

Vladimir Egorov, on remand for criticism of Putin, is a political prisoner, Memorial says

Vladimir Egorov, a 50-year-old electrician from Toropets, in Tver region, and head of the local branch of the Yabloko party, has been charged with incitement to kill the president of the Russian Federation. The opposition activist has already been held in pre-trial detention for two months.

The basis for the charge is the phrase, "The chief Kremlin rat must be toppled along with his henchmen-friends," from a post by Egorov in VKontakte. In the post, Egorov criticized the authorities, commenting on the recommendation of Prime Minister Medvedev that teachers should earn some extra money part-time in the private sector if their salaries are insufficient. The text included a photo of Putin with the words, "The Chief Rat."

Police investigators considered that the word "topple" [*"валить"* in Russian – trans.] is an incitement to murder. However, in the context of the post by the opposition activist from Toropets, the word could also mean incitement to remove [*"смести"*, in Russian – trans.] Putin from office. Since there is no single conclusive interpretation of the statement in question, then the doubts, according to the Criminal Procedural Code, must be interpreted in favour of the defendant. Moreover, the meaning "remove from office" is more appropriate given the content of the rest of Egorov's text in which, using slang words, he complains about the authorities and security services, and given his record of civic activism, in the course of which he conducted a lawful public political campaign and did not use force or incite others to use force.

It should be noted that law enforcement agencies must be tolerant of criticism towards officials. The Resolution of the Plenum of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation, dated 28 June 2011, set out that "criticism...of public officials, their actions or convictions, must not be considered in all cases to be intended to defame a person or a group of persons, since in relation to the said persons the level of permissible criticism is higher than in relation to private persons."

There are weighty reasons to consider that the criminal prosecution of Egorov is related to his criticism of government bodies and law enforcement agencies, and with his investigations into corruption. Earlier in this connection, on more than one occasion, he has been threatened and attacked.

Egorov told [Radio Svoboda](#) of the threats: "I was a Yabloko party candidate in elections to the legislative assembly of Tver region...The head of our local municipality, Aleksandr Brizh, passed on to me word that, after the elections, they would shut me up. I had investigated the illegal activities of local authorities."

In April 2017, soon after publication of Egorov's latest investigation, concerning what he believes to be illegal quarrying and removal of sand by a local company, Spetsstroi, linked, according to his information, to local officials, a stone was thrown at his house, [smashing a window](#). Egorov stated that he identified the person who threw the stone as the son of the head of the local police chief, one of the individuals whom he had been investigating. In May there was another attempt to [smash a window and set fire to Egorov's house](#), and in June the house was indeed [set on fire](#). At the time, Egorov's wife and children were sleeping in the house. Luckily, the fire was extinguished in good time.

Memorial Human Rights Centre considers Vladimir Petrovich Egorov a political prisoner. Memorial demands that Egorov be released immediately and that those responsible for his criminal prosecution be brought to justice.

Recognition of an individual 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.

More information about the case can be read [here](#).

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