



Illustration: Sima for OVD-Info

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ON THE GROUND

This exiled eco-activist spoke out against the war. Then his house was burned down

In early December, eco-activist Andrei Panyushkin reported the arson of his house in the Krasnodar region, in south-european Russia. He linked this to his anti-war posts on social media. The official cause of the fire has not yet been established, and Panyushkin hasn't received any replies to his appeals to the police and the prosecutor's office as well. OVD-Info publishes his monologue about the incident.

ОБ ЭТОМ НИКТО НЕ УЗНАЕТ

Если об этом никто не напишет. Подпишитесь на регулярные пожертвования ОВД-Инфо, чтобы плохие дела не оставались в тишине.

ПОДПИСАТЬСЯ

Текст на русском

On Saturday, December third, at eight in the evening, my neighbor from the opposite house called me. Saying «Andrey, your house is on fire» she turned on the camera on her phone. It was visible that at least half of the roof nearing the forest — where you can quietly approach the house — was already on fire.

I couldn't believe my eyes. I immediately realized that this was a disaster. I was grocery shopping at that moment. I experienced something like a panic attack — just threw out all the items I was going to buy from the basket and ran out to the street. I started calling my wife. I, myself, left Russia at the end of September, but my wife and daughter were still in the country. They were staying with my mother-in-law at the time.

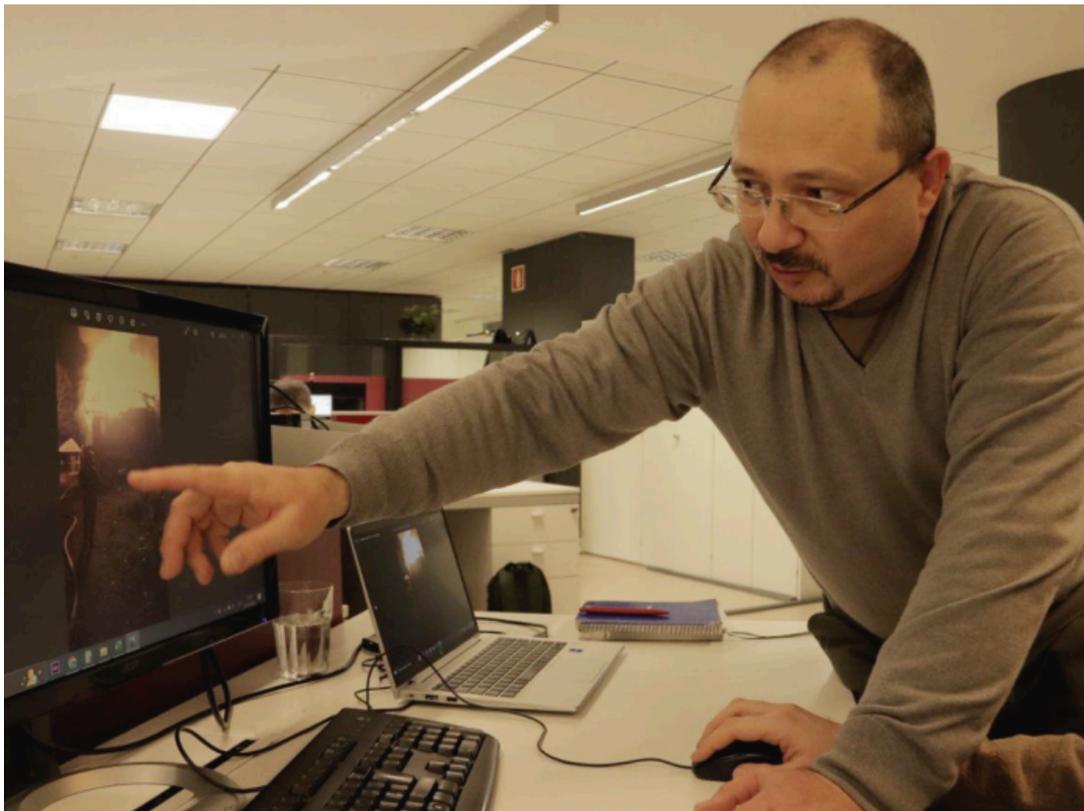
I asked my wife to return to our town of Goryachiy Klyuch as soon as possible. At the same time, my neighbor called the fire brigade.

I called the neighbors, urging them to go outside and take a video of my burning house, explaining how a fire truck could access the site. Everyone was in a terrible fuss. Within an hour, firefighters arrived, and half an hour later, my wife reached the house. She was interviewed by a district police officer — one of the neighbors called the police.

The fire was completely extinguished only by midnight. The first truck either arrived without water or lacked special

equipment. The second one got stuck on the road. As a result, they could not put out the roof fire. The roof burned down completely, then the third and second floors also burned. Only concrete bearing structures remained. The most damage was caused to the room on the forest side. The window, wall decoration, and all the furniture burned down completely. The house's facade was destroyed — we had a wooden one, built in Japanese style. Only the kitchen was nearly unaffected — even the furniture there remained almost untouched.

The fire inspector arrived only on Monday morning. That is, the house was powered down for a day and all the cameras in it burned down. The police didn't seal off anything. All doors were open. Anyone could come and take anything.



Andrei Panyushkin is showing his burned-out house to journalists / Photo provided by the hero of the publication

Neighbors turned to the police on the day of the fire, but my wife was not allowed to read the police statement. The police said that we would not be allowed to familiarize

ourselves with the case materials until a procedural decision was made.

Since my property was damaged in the fire, I wrote complaints to the Prosecutor's Office and the police on Monday, and also addressed the Investigative Committee. I indicated that I think the fire was a revenge for my professional activity.

The thing is, in 2021-2022, I published several high-profile publications in «Zhivaya Kuban». In one of them, I wrote about anti-war actions in Goryachiy Klyuch. I talked to an activist who the authorities afterwards harassed so severely that she had to leave the country. In another, I reported on electoral violations. Several materials were related to the investigation of environmental crimes in our region — I found out that the administration of the Goryachiy Klyuch drains untreated water into the passing Psekups River.

I haven't received a response to my complaints yet, while my wife is being tormented with interrogations. They constantly call from Krasnodar, where she is staying with her mom, to Goryachy Klyuch and force her to testify. But what can she say? She was not even at the scene that day.

Thus, the official cause of the fire is still not disclosed. But we discovered an interesting detail: there were two CCTV cameras in the house, one of them completely burned, and the other melted and was flooded with water, but recordings from all the cameras were preserved. They are interrupted at the same time: at four in the morning on the third of December. In other words, the house was disconnected from power in advance, and only then it caught on fire.

Since I left Russia at the end of September, I doubt that the cause of the fire could be a local conflict. [For argument's sake,] I don't think someone I had a conflict with would wait that long to take revenge.

I left because I was afraid of criminal prosecution. After I published my environmental investigation, operatives came to me several times. They threatened to plant a bundle [with drugs] in my car and harassed me in every possible way.

In August [2022], my neighbors told me that the police were allegedly going door-to-door and gathering information about me — they were collecting material for a criminal case. At the same time, the police kept calling me, up to 10-20 calls a day. I wrote them back: send me an official subpoena, and I will come to the police station. But our law enforcement officers like to call, not write, as to leave no evidence, and therefore, they never responded to my messages. In the end, I was so fed up with them that I even went to the prosecutor's office and filed a complaint against police actions. They calmed down a bit.

I think the police wanted to invite me for an informal talk. They would have questioned me and threatened simultaneously: «You see, we're opening a criminal case against you, so stop messing with the local administration.»

But as soon as they left me in peace, a new problem arose. I was summoned to the administration as a representative of the TPS (territorial public self-government — *OVD-Info*) and asked to secure support for the «special military operation» in my region. They wanted me to gather people for rallies in support of the war, post flyers, and campaign among the local residents. I looked at them wide-eyed: «Guys, come on. This doesn't correspond to my moral, personal, or spiritual convictions. I'm not going to do it.» After that, I was summoned for talks with the administration almost every week.

Then they came up with a new task for me: at the elections in September, they asked me to make the independent candidates withdraw from the polls. Then I not only refused to participate in it but also wrote an article about the fact that such things happen in our region. After that, the

administration told me I had been asking for trouble, and now I was about to get it.

On September 21, the news about the mobilization appeared. The town administration immediately asked me: «So, when are you joining the army?» It became clear: they wanted to get rid of me by any means. I realized that I had to leave. I had a tourist visa to France, and my friends invited me to visit them multiple times. So I went. At first, I was in France, then I moved to Spain. Now I'm trying to get the documents to find a place to live and relocate my wife and daughter here.



Andrei Panyushkin's house during the fire / Photo provided by the hero of the publication



Andrey Panyushkin's house after the fire / Photo provided by the hero of the publication



Andrey Panyushkin's house after the fire / Photo provided by the hero of the publication

In Europe, I perhaps felt the air of liberty, equality, and fraternity. Every day after my departure, I wrote on Goryachy Klyuch's social media, my little Telegram channel, and Instagram that I consider it unacceptable to support the war in any way. Neither by sewing socks for the military at the front nor by buying medicine or joining the army

on mobilization summons. All this, in one way or another, leads only to one thing — the murder of Ukrainian citizens. Besides, I published information my neighbors passed on to me. For example, I wrote about minors from Goryachy Klyuch being recruited as a crowd at the funerals of soldiers who had died in Ukraine.

The fact is, almost everyone in our town supports the «special military operation». I personally know such people who are even in favor of Russia starting a nuclear war. It's rare to meet anyone who is at least neutral about what's happening. We had only three ardent opponents of the war. I tried to get to those who could still be reached through social media.

I didn't publish anything edgy. I just wrote the things I believe in since I am a Buddhist: under no circumstances should one kill or help others to kill people. I was expressing my personal point of view.

I believe that no one should be killed: neither Ukrainians, nor Kazakhs, nor Yakuts, nor anyone else. It is especially frightening to me that people not involved in the armed resistance are being killed now — when Russian missiles fly into Ukrainian cities and kill civilians.

It has now been over a month since the arson. All the property my wife and I had accumulated was in this house. Of course, my wife is very upset. She thinks I am to blame: everything I had been building with my own hands for 15 years burned down in 3 hours because of my anti-war position.

I understand her feelings. Recently I wrote an official appeal to the city council: I asked them to help us as fire victims. I know that usually, in such cases, they offer one-time financial assistance or at least help remove everything that is burnt and unusable from the territory. However, in response to the letter, I was advised to contact the social protection

authorities of Krasnodar krai, as the administration allegedly could not do anything.

The problem was that there was a server in the house that I used to work remotely as an IT specialist. It also burned down. Consequently, I lost part of my income, and I can't hire someone to remove all the burnt stuff from the property now, and people are refusing to help us pro bono. They are all intimidated by the police.

Recorded by Karina Merkuryeva

ЧТО Я МОГУ С ЭТИМ СДЕЛАТЬ?

Прочитать, рассказать, поддержать. Подпишитесь на регулярные пожертвования ОВД-Инфо, чтобы как можно больше людей узнали о политических репрессиях в России сегодня.

ПОДДЕРЖАТЬ

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