

Memorial considers the prosecution of Crimean journalist Nikolai Semena unlawful and politically motivated

The trial of journalist Nikolai Semena, who works for ‘Krym. Realiji’ [Крым. Реалии], is under way in Simferopol. He is charged with an offence under Article 280.1, Section 2, of the Russian Criminal Code (public incitement to violate the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation by means of the Internet) and is under travel restrictions. The charge is related to an article he wrote, entitled ‘A blockade is the necessary first step to the liberation of Crimea,’ published on the ‘Krym. Realiji’ website in September 2015.

Semena’s text was a response to an article by Sergei Subbotin, ‘Blockade Fairy Tale,’ also published on the ‘Krym. Realii’ website. Subbotin had written that a food and energy blockade of Crimea by Ukraine was pointless, rejected the views of those who supported a blockade, and said that he does not want to put up with hardships. Semena called such a position treachery, and called Subbotin a traitor to Ukraine. In opinion of Semena, Ukraine should have introduced a food blockade of Crimea on 19 March 2014, immediately after the ‘referendum.’ Both points of view have a place in political discussion as legitimate responses to the on-going international conflict.

All the more reason, then, that Semena’s words cannot be considered criminal. In essence, the prosecution considers it a criminal offence to assert that Crimea must be returned to Ukraine. We consider Article 280.1 of the Russian Criminal Code to be in contradiction with the Constitution and the international obligations of Russia in that it introduces criminal liability for the expression of opinion about the territorial integrity of the country.

Prosecutions under this article of the Criminal Code for disagreeing with the annexation of Crimea, which, from the point of international law, has no relation to the ‘territory of the Russian Federation,’ constitute an outrageous injustice. Precisely for that reason, despite the fact that in monitoring political repression in Russia we prioritize cases in which defendants are held in detention, we consider it important to draw attention to the prosecution of Nikolai Semena, and also to that of Ilmi Umerov. We demand that the criminal charges against Nikolai Semena be dropped.

Recognition of a person as a political prisoner, or of a prosecution as politically motivated, does not imply that Memorial Human Rights Centre shares or approves the individual’s views, statements or actions.

For more information about the prosecution of Nikolai Semena and the position of the Memorial Human Rights Centre, see [here](#).

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