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News Editors Arrested in Ryazan Extortion Case

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Alexei Frolov and Konstantin Smirnov. **vidsboku.com**

Police in central Russia's Ryazan region arrested two local news editors and a former reporter on charges of extorting a business executive in exchange for suppressing critical coverage.

Regional investigators, without naming those involved, said one editor had "conspired" with the ex-reporter to publish several critical articles in 2024. The business executive allegedly paid 300,000 rubles ($3,000) to stop the coverage.

"The information embarrassed him, undermined his business reputation and detracted from his honor, dignity, and good name," regional law enforcement said Friday. It was not immediately clear from the statement what accusations the second editor faced.

If convicted of large-scale extortion, the arrested journalists each face up to seven years in prison.

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Russia's state-run TASS news agency later identified the detainees as former television reporter Natalia Smolyaninova and editors-in-chief Konstantin Smirnov and Alexei Frolov.

Smirnov runs the Telegram news channel Ryazan Vid Sboku, is a member of the liberal opposition party Yabloko and serves on a local city council.

Frolov heads the Ryazan desk of the independent newspaper Novaya Gazeta, which suspended operations after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The newspaper's publishing license was later revoked and its website was blocked in Russia.

Smirnov told Ryazan Vid Sboku he denies the charges against him. Novaya Gazeta said it was still working to confirm Frolov's connection to the case.

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