashin’s claim that it had removed a December article written by

Nesoevaya, asserting that it passed their fact-check and was independently verified by Mediazona and other outlets.

“Our news editor provided Kashin with evidence supporting the article’s authenticity. Kashin has promised to publicly retract his accusations,” IStories told The Moscow Times.

Meduza did not respond to a request for comment.

Holod [reported](#) that Nesoevaya, a 21-year-old freelancer based in the republic of Tatarstan, is seeing a psychiatrist and being treated for “psychological issues.”

She reportedly admitted to the publication that her actions were “unprofessional” and told the outlet: “A story is the main thing, but key details about people are not, because those people could face consequences here [in Russia]. I choose people, not truth.”

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Amid the falsification scandal, several journalists said they had also been in contact with Nesoevaya but declined to publish her pieces after they failed their fact-checking processes.

“The author [Nesoevaya] was offended, cursed and complained when we declined to publish her stories after they failed fact-checking. She took her drafts elsewhere,” Olesya Gerasimenko, an editor working with freelance journalists in Russia, [wrote](#) on social media.

“On the bright side, this is a great opportunity to review editorial standards. Hopefully, every media outlet will now allocate additional resources for fact-checking,” Gerasimenko said.

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