



Evgeny Vlasov / Photo: Anna Zueva for the People of Baikal online magazine

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ARTICLES

“This is not Christ-like at all”: meet the father of four from Buryatia who opposes the war

In February Evgeny Vlasov, a father of four, was fined 30,000 rubles (US\$368) by a court in Buryatia. He was charged with «discrediting» the Russian army (Article 20.3.3 of the Code of Administrative Offences) for posts on Vkontakte, a Russian social network. There are many mistakes in the offence report: for example, it is not stated which publications were seen as grounds for prosecution. We are publishing his story.

Текст на русском

«PROHIBITED» MATERIALS AND FALSIFIED RECORD

I learnt that I was going to be tried for reposts in December, when I got a call from the local police officer. He asked me to come to the police station. I asked him what the reason why I was being summoned and if I should get ready for jail. He replied, «No, there is no need, just come and we will talk.»

He called me in the morning and I got there by the evening. They were waiting for me. They told me that the Federal Security Service had looked through my page on Vkontakte and found certain «prohibited» materials. The local police officer showed me printed screenshots with reposts of some videos but I didn't have the time to see which. I was not given the materials. When I asked for a copy of screenshots, I was told that I would only be given the record of the questioning.

While the police officer and I were talking, he was filling in the record. He gave it to me to read, and it mentioned admission of guilt. I said, «I can't possibly admit guilt. I don't think that I did anything wrong or broke any law. I can only admit that it is indeed my page and I did repost these materials, » to which he told me to write that I had read the document but I did not agree with the charges. Then I left.

The day after I went to the police station, I got another call from the district police officer. The thing is, I am subscribed to some liberal channels on Telegram. So I posted a photo of the report in the comments to a post on one of these channels. I asked if there were any lawyers in the chat who could help me figure out what to do about it. People started responding.

The photo remained in the comments section for half an hour. Then the administrator of the channel wrote to me and said: «I'll delete the protocol so that no one sees your personal data» and I'll write to you myself.

And that's when I got a call from the district policeman. He asked: «Why did you put the report on the Internet?» I said, «I wasn't told it was forbidden.» In reply the policeman said that I would have to come back to the police station one of these days — apparently, there was something that needed to be corrected in the report.

He never called again. Then there was a trial where I was fined 30,000 rubles (US\$368). After the trial, I went to take the kids to daycare and school. My wife was at home and told me that a police car had driven into our yard and started honking. My wife looked out the window. The policeman asked: «Does Mikhail Yevseev live here?» The wife replied that she didn't know any Mikhail.

The thing is, we live in a private house, so it's hard to imagine a situation where she wouldn't know one of the tenants. The policeman started pressing her and asked questions about me. My wife gave him my mobile number.

While I was driving the children to school, he started calling. He asked again about a man named Mikhail, whether he was registered in our house. I answered that he wasn't. He hung up after that.



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In the evening, the police came over to our house again. They explained that they were still looking for Mikhail. I again said that he was not registered with us. I can't get my head around this. The police can easily run a check on a person, find out where they live, what their registered address is. They explained their interest in Mikhail by the fact that conscription officers were looking for him».

As we got talking, I told the police that I had recently been on trial and joked: «Did the FSB (Federal Security Service) send you here, or what?». The police answered: «No, we are really looking for Mikhail.» And they started asking me what kind of trial I had. I said that I had been tried for «discrediting» the Russian army.

This ended our conversation. I think that under this pretext they wanted to get inside the house, but it didn't work out. After that, the police didn't call or come again.

PATRIOTISM, TOLSTOY, AND SEVENTEEN MOMENTS OF SPRING

I got interested in politics after 2014. At the time I began to understand, more or less consciously, that something was going wrong in Russia. I stopped watching TV after realizing it was nothing but lies and switched to protest YouTube channels.

After February 24, I wanted somehow to express myself. I mainly reposted anti-war posts on VKontakte or commented on the news. I didn't write anything myself. My account is private.

For example, I was very touched by a story about a teacher who is also on trial for «discrediting» the army. I wrote that what discredited the Russian army was precisely cases like this one. Then I reposted the news with statistics: for one Muscovite, so-and-so many Buryats and Dagestanis had been killed in Ukraine after the mobilization.

There was also a post with a quote on patriotism by Leo Tolstoy: «Patriotism in its simplest, clearest, and most indubitable signification is nothing else but a means of obtaining for the rulers their ambitions and covetous desires, and for the ruled the abdication of human dignity, reason, and conscience, and a slavish enthrallment to those in power. And as such it is recommended wherever it is preached.»

I also shared a video post by opposition YouTuber Maxim Katz «How Russia Is Destroying Its Future» and a selection of shots from the Soviet television WWII show *Seventeen Moments of Spring*. Some people had noticed that Z and V —

the symbols of the Russian invasion into Ukraine — are worn by the Nazis in the show.

In all these trials and tribulations my wife provides the greatest support. She and I see things the same way. But with many relatives our views diverge.

My mother and I have not been close for a while now. Our personalities do not match. She used to send me propaganda videos about the «special operation». She has stopped now. Of course, she is not happy that they are harassing me for my posts, but she still stands firm for Putin. «Don't berate him. He's doing a great job, » she keeps telling me.

My wife's older sister is even more radical. She keeps saying that «people like us should be put in front of the firing squad».

This position is difficult to understand. For me, war is unacceptable for many reasons, both political and religious. My wife and I are religious, we go to church. I came to faith when I was still a teenager. One of the Commandments says: «Thou shalt not kill». How then, can we, a Christian country, where churches are being built everywhere, unleash a war? It is one thing to fight if you need to defend yourself, but to attack another country is definitely forbidden. This is not Christian at all.

Lately, I've stopped going to church. I had an internal conflict with it. I see that the Church is silent, it does not speak out against the war in any way, and the priests support Putin's policies en masse.

It is the same with the parishioners. You tell them seemingly obvious things — how can one invade another country, kill people? How is it possible at all, and especially from a Christian perspective? And they still do not understand.

We do not talk about politics with our children. We just explain to them that war is bad. They are still very young. Our eldest daughter is 10, the middle one is 9, our son is 4, and

the youngest daughter is 2. They too are certainly affected by what is happening, in one way or another.

Sometimes, when the older ones see Z or V on the street, they ask what it means. I tell them it is wrong to draw this, these are totalitarian and militarist symbols.

The oldest children have already been affected by Important Conversations (mandatory patriotism extracurriculars). When it became clear over the summer that this subject might start being taught at schools, I found a template of the withdrawal form on the Internet. I filled it out in the fall and gave it to the secretary. Even though our headmaster is a member of the ruling United Russia Party, there were no issues with him.

The middle daughter's teacher kept asking where she had been and why she had missed the class for the first month and a half or so. Then she stopped. So, it has been a year since the children stopped attending the first lesson on Mondays. Whether they are the only ones, I do not know. I did not ask. But in the parents' group chat, no one talks about the war or politics.

After everything that has happened, I want to leave Russia, of course. I am considering the US. I would like to emigrate as soon as this summer, or at the latest, before the fall. It feels like something else is going to happen here in the fall.

Besides, I continue to openly express my opinion. I have told my Putin-supporting friends enough for another administrative court case at the very least. Maybe even for a criminal case. That is, denunciations have been brought back: one day someone will definitely report me.

Recorded by Karina Merkuryeva

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