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Russia: Judicial harassment against DOXA student journal staff

On 14 April 2021, law enforcement officers searched the office of the student journal **DOXA** and the homes of the outlet's editors, human rights defenders Armen Aramyan, Alla Gutnikova, Vladimir Metelkin, and Natasha Tyshkevich. Later that day, the Basmanny District Court of Moscow issued a two-month restriction order against the four editors, severely restricting their movements and limiting their ability to freely communicate with anyone other than their lawyer. They have been charged with "involvement of two or more minors in committing illegal actions on the Internet".

[DOXA](#) is a Russian student journal that writes about issues related to universities and academia, and extensively covers the political persecution of students, namely for their participation in peaceful rallies, and the issue of sexual harassment in universities. DOXA works to defend the rights of persecuted students through publicity, broadcasting from courtrooms and conducting investigations into the students cases. The journal was created by students and alumni of Moscow's Higher School of Economics (HSE) in 2017, however was stripped of its status of a student organization in 2019 and now operates as an independent magazine. In cooperation with OVD-info, an independent media project focused on human rights and political persecution, DOXA provides assistance to students who are detained for their participation in peaceful protests in Russian cities or in connection with these protests, including recent protests in support of Alexei Navalny in 2021. DOXA has extensively advocated for the rights of students in relation to quarantine restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic, including evictions from hostels, orders preventing students from leaving their university accommodation, and unreasonable fines.

On 14 April 2021, law enforcement officers searched the office of the student journal DOXA, the homes of DOXA's editors Armen Aramyan, Alla Gutnikova, Vladimir Metelkin and Natasha Tyshkevich, as well as the apartments of Armen Aramyan and Alla Gutnikova's parents. The law enforcement officers denied DOXA's lawyer, Leonid Soloviev, entry into the office or Armen Aramyan's home whilst the searches were taking place, and also broke down the door of the apartment of Natasha Tyshkevich. The editors' cellphones and laptops, as well as video and audio equipment were seized during the searches.

Following the searches, the four editors were taken to the Investigative Committee for questioning, where they were issued an indictment of "involvement of two or more minors in committing illegal actions on the Internet" (Paras. (a) and (c), Part 2, Article 151.2 of the Criminal Code). According to the journalists, the charges are linked to a video published by DOXA on 23 January 2021, in which journalists from the outlet outlined the illegality of the expulsion of students from universities for their participation in rallies organised in support of Alexei Navalny. The Federal Service for Supervision of Communications, Information Technology and Mass Media (Roskomnadzor) requested the video be deleted as according to a linguistic examination of the video, it contained calls to participate in unauthorised protests. DOXA complied with the request and deleted the video, but has since filed a lawsuit against Roskomnadzor in response to the request to delete the video, which is yet to be heard in court.

It is reported that the editors are charged in the same case as Leonid Volkov, a colleague of opposition leader Alexei Navalny, who is currently outside of Russia. According to the investigation, Leonid Volkov published a video on YouTube, in which he "appealed to minors to

participate in illegal actions." This case was opened on 22 January 2021 by the main investigation department of the Investigative Committee.

On the same day as the searches, on 14 April 2021, the Basmanny District Court of Moscow issued restriction measures against the editors until 14 June 2021. According to the measures, the four editors are forbidden to leave their homes from 00:00 to 23:59, communicate with someone other than a lawyer without the written permission of the investigator, or use the Internet or any other means of communication. The conditions of the restrictive order do not differ greatly from the conditions of house arrest.

Since 14 April 2021, Armen Aramyan, Alla Gutnikova, Vladimir Metelkin, and Natasha Tyshkevich have been summoned to the Investigative Committee for questioning every day. On 22 April 2021, Vladimir Metelkin filed a recusation request against the investigator in the case, due to psychological pressure he had been subjected to during the interrogations. In the recusation request, Vladimir Metelkin described in detail how the investigator had violated his personal space, made inappropriate remarks about his appearance, breaching professional ethics. DOXA has since published a recording of the investigator's inappropriate remarks towards Vladimir Metelkin from a dictaphone recording.

Since opposition leader Alexei Navalny returned to Russia in January 2021, hundreds of thousands of people have been taking part in protests to demand the release of the jailed opposition politician. [Journalists](#) and [human rights defenders](#) have faced an unprecedented level of pressure from the authorities in response to their work covering and [monitoring](#) the [protests](#).

Front Line Defenders condemns the judicial prosecution and ongoing harassment of human rights defenders Armen Aramyan, Alla Gutnikova, Vladimir Metelkin, and Natasha Tyshkevich and believes that they are being targeted solely as a result of their legitimate and peaceful work defending the rights of students in Russia. Front Line Defenders considers the case against DOXA's editors an attack on the freedom of expression and an attempt to obstruct DOXA's work and intimidate other independent journalists from reporting on human rights violations occurring in the context of the current protests in Russia.

Front Line Defenders urges the Russian authorities to:

1. Immediately and unconditionally cease the judicial prosecution and harassment against Armen Aramyan, Alla Gutnikova, Vladimir Metelkin, and Natasha Tyshkevich, as it is believed that they are solely motivated by their legitimate and peaceful human rights work;
2. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of Armen Aramyan, Alla Gutnikova, Vladimir Metelkin, and Natasha Tyshkevich;
3. Cease the practice of detentions and judicial prosecution of journalists covering the protests in Russia and human rights defenders monitoring these protests;
4. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Russia are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions including judicial harassment.