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### **Russia: Editor-in-chief of Mediazona Sergey Smirnov detained in Moscow**

On 30 January 2021 the editor-in-chief of Mediazona **Sergey Smirnov** was detained in Moscow on the suspicion of repeatedly violating the established procedure for arranging or conducting a meeting, rally, demonstration, procession or picket. Later that day he was released under the obligation to appear in court on 3 February.

[Sergey Smirnov](#) is a human rights defender and the editor-in-chief of the prominent independent media outlet Mediazona. Founded in 2014, Mediazona covers the work of the justice system in Russia through reporting on trials, law enforcement and the penitentiary system. Mediazona often covers cases of human rights violations, political prosecution and assaults on independent journalists. In 2020 Mediazona began its work in Central Asia, namely in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, and Belarus and is a recipient of the Free Media Awards 2020 by The Fritt Ord Foundation and the ZEIT Foundation Ebelin and Gerd Bucerius.

On 30 January, Sergey Smirnov was detained at the entrance of his house when he was leaving for a walk with his son and colleagues. Sergey Smirnov was detained by the police officers, and an officer from the criminal investigation department who was in plain clothes, and brought to the Ministry of Internal Affairs Department for the Tverskoy district of Moscow. At the time of his detention, the law enforcement officers didn't permit Sergey Smirnov to wait for his wife to come to pick up their five year old son and the human rights defender had to leave his son with his colleagues.

Sergey Smirnov was detained on the suspicion of repeatedly violating the established procedure for arranging or conducting a meeting, rally, demonstration, procession or picket under Part 8 Article 20.02 of the Code Of Administrative Offences Of The Russian Federation. The charges are based on Sergey Smirnov's retweet on Twitter of a joke about himself containing the date and time of the protest in support of Alexei Navalny on 23 January. Thus, by retweeting this post the human rights defender has allegedly acted as an organiser of the mass public event.

Sergei Smirnov was released from detention in the evening of January 30 under the obligation to appear in court on February 3 when his case will be considered. If charged he can face up to 30 days administrative arrest or a fine of up to 300 thousand rubles (around 3,250 euro) or compulsory work.

On January 27, police officers conducted a search at Sergei Smirnov's mothers home, which is the human rights defender's listed residence. The search lasted four hours, during which books and a computer hard drive were confiscated. The human rights defender's mother was also questioned for an hour and a half during the raid. On January 21, the police handed Sergei Smirnov a warning not to violate the law in connection with the 23 January protest.

Since Alexei Navalny returned to Russia, hundreds of thousands of Russians have been taking part in protests to demand the release of the jailed opposition politician. Journalists have faced an unprecedented level of pressure in response to their work covering the protests. Journalists' and Media Workers' Union reported that the rights of more than 150 journalists who were covering the two protests were violated on and before the protests occurred on 23 January and 31 January. Most of the violations were in the form of detention, but these numbers also include arrests of journalists, acts of violence against journalists and incidents of intimidation ahead of the protests when journalists were handed warnings by the police.

Front Line Defenders condemns the judicial prosecution and ongoing harassment of Sergey Smirnov, as it believes that these acts are directly linked to the legitimate journalism and reporting by him and his colleagues at Mediazona in defence of human rights. Front Line Defenders considers the case against Sergey Smirnov an attack on the freedom of expression and an attempt to obstruct Mediazona's work and intimidate all independent journalists reporting on human rights violations during the current protests in Russia.

**Front Line Defenders urges the Russian authorities to:**

1. Immediately stop the judicial prosecution of Sergey Smirnov and the harassment against him and his relatives, as it is believed that they are solely motivated by his legitimate and peaceful journalistic work in defence of human rights;
2. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the detention of Sergey Smirnov, with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
3. Stop the practise of detentions and judicial prosecution of journalists covering protests in Russia;
4. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of Sergey Smirnov and his relatives;
5. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Russia are able to carryout their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions including judicial harassment.

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