



Illustration: [Asya Sokolova](#) for OVD-Info

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ARTICLES

“Shut up and stay quiet.” This elderly Russian was fined for complimenting Zelensky

At the end of April, a Moscow court fined a 70-year-old pensioner Olga 40 thousand rubles (US\$517) under Article 20.3.3 of the Code of Administrative Offences for discrediting the military. The reason was three reports of her having complimented the appearance of Ukrainian President Vladimir Zelensky during a conversation in a sanatorium.

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

Olga was vacationing in a sanatorium in the Caucasian city of Nalchik in December 2022. In her words, a conflict with the sanatorium's staff began right away. «I arrived early and was told: pay for this, pay for that. But why should I pay extra for a day? It's not like I drank or ate anything there. Besides, I live off my pension, I don't have that much money», recalls Olga.

She later went to meet up with an acquaintance of hers who was also going to stay in this sanatorium and came to check in at the scheduled time. The next morning, Olga received a bill for the extra night. She made a scene. In the end, everyone agreed that she should not pay anything extra.

«On the second day, I went to the cafeteria and didn't like that an employee was carrying food on the third shelf of the serving cart — placed very close to the floor. So I said „We're not pigs to eat off the third shelf, which is meant for carrying dirty dishes, right?“» said the pensioner.

Olga is sure that the waitress disliked her from that moment on. She was one of those who later wrote a report to the security services.

The author of the other denunciation was Yevgeny, a man who shared one of the cafeteria's tables with Olga. The denunciation written by the waitress stated that Olga had expressed a hope that Russia would lose the war and that Zelensky would come and take over the rule of Russia.

Yevgeny, in his turn, said in his note that Olga asked him if he supported the war in Ukraine.

In Olga's words, the conversation about Zelensky at the table where she was eating began all by itself. Sitting next to her was a woman born in Odesa, but has been living in Russia for many years.

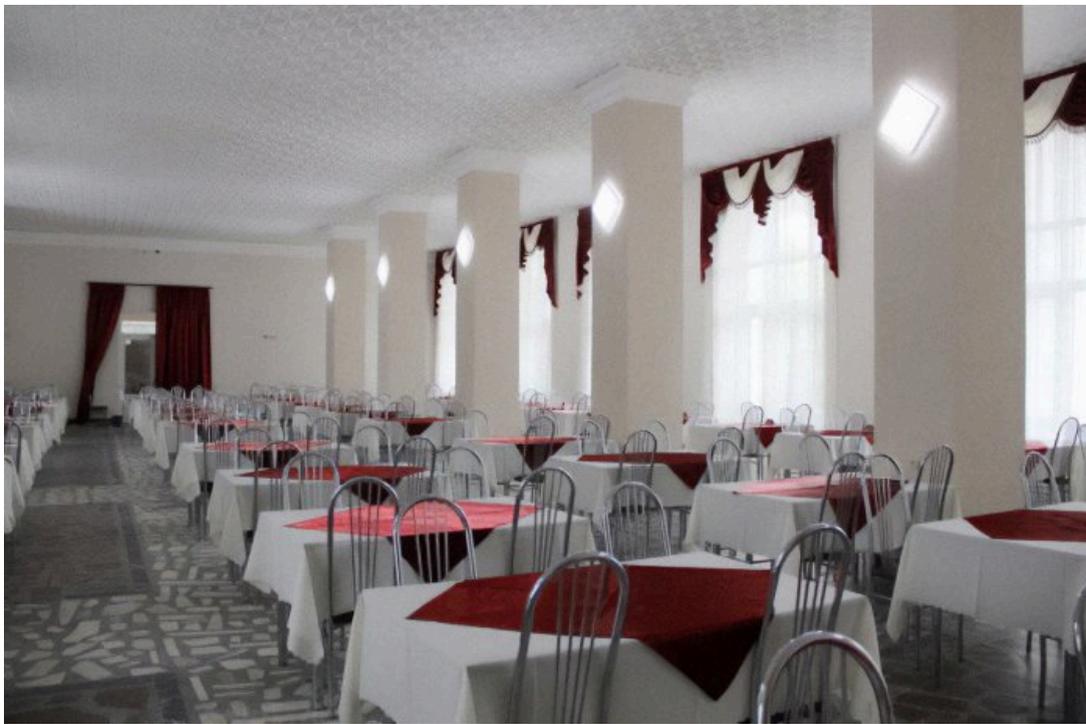
— It's a good thing you're not in Odesa right now. There's such horror going on over there, — Olga began the conversation.

— I've been living in Russia for 40 years, you know. All of my relatives are still there though.

— How are they, relatives?

— Everyone speaks Russian.

«She did not express her opinion about politics in any way. She said: „My son forbade me to discuss such topics“», recalls Olga. Olga jokingly asked her new companion how to pronounce the word «palyanitsa». The woman pronounced it. Olga tried to repeat after her. Her companion corrected her. They began to laugh. Olga suggested that other visitors to the sanatorium who were sitting at their table should also try pronouncing the code word.



Cafeteria of the Russian Federal Penitentiary Service in Nalchik / Photo: Russian Federal Penitentiary Service

After lunch, the waitress came up to her. Olga jokingly asked her to say «palyanitsa» too. She could not pronounce the word correctly either.

— You are pronouncing it wrong too, — Olga laughed.

— Zelensky is a monster by the way.

— Why a monster? He is a handsome young man.

That was the end of the conversation. Three days later, FSB officers came to Olga's room. She was told that she had been glorifying Ukraine in the cafeteria.

Olga got upset. She had not said anything about Ukraine as a country. She had only noted that Zelensky was a visually attractive man.

«I jokingly told one of the police officers: „I can't call him a monster, like I can't call you such, for example. You also look like a handsome man“. This comparison must have made him mad», recalls Olga.

Then the FSB officers took her passport and made a copy. «It was only later when I found out that I should have kept quiet», said the retiree. «But back then I was under terrible stress. It was my first ever contact with the police. And I started actively explaining to them: „I didn't shout anything, didn't call for anyone to do anything“».

The police drew up a protocol against Olga and then let her go saying «go get lunch». In the cafeteria, she saw one of the waitresses writing something down. Police officers were standing next to her. They didn't let Olga find out what was going on.

«I finished my lunch and was coming out of the cafeteria. And two policemen were standing there saying: „Let's go, follow us“. I told them: „Wait, I'll come up to you myself, I'm not going to run away anywhere“. I feel ashamed in front of people. I am a 70-year-old granny, and two policemen were escorting me out of the cafeteria like a criminal, with 150 people watching», recalls Olga.



Territory of the Sanatorium of the Federal Penitentiary Service of Russia in Nalchik / Photo: Russian Federal Penitentiary Service

After that, they took her to the police station. There they interrogated her. They asked her whether she was born in Ukraine and whether she had relatives there.

— Why were you shouting slogans in defense of Ukraine?

— I didn't shout anything. I live in Russia after all. Why would I shout slogans over the whole cafeteria? Am I what, crazy?

The policeman asked Olga for her phone. She refused to show it to him. So they threatened to «lock her up» for 15 days and take her phone away for good. In the end, the policeman got hold of Olga's phone anyway. She did not have any social networks or messengers installed, so they ended up not examining it for long.

After that, the police officers handed her the interrogation record. «Olga did not have her glasses with her and she signed everything she was given. They read aloud to her not at all what was actually written in the document», says Olga's defense attorney Lidia Anosova, affiliate of OVD-Info. «They told her they had only put down her phrase that „Zelensky is a handsome man“. In fact, the interrogation record says that Olga was agitating for Zelensky saying that he would come and rule Russia and that he was doing a great job overall. In addition, the record says that Olga stopped short of shouting „Glory to Ukraine“ over the entire cafeteria. Since Olga handwrote down the words „my words recorded correctly and read by me“, the judge of course kept pointing at this phrase saying: „She is a grown woman. Why does she sign everything left and right?“»

The first court hearing, originally scheduled to take place in Nalchik, got postponed due to Olga's sharp increase in blood pressure. With the assistance of a local human rights advocate, Olga requested that the trial be moved to Moscow where she lives.

On April 18, a court hearing was held in Moscow. According to Olga's defense attorney Lidia Anosova, the hearing lasted no more than five minutes. Olga's attorney filed a motion to postpone as Olga was unable to attend the hearing. She was undergoing treatment for severe leg pains under the care of a neurologist and a general practitioner. However, the judge decided the treatment was not a good enough reason for postponing. «It's not like she's in an ICU. She can walk, is alive and well», said the judge.

Olga's attorney then asked the judge to call witnesses to the court via videoconference and question those who reported Olga. The judge refused. Additionally, the attorney sought to attach video recordings from the sanatorium's cafeteria, which could be used to compare Olga's words to what was recorded in the interrogation report. However, the judge declined this request as well.

Eventually, Olga was fined 40 thousand rubles (US\$517) under Article 20.3.3 of the Code of Administrative Offences for discrediting the military. Her attorney is going to file an appeal.

«I'm shocked by my life», admits Olga. «After 70 years, I've only now begun to get a grasp of how things work. Earlier I didn't understand anything. But I guess it's too late now. My husband, a former military man, told me: 'You need to shut up and stay quiet' That's probably what one ought to do, but I'm a fair-minded and talkative person. I try to keep quiet, of course. But in our country, even if you don't promote a political point of view or even if you just say that one shouldn't call everyone and anyone a freak, you get lots of aggression in response».

Olga reveals that not only her husband has condemned her opinions. Everyone she knows has turned against her, calling her an «enemy of the people», a «traitor to the motherland», «crazy» and «stupid». They say that she has lost her mind.

They view Zelensky as Russia's enemy and a fascist, about whom one can say nothing good.

She is certain that her friends and acquaintances did not support her because they are intimidated and «zombified» by the propaganda they see on television. She explains that they rely solely on TV news for their information, whereas she and her husband seek out alternative sources, such as the Internet. Olga further notes that the younger generation, including the children and grandchildren of her acquaintances, are too busy just getting by in Moscow — and making some more money. They have little time left to communicate with their older relatives or try to make sense of the political situation in the country.

«Yes, I'm not a patriot. I wouldn't go fight and wouldn't send my son there — he died 14 years ago but were he alive, I wouldn't let him go. I would have done anything so he doesn't get sent there. But I also love Russia and am not going to move anywhere else. It just scares me that I can't even peacefully express my opinion here, because our phones too are tapped», she said.

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

Украина



С началом полномасштабного вторжения в Украину в России стали преследовать тех, кто так или иначе высказывает реакцию на военные действия.

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