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<http://www.rsf.org/russie-extradition-request-for-dissident-12-04-2011,40020.html>

Europe & ex-USSR - Tajikistan

Persecution

Extradition request for dissident journalist is "illegal and absurd"

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Reporters Without Borders today denounced as "illegal and absurd" the efforts of the Tajik government to get dissident journalist **Dodojon Atovulloev** forcefully returned to Tajikistan from his exile in Russia and Germany and called on these two governments to protect him.

The state prosecutor in the Tajik capital, Dushanbe, [sent an extradition request](#) to the Russian authorities today for the journalist and opposition leader, who is a political refugee in Germany (living in Hamburg) and currently in Moscow.

"The request is absurd," the worldwide press freedom organisation said. "Since he obtained political asylum in Germany in 2002, Tajikistan and Russia cannot legally touch him. We hope the Russian authorities, in accordance with international law and as they have done before, will reject the request."

"A political refugee can under no circumstances be sent back to his country of origin and the Tajik request for this to be done, in violation of basic international law, is very worrying," it said.

Atovulloev is founder and editor of the opposition monthly *Charogi Ruz* (Daylight), the first privately-owned publication set up after independence in 1991 and a strong critic of the regime. He was forced to flee abroad in 2001 after getting death threats and being accused of insulting the president and supposedly "inciting national, racial and religious hatred." The newspaper is now based in Moscow after its Dushanbe offices were ransacked.

Family members in Tajikistan were imprisoned for several weeks and [death threats to Atovulloev continued](#). He was arrested at Moscow airport in July 2001 and only an energetic campaign by human rights groups prevented him from being sent back to Dushanbe.

The charges against him were initially dropped, but the newspaper continued its criticism and Atovulloev set up an opposition party, 'Vatandor', in 2007. New charges of insulting the president and "public appeals for violent overthrow of the constitutional order" were laid against him in 2008 and are the basis of the extradition request announced by prosecutor-general Sherhon Salimzoda today.

Press freedom [shrank](#) in Tajikistan last year and the authorities are now very keen to silence Atovulloev, who Salimzoda's predecessor, Bobojon Bobohonov, called a "[news terrorist](#)" in 2008. While media outlets mentioning armed clashes in the country's Rasht Valley last September were [clamped down on](#), Atovulloev called the incidents "a return to [civil war](#)."

(Photo: Asia-Plus)
