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Russia: Journalist Alsu Kurmasheva detained under "foreign agents" law

On 12 December 2023, Russian authorities opened a criminal case against **Alsu Kurmasheva** on the charges of disseminating "fake news" about the Russian army. Earlier, on 18 October 2023 another criminal case was opened against the journalist on the charges of failing to fulfill the requirements under the legislation on "foreign agents." The journalist is now facing criminal charges under Articles 207.3 and 330.1 of the Criminal Code, with sanctions in each case ranging from a 3000 EUR fine to imprisonment for up to five years.

[Alsu Kurmasheva](#) is a woman human rights defender, journalist and the editor of the Tatar-Bashkir service of Radio Liberty. Her work focuses on the struggle faced by ethnic and religious minorities, including Volga and Crimean Tatars. She has been working with Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty since 1998 and is the editor of Idel.Realii. In 2014, Alsu Kurmasheva published an interview with Mustafa Dzhemilev, a deputy of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine and head of the Mejlis of Crimean Tatars, in which he criticised Crimea's annexation. Following this line of work, she again collaborated with Idel.Realii in publishing the book "No to War" in November 2022. This told the story of the residents of the Volga region who oppose the war in Ukraine. Alsu Kurmasheva has Russian and American citizenship and lives in Prague with her family.

On 20 May 2023, Alsu Kurmasheva travelled to Russia for a family emergency. When she was returning to the Czech Republic on 2 June 2023, she was arrested for failing to notify the Ministry of the Interior of her status as a dual-citizen of the US, and of her permanent residence in the Czech Republic. Both of her passports were confiscated, and she received a fine. She spent the following 4 months in Russia and, on 18 October 2023, she was arrested once again for non-compliance with actions required of her by the Russian Federation on foreign agents.

According to the investigation, the woman human rights defender had to provide documents "necessary for inclusion in the register of foreign agents engaged in the purposeful collection of information in the field of military activities of the Russian Federation, which, if obtained by foreign sources, can be used against the security of the Russian Federation." The "military information" in question included information about the conscription of university teachers in Tatarstan, which was included in some "alternative analytical materials" for "specialised international authorities" that conduct information campaigns "discrediting Russia." For failing to adhere to this, Alsu Kurmasheva could be fined up to 300,000 rubles (3000 EUR), and could be sentenced to compulsory labour or imprisonment of up to five years.

On 23 October 2023, the woman human rights defender Alsu Kurmasheva was trialled and remanded into custody. On 1 December 2023, the court extended this detention until 1 February 2024, and on 12 December 2023 Tatarstan Supreme Court reduced this detention period again by one day. On that same day, however, a new criminal case was opened against the journalist.

According to the charges, Alsu Kurmasheva was involved in the distribution of the book "No to War". This comprises 40 stories of Russians who oppose the invasion of Ukraine", which was published by the Tatar-Bashkir service of Radio Liberty last November and which includes stories

from residents of the Volga region. This has been categorised as an offence under Article 207.3 of the Criminal Code which criminalises "public dissemination of knowingly false information on the use of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation." The sanctions for this offence range from a fine of 700,000 rubles (7000 EUR) to a prison sentence of up to five years.

This is not the first time human rights defenders and Tatar journalists have been persecuted by Russian authorities. In August 2022, police in Kazan searched the homes of seven journalists and correspondents of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and questioned them about the work of the Tatar-Bashkir service. In November 2022, a court in Kazan ordered the arrest in absentia of Andrei Grigoriev, a reporter for Idel.Realii, on charges of justifying terrorism. Additionally, this is the second time a journalist with US citizenship is being detained in Russia under security legislation. The first of these cases involved Evan Gershkovich, a correspondent for The Wall Street Journal, who was arrested in March 2023 on charges of espionage.

Front Line Defenders is gravely concerned by the detention of Alsu Kurmasheva as it believes this to be a direct reprisal against her legitimate and non-violent journalistic and human rights work. Front Line Defenders further condemns the Russian authorities' use of security laws, including the "foreign agents" and "fake news" laws, to radically suppress the work of journalists and human rights defenders in Russia. Front Line Defenders urges the Russian authorities to stop their continued attack on civil society, which aims to completely dismantle the work of human rights defenders in the country.

Front Line Defenders calls upon the authorities of the Russian Federation to:

1. Immediately release Alsu Kurmasheva and discontinue the criminal cases opened against her on charges under Articles 330.1 and 207.3 of the Criminal Code;
2. Cease using the laws on "foreign agents" and "fake news" to judicially harass journalists and human rights defenders in Russia;
3. Repeal the laws on "foreign agents" and "fake news", to target human rights defenders, journalists and lawyers, as well as their respective human rights organisations;
4. Guarantee in all circumstances that all journalists and human rights defenders in Russia are able to carry out their human rights activities without fear of reprisal and free from all restrictions, in line with the Russian Federation's international human rights obligations and commitments.