

The Memorial human rights centre considers members of the IGHR “FRG” Yuri Mukhin, Valery Parfenov and Alexander Sokolov political prisoners

Publicist and pensioner and former editor-in-chief of the newspaper “Duel” Yuri Mukhin, born in 1949, systems administrator at the Moscow Unified Energy Company Valery Parfenov, born in 1974 and candidate of economic sciences and RBC journalist Alexander Sokolov, born in 1987, members of the Initiative Group for the Holding of a Referendum “For a responsible government” (IGHR “FRG”) are charged with committing crimes envisaged under part 1, article 282.2 of the Russian criminal code (organising the activity of a public... society or other organisation, in relation to which a court has taken a decision that has come into legal force on its liquidation or ban on its activity in connection with the implementation of extremist activity, up to eight years in prison).

All three were detained on July 28, 2015, and subsequently Mukhin was placed under house arrest, and since their detention Parfenov and Sokolov have been in custody.

The charge against Mukhin, Parfenov and Sokolov stems from the fact that after the ban in 2010 by a decision of the Moscow city court on the “Army of the People’s Will” inter-regional public movement, “in connection with the implementation of extremist activity”, they continued to organise the activity of that organisation under the name IGHR “FRG”. The investigation believes that the name of the movement was only formally changed with the aim of avoiding responsibility for illegal activity, while the movement retained its previous aims and tasks, without changing its programme, aims, tasks, slogans or attributes.

We consider the criminal prosecution of the members of the IGHR “FRG” illegitimate for several reasons:

The investigation bases the charge of continuing the activity of the banned APW organisation under the name IGHR “FRG” on the fact that Mukhin, Parfenov and Sokolov set themselves the previous aims and tasks associated with the creation of initiative groups for a referendum and the subsequent holding of a referendum with the aim of making changes to the Russian Constitution on the responsibilities of the higher bodies of government to the people, while recognising that their real aim consists of “shattering the political situation in the Russian Federation by destabilising it, and also changing the existing government by illegal means”.

We believe that the investigation’s claims about the “real aim” and its recognition by the accused do not correspond with the actual circumstances associated with the activity of the IGHR “FRG”. The investigation, in essence, bases itself on the groundless attributing of unproven subjective characteristics to the accused, which in no way flow from the circumstances of the case.

Moreover, the charge of the presence of the aim of “shattering the political situation in the Russian Federation by destabilising it” is not punishable and does not indicate any sign of a crime. The statements and actual typical activity of the IGHR “FRG” over the past five years, aiming to hold a referendum, are also not criminal.

The inter-regional movement “Army of the People’s Will” was banned in 2010 in connection with its distribution of a text with the headline “You voted – it’s up to you to judge!”, which consists of the APW’s proposed amendments to the Russian Constitution and the law “On a trial by the people of Russia of the president and members of the Russian Federal Assembly”, recognised by a court as extremist, although, in our view, also groundlessly. However, in characterising the activity of the IGHR “FRG” as the continuation of the activity of the banned APW movement under another name, the investigation does not mention this lone sign of “extremist activity” which would serve as a basis for a legal ban.

Thus the investigation’s claim about the continuation of the activity of the APW under the name IGHR “FRG” is the only basis for opening a criminal case, not even formally justified, and the criminal case under article 282.2 of the Russian Criminal Code was opened illegitimately.

We believe that the criminal prosecution and removal of the freedom of Mukhin, Parfenov and Sokolov were applied exclusively because of their political convictions, and also in connection with the non-violent implementation of their freedom of thought, freedom to express opinions and

information, and freedom of peaceful assembly and association, which are guaranteed in Russia's agreements.

At the same time, we consider the criminal prosecution and removal of the freedom of Mukhin, Parfenov and Sokolov to be politically motivated, and in particular, aimed at achieving an involuntary halt to their public activity.

Besides this, the pre-trial measure in the form of holding them in custody is not grounded in law and is clearly inappropriate both for the real public danger of their activities and that assumed by the investigation.

In connection with the above, the Memorial human rights centre considers Yuri Mukhin, Valery Parfenov and Alexander Sokolov political prisoners and believes that they should be released from custody immediately, and the criminal prosecution of them under article 282.2 of the Russian Criminal Code should stop.

Recognising a person as a political prisoner or as prosecuted for political motives does not signify either the agreement of the Memorial human rights centre with his views or statements, or our approval of his statements or actions.

In particular, recognising Yuri Mukhin as a political prisoner does not change the Memorial human rights centre's categorical condemnation of his public racist and Stalinist statements.

More detailed information and the positions of the Memorial human rights centre can be found [here](#).