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⚠ Lvl. 1

No state reply yet

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Russian Journalist Ivan Safronov Arrested over Charges of Treason; Journalists Detained at Protests for his Release

SOURCE OF THREAT ▶ **State**

CATEGORY ⓘ ▶ **Detention and imprisonment of journalists**

⊖ **1 Journalist in detention**

NO STATE REPLY YET   <u>PARTNER:</u> **CPJ**, Article 19, RSF

On 7 July 2020, Federal Security Service (FSB) officers detained Ivan Safronov near his Moscow apartment and charged him with high treason for allegedly spying for the Czech Republic.

Safronov had worked as a military correspondent for the business dailies Kommersant and Vedomosti and reported on the Russian military and aerospace industry for over 10 years. In May 2020, he left journalism to take a job as an advisor at the space agency Roskosmos.

Ivan Pavlov, the journalist's lawyer, said in an interview with Dozhd that his client was accused of spying for the Czech Republic since 2012 and of passing secrets "about military cooperation between Russia and a Middle Eastern-North African country" to Czech special services in 2017, "which, in turn, collaborated with the United States."

Pavlov said the warrant launching the investigation did not specifically cite any of Safronov's journalism or contain any evidence against him, but referred to investigators mentioning the journalist's March 2019 reporting on sale by the Russian Federation of jet fighters to Egypt, which the authorities had ordered Kommersant to delete as they claimed it contained state secrets.

In May 2019, Kommersant fired Safronov under government pressure, according to the BBC.

On 7 July, speaking at a press conference in Moscow, presidential spokesperson Dmitry Peskov called Safronov a "talented journalist" but denied that the charges were related to his journalism, according to news website Meduza.

On that day, Moscow law enforcement also detained Taisiya Bekbulatova, chief editor of the

news website Kholod, who is close friends with Safronov. She was released on 8 July without charge, but police confiscated journalistic equipment and bank cards. On Facebook, Bekbulatova wrote that tpolice also confiscated equipment from her colleague, Kholod podcast editor Aleksey Ponomaryov, who was in her apartment at the time. Bekbulatova called charges against Safronov "absurd."

The editorial team of Kommersant published a statement in support of Safronov, calling him "one of Russia's best journalists" and a "true patriot", who would not spy for a foreign country.

Following Safronov's arrest, dozens of journalists staged protests in front of FSB buildings in Moscow and other cities, and several were briefly detained, according to reports and video by Meduza.

On 7 July, Moscow police detained Reuters correspondent Polina Nikolskaya, Vedomosti correspondent Alina Didkovskaya, Meduza correspondent Liliya Yapparova, Kommersant journalists Elena Chernenko, Kira Dyuryagina, Marianna Belenkaya, and Aleksandr Chernykh, independent blogger Kseniya Sobchak, The Bell investigative outlet correspondent Anastasiya Stogney, Proekt news website correspondent Olga Churakova, Kholod correspondent Yulia Dudkina, Batenka news website correspondent Galina Sakharevich, and MBK Media news website correspondent Anastasya Olshanskaya, according to Meduza and Kommersant.

All the journalists except Chernenko and Dyuryagina were released without charge.

Chernenko was charged with violating quarantine regulations and then released. If convicted, she can be fined up to 30,000 rubles (€373.50). Dyuryagina was released after being charged with illegally holding a protest, and could be fined up to 50,000 rubles (€622.50) if convicted.

Individual journalists also staged protests in St. Petersburg and the cities of Yekaterinburg and Novosibirsk, and none were reportedly detained.

On 8 July, Moscow police detained Mariya Sherstyukova, a correspondent for the state news agency RT, and Nikita Mogutin, a correspondent for the Baza news website, who were protesting for Safronov's release.

Similarly Perm police arrested Mikhail Danilovich, an independent journalist.

Immediately after Safronov's arrest, the head of Roskosmos, Dmitry Rogozin, stated that Safronov had not had access to classified information at the space agency and would retain his job.

When CPJ called the FSB central office in Moscow, an officer on duty refused to give his name or comment on the case.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ▼

➡ **CPJ Alert: "Russian journalist Ivan Safronov charged with treason; journalists arrested at protests for his release"**

JOURNALISTS IN DETENTION ▼

Currently in detention (1):

Ivan Safronov