

Memorial recognises leader of the Evenk community Sergei Nikiforov as a political prisoner

Resident of Amur Region Sergei Nikiforov has been sentenced to four years in a colony and fined 3 million roubles. He was found guilty under point “v” of part 5, article 290 of the Russian Criminal Code (Receiving of a large bribe by an official) and under part 2, article 285 of the Russian Criminal Code (Use by the head of a body of local self-government of the powers of his position against the interests of the service for selfish or other personal interests).

According to the sentence, Nikiforov, as the head of the Ivanovskoe village council, concluded a contract in 2012 with the DalTeploEnergo company for the renovation of the boiler house and water system, knowing in advance that the company had no revenues. The director of DalTeploEnergo Zhakova supposedly gave Nikiforov bribes to allocate a prepayment, and the investigation thinks that the contracting company didn't complete the work on the first contract, and didn't do the second one at all.

Nikiforov himself asserts that he was forced to allocate a prepayment so as not to disrupt the work and get it done on time (repairing the boiler house before the heating season), but didn't receive bribes for this and didn't know in advance about the company's lack of revenues. When he found out that DalTeploEnergo was avoiding fulfilment of the second contract, he made a report on fraud by Zhakova, but he himself was charged with a criminal offence. From October 2013 he was under house arrest, and on September 28, 2015 after sentencing he was taken into custody.

Memorial considers that the Nikiforov case has obvious signs of falsification, and he himself was denied the right to a fair legal investigation. The most absurd fact in the Nikiforov case is that the investigation didn't try to prosecute Zhakova, although, if the story in the charges is true, she gave bribes on her own initiative and, after receiving a prepayment for the second contract, didn't fulfil it. Moreover, she is not hiding and is a prosecution witness.

It is notable that, according to the investigation, Nikiforov sometimes received part of the bribes in Blagoveshchensk, and then on the same day put them into his account. But the defence proved that Nikiforov put these sums into a branch of Sberbank in the village of Ekimchan, which is over 600 km from Blagoveshchensk, and the roads that lead to it are extremely bad. The investigation obviously created an impression of credibility by making real payments into the account seem like an imagined bribe.

This kind of falsification could have had the motive of corruption, but we think that the case doesn't end here. Nikiforov's trial coincided with a struggle between residents of the village of Ivanovskoe and a group from the Petropavlovsk company, which received a licence to engage in gold mining work 2 km from the village. According to our information, Nikiforov was coordinating the actions of his fellow villagers, who were holding demonstrations in favour of environmental protection, and preparing to prevent the work. By taking Nikiforov into custody this activity was halted. Previously in 2012 Nikiforov had already disrupted the gold mining work of another company by threatening to organise a boycott of the presidential elections.

This gives us grounds to believe that the authorities were not interested in a fair examination of the falsified case against Nikiforov and had a political motive to isolate the public activist. Amnesty International [considers](#) Nikiforov a prisoner of conscience.

The Memorial human rights centre demands the release and fair examination of the case of Sergei Nikiforov.

Recognising a person as a political prisoner or as prosecuted for political motives does not mean that the Memorial human rights centre agrees with their views or statements, or that it approves of their statements or actions.

More details on our position can be found [here](#).