



Vladimir Postnikov, Editor-in-Chief of Vechernie Vedomosti / Photo: Vechernie Vedomosti archive

29.03.2024, 13:23

ARTICLES

“The authorities are sensing their impunity”: Kremlin’s bureaucratic war on journalism

Kremlin keeps trying to annihilate the vestiges of free press in Russia. This is the story of local Vechernie Vedomosti («Evening Gazette») newspaper, which suffered the authorities’ attack. We outline how the independent Yekaterinburg news outlet is surviving and how their fight is indicative of a larger trend of Kremlin’s attack on the press.

ОБ ЭТОМ НИКТО НЕ УЗНАЕТ

Если об этом никто не напишет. Подпишитесь на регулярные пожертвования ОВД-Инфо, чтобы плохие дела не оставались в тишине.

ПОДПИСАТЬСЯ

Текст на русском

On October 12, 2023, Reseda Karimova, a Yekaterinburg district court judge, found Vladimir Postnikov, Editor-in-Chief of *Vechernie Vedomosti*, guilty of discrediting the Russian army (Article 20.3.3 of the Administrative Code) while acting in a professional capacity. This verdict was issued for several posts about police actions at anti-war rallies, published in the newspaper's Telegram channel between February 27 and March 2, 2022.



Postnikov **was ordered to pay** a 195 thousand-ruble fine (over US\$ 2,000). Police officers stated **in their report** that as Editor-in-Chief, he «allowed public demonstration of publications», i.e. news about the peaceful protests in Yekaterinburg. Additionally, in October 2023, Guzel Aitkulova, head of the newspaper's parent company, was fined 110,000 rubles (over US\$ 1,200) under the same Administrative Code article.


In 2022, Postnikov had already been **fined** 100 thousand rubles (over US\$ 1,100) under the «discreditation» article. According to *Vechernie Vedomosti*, back then the court imposed the fine «for the failure to remove the news» published on February 24, 2022 from the website.

In addition, on three occasions courts fined the *Vechernie Vedomosti* newspaper itself for «discreditation» (Article 20.3.3 of the Administrative Code). In September 2023, the newspaper was fined 245 thousand rubles (over US\$ 2,700) for the coverage of anti-war rallies in Yekaterinburg. Prior

to that, in August 2022, *Vechernie Vedomosti* had been **fined** 200 thousand rubles (over US\$ 2,200) for 54 posts in its Telegram channel between February 24 and March 8, 2022.

The first time the newspaper was **fined** was back in April 2022 — 150 thousand rubles (over US\$ 1,600) under the «discreditation» article — when it published the news of the street artist Leonid Cherny's arrest. The post in *Vechernie Vedomosti*'s Telegram channel showed the stickers for which the artist was **brought into court** under the Criminal Code article on «vandalism based in political hate». He was charged specifically for «a publication containing an image with captions 'ГрыZ200' [Cargo 200 is a Soviet-era expression referring to coffins of dead soldiers, while Z has become is a pro-invasion symbol] and 'ПиZ****' [a 'WTF' expression referencing the war]». «And all that even after we censored [the stickers]» Postnikov emphasises.


**Вечерние ведомости**





Telegram: @ve4ved
ВЕЧЕРНИЕ ВЕДОМОСТИ


Сегодня рано утром екатеринбургского уличного художника Леонида Чёрного (автора стикера [КлеймоМент](#)) задержали возле Дома офицеров и доставили в ОП №1.


Предположительно, причиной стало распространение им таких вот надписей.

 29

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t.me/ve4ved/60291 3.41K  edited Mar 18, 2022 at 05:08

🔗 [Открыть пост в Telegram: ve4ved/60291](#)

Telegram post reads: *Early this morning, the Yekaterinburg street artist Leonid Chyorny (author of the «KleimoMent» sticker (<https://t.me/ve4ved/56720>)) was arrested near the House of Military Officers and taken to Police Station No. 1.*

Presumably, the reason for his arrest was the dissemination of inscriptions like these.

The other police reports were drawn up for reporting on anti-war protests in Yekaterinburg, Novosibirsk, and Moscow. «These publications covered protest rallies in Yekaterinburg in those days; they contained parts of live streams from a peaceful march and photos of administrative police reports. In other words, they contained only objective facts (which is precisely what the media is supposed to cover by our creed), not the editorial staff's opinions, statements, or calls», *Vechernie Vedomosti* **states**.

The newspaper does not plan on removing the publications that provided grounds for complaints from the law enforcement, emphasising that the posts had nothing unlawful about them, «even under current Russian laws».

«A UNIVERSAL REVENGE TOOL»


«I have a feeling that they decided to use this article [on discrediting the Russian army] as a sort of a universal tool of revenge against the paper», Postnikov says.


He proposed a hypothesis that multiple police reports against the newspaper were issued due to personal distaste on the part of Police Lieutenant Colonel Anton Troshin, who in 2019-2022 headed a division of the Yekaterinburg Interior Ministry office responsible for enforcing administrative law. In March 2022, Troshin was promoted to head the division

enforcing administrative law in the Interior Ministry's regional office.

Troshin was a defendant in the case of eight people detained on March 6, 2022 at an anti-war rally in downtown Yekaterinburg. On May 27, 2022, *Vechernie Vedomosti* published a video from a police officer's body camera. The video shows the police dispersing the rally on March 6: using batons, law enforcement sat the protesters in the snow and made them raise their hands. Moreover, they rounded up not just rally participants, but also random pedestrians.

Вечерние ведомости










— Чё непонятно бл😡? По-украински тебе ответить или чё?

В распоряжении @ve4ved оказалось видео с камеры регистратора полицейского, участвовавшего в разгоне не согласованного с властями антимилитаристского митинга в Екатеринбурге 6 марта этого года.

Напомним, на том митинге группу мирных граждан, шедших по нечётной стороне проспекта Ленина, силовики заставили сесть на тротуар.

Девушке, которая отказалась садиться на заснеженный тротуар, полицейские поставили подножку.

Полное видео в более высоком разрешении можно посмотреть [здесь](#).

 152  8  7  1  1

[Открыть пост в Telegram: ve4ved/61489](#)

Telegram post reads: «What's not f### clear, ☒? You want me to answer in Ukrainian or something?

@ve4ved got hold of a video from the body camera of a police officer involved in dispersing an unauthorized anti-militarist rally in Yekaterinburg on March 6th this year.

As a reminder, during that rally, law enforcement officers forced a group of individuals walking peacefully along Lenin Avenue to sit on the pavement.

Officers deliberately tripped a young woman when she refused to sit on the snow-covered pavement.

Watch the full video in higher resolution here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uIR9vt7gS9Q>

Later eight people filed a lawsuit. They demanded that the police actions be deemed unlawful — including those of Lieutenant Colonel Anton Troshin, who personally took part in the arrests on Sunday, March 6, 2022. The Court **dismissed** the lawsuit and declared the police actions lawful.

Postnikov recalls: «This video was published on Friday. And already on Saturday, a police officer from 26 Tolmachev Street [the address of Yekaterinburg's police precinct No. 1 for the Kirov district] came to work on her day off to draw up a report against us. Then she found 54 instances of discreditation». For these 54 publications the newspaper was later fined 200 thousand roubles (over US\$ 2,200).

In 2019, Lieutenant Colonel Troshin brought legal action against an item titled «**A Loser in Uniform?**» on *Kriknews*, the website of a non-governmental Yekaterinburg TV broadcaster ResonanceTV. This publication discussed the criminal case against Vadim Pankratov (a.k.a. Picket Gramps / Дед-пикет), who participated in protests at one of Yekaterinburg's garden squares — rallies against the construction of St. Yekaterina's Church in the place of a garden square next to the Drama Theatre. Troshin's

lawsuit to defend his honour, dignity, and business reputation also seeking to compensate for moral damages was dismissed by Yekaterinburg's Oktyabrskiy district court.

Vadim Pankratov was criminally charged with using violence against police because at that protest rally he allegedly hit officer Troshin with a rolled-up newspaper. He ended up fined 20 thousand roubles (approx. US\$ 225).

📺 YouTube Video: CgVUjnl-KX8



Police Lieutenant Colonel Troshin refusing to give his full name to a concerned citizen

The *Vechernie Vedomosti* editorial team has no plans of removing the video and materials about the court proceedings initiated by those detained at the rally against the Yekaterinburg police. «These publications cannot be removed just like that, because they contain only the truth, only objective facts». Postnikov believes that because of these publications, Troshin won't be able to bring legal

action in defence of his honour. That is why, in his opinion, the police officer wants to get the *Vechernie Vedomosti* website blocked.

In early October 2023, the Sverdlov regional Prosecutor's Office **began inspecting** *Vechernie Vedomosti* for extremism. This was triggered by the «discreditation» fines, including one levelled against the head of the newspaper's parent company, Guzel Aitkulova, the ruling on which had not yet come into force. The decision to initiate the inspection was signed by the Deputy Prosecutor for the Kirov district of Yekaterinburg Rinat Bisinbayev, who also summoned Guzel Aitkulova for a «conversation». Postnikov points out that «Rinat Bisinbayev is the son of Marat Bisinbayev, the former head of the Yekaterinburg Interior Ministry office. We believe the pressure from the Prosecutor's Office may have to do with connections and old contacts between the current police staff and the former high-ranking police officer and his family members, currently working in the Prosecutor's Office and other law enforcement agencies».

On the morning of November 8, Guzel Aitkulova was once again **summoned** to the Prosecutor's Office. She was issued a warning stating that «there have been established facts of publishing information with a view to incite hatred and enmity towards government representatives, as well as of false, publicly significant information». The Prosecutor's Office has ordered to «remedy the violations», i.e. to remove the materials that show «signs of extremism». Otherwise, the news outlet would be shut down «in accordance with the established procedure».

When there is a warning from the Prosecutor's Office, *Roskomnadzor* [Russia's censorship administrator] may revoke the publisher's licence. Postnikov supposes that this is precisely what police officers from the Interior Ministry's regional office in Yekaterinburg are counting on. **According to**

Vechernie Vedomosti, «despite the warning, the editorial staff will continue their work».

«IT CAN'T BE THURSDAY IN YEKATERINBURG IF EVERYWHERE ELSE IN THE COUNTRY IT'S SATURDAY»

The editorial staff of *Vechernie Vedomosti* are now preparing to pay the fines imposed in 2023. The journalists are counting on their readers for help: in 2022, they had raised 450 thousand rubles (over US\$ 5,000) within one week.

«It's absurd», Vladislav Postnikov, Editor-in-Chief of *Vechernie Vedomosti*, repeats. «So they accuse us of discrediting the Russian army. Us, a newspaper that does not cover this conflict at all?» On March 5, 2022, a day after the federal law No. 32 on «fakes» came into force, *Vechernie Vedomosti* published an editorial statement saying that the newspaper will not report on the war in Ukraine.

«We are not willing to compromise and we cannot objectively cover the military actions. Otherwise we would become just another government propaganda mouthpiece. That is why we closed this subject», explains Postnikov.

He says that despite the censorship and risk of criminal prosecution, there still are independent news outlets left in Yekaterinburg, «thanks to the strong community of journalists that has formed here».

«At the same time, we can't say that the situation with freedom of speech here is as good as it was; but again, it's made impossible by the overall climate in Russia. It can't be Thursday in Yekaterinburg when everywhere else in the country it's Saturday», he emphasises. «The police — I believe that the root cause of *Vechernie Vedomosti*'s persecution lies specifically within the Interior Ministry's city

office — sense in the spirit of the time that now they are allowed to attack, and so they decided to attack [us]. They chose the article on discrediting the Russian army as their tool simply because, as we know, almost no cases under this article are ever dismissed. And if something did change after February 24, 2022, it's that the authorities are sensing their impunity, they've become more self-confident. And courts have demonstrated that they were not wrong».

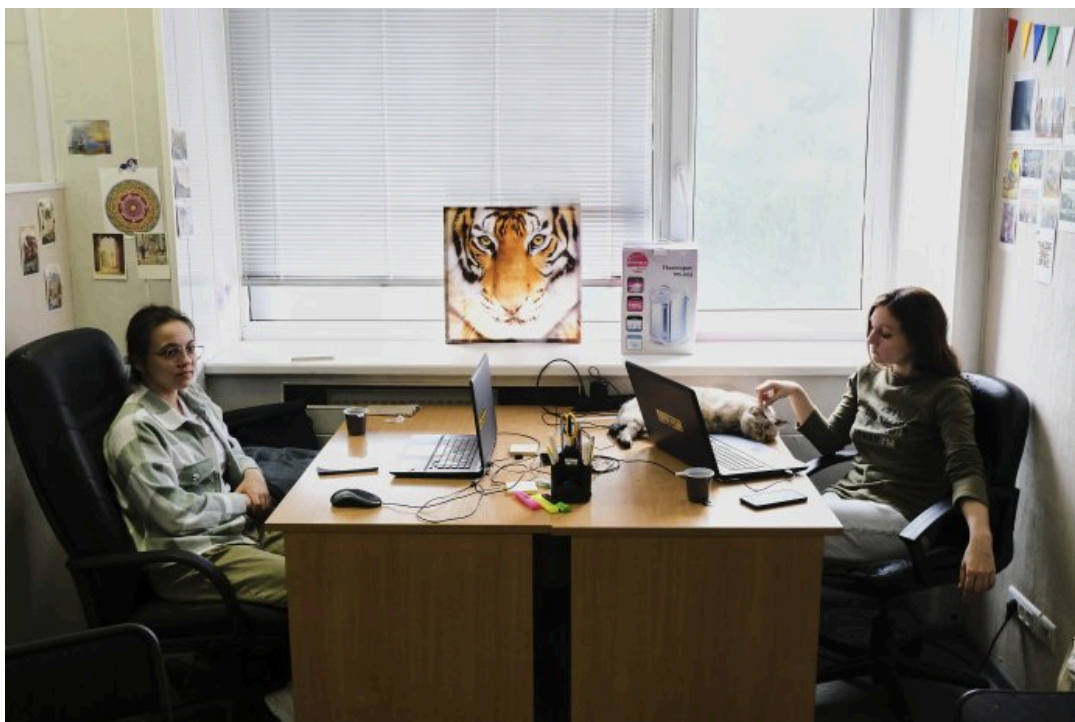


Photo: Staff members of Vechernie Vedomosti Yulia Medvedeva and Alya Trynova, and Maya the cat / Photo: Vechernie Vedomosti archive

On March 28, 2022, *Roskomnadzor* **blocked** the website of Yekaterinburg-based media *It's My City* that was founded by journalist Dmitry Kolezev. According to *Roskomsvoboda* [a Russian NGO supporting open networks and the protection of Internet users' digital rights], in the span of a month from September 24 to October 23, *Roskomnadzor* blocked over 7,500 websites.

On October 13, 2023, founder of *Znak.com* Aksana Panova **filed an application** to liquidate this Yekaterinburg-based media that she had run for 9 years. The editorial board published a statement saying that their work will

be terminated on March 4, 2022, basically because of the «fake news» law. «We, the editorial board of the online publication Znak.com, are announcing its closure. We are terminating our work due to the large number of limitations that have emerged recently on the work of media in Russia», the editors wrote in their Telegram channel, which has since been deleted.

According to OVD-Info, by summer 2022, 100 days after the start of the war, more than 25 media outlets had shut down their work in Russia.

According to Mediazona, as of October 2023, more than 8,100 administrative cases had been launched under the Administrative Code article on discrediting the Russian army, with 233 of them in the Sverdlovsk region [Russia's region with Yekaterinburg as its capital]. According to OVD-Info, by November 7, out of a total of 767 criminal «anti-war» cases, 132 had been under the Criminal Code article 280.3 on discrediting the Russian army.

In September 2023, Mariana Katzarova, UN's Special Rapporteur on Russia, presented a report on human rights in Russia to the UN Human Rights Council. She pointed out the pressure on media as well as the persecution of individual journalists in Russia. Several chapters in the report were dedicated exclusively to the freedom of speech, silencing journalists, criminalisation of their professional activity, and the untenable conditions for independent journalism in Russia. According to Mariana Katzarova, more than 300 media websites have been blocked since the beginning of the war.

Katzarova claims that Russian authorities have launched no less than 38 criminal cases against journalists under Russia's Criminal Code article on «fake news» (Article 207.3) and at least 7 criminal cases under the article on «discrediting the Russian army» (Article 280.3). The actual number of prosecuted journalists is higher, since «anti-war» charges

are brought under other articles of the Criminal Code as well: on rehabilitation of nazism, calls for extremism, justification of terrorism, and others. Using OVD-Info data, *Important Stories* **found** at least 50 criminal cases against journalists and bloggers as of May 2023. Many of them were forced to leave the country. *Verstka* **estimates** that by the end of October 2023, at least 19 Russian journalists had been taken into custody or imprisoned.

OVD-Info

ЧТО Я МОГУ С ЭТИМ СДЕЛАТЬ?

Прочитать, рассказать, поддержать. Подпишитесь на регулярные пожертвования ОВД-Инфо, чтобы как можно больше людей узнали о политических репрессиях в России сегодня.

ПОДДЕРЖАТЬ

Ещё почитать

26.02.2025 **Хабаровский край**

Журналиста Forbes из Хабаровска оштрафовали на 700 тысяч рублей по делу о военных «фейках»



«Чувствовал, что потерял страну». Евгений Бестужев вышел на свободу с условным сроком и уехал из страны. Поговорили с ним и его адвокатом

Эксперты очень старались найти «фейки» в 27 постах Евгения Бестужева, но обнаружили только в одном. И то — у Владимира Зеленского.



Защита политпреследуемых не должна быть вне закона. Заявление ОВД-Инфо о приговоре адвокатам Алексея Навального



Закон о фейках и публичные мероприятия



Владимир Путин и другие: за что штрафуют по статье об оскорблении общества

12 новостей и текстов по теме