

Reporters Without Borders

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Europe/Ex-USSR - Russia

Forced to flee

Novaya Gazeta deputy editor flees into exile after threat from top cop

13 June 2012

Reporters Without Borders is appalled to learn that Gen. Alexander Bastrykin, the head of Russia's Investigative Committee, an agency with powers similar to the FBI, personally threatened to kill **Sergei Sokolov**, the deputy editor of the independent Moscow-based tri-weekly [Novaya Gazeta](#), because of his critical coverage of his agency.

The press freedom organization also voices its full support for the journalists who are currently staging a protest in Moscow about the threat, some of whom were arrested illegally.

"How ironic," Reporters Without Borders said. "Gen. Bastrykin is one of Russia's top police officers and is in charge of the investigation into *Novaya Gazeta* reporter [Anna Politkovskaya's](#) 2006 murder. Yet he explicitly threatened a representative of the same newspaper, one that has become the symbol of the martyrdom of independent journalists in Russia.

"With a total of five of its journalists killed in connection with their work, *Novaya Gazeta* has paid a high price for its determination to do its duty to report the news. It is more than shocking that Bastrykin played on the failure to punish these murders and suggested that the police and justice system would protect those who murder journalists."

In [an open letter to Bastrykin in today's issue](#), *Novaya Gazeta* editor **Dmitry Muratov** accused him of organizing a disturbing one-on-one meeting in a forest with Sokolov on 4 June at which he threatened to have the journalist killed. If safety guarantees are not given to Sokolov, who has since left the country, other methods, including judicial ones, will be used, the letter said.

Journalists have been demonstrating outside the Investigative Committee's Moscow headquarters today in support of Sokolov and the rest of the *Novaya Gazeta* staff. Although they are demonstrating one by one, a form of protest that does not need any permission, the police briefly detained the first demonstrators, most of whom were in the process of preparing placards at the time.

Radio [Echo of Moscow](#) deputy editor **Vladimir Varfolomeyev**, **Alina Grebneva**, **Olga Bychkova** and **Natella Boltianskaya** were among the journalists who were detained. They were taken to the Basmany district police station. [The well-known journalist and dissident Alexander Podrabinek](#) was also detained.

Bastrykin's threats were prompted by [a 4 June article by Sokolov](#) about the fact that a former parliamentary representative for the southwestern region of Krasnodar had just been sentenced to nothing more than a fine although he had been found guilty of protecting a criminal gang responsible for the deaths of 12 people in 2010. Sokolov's article also accused Bastrykin of colluding with this gang.

Bastrykin invited Sokolov to a public event linked to the case the same day, during which Sokolov apologized for the "pointlessly virulent words" he used in his article. Bastrykin refused to accept his apology and summarily ordered him to leave the room. In his open letter, Muratov said he found this to be fair, but added, "unfortunately, the story did not stop there."

On returning from this event, Sokolov was bundled into Bastrykin bodyguards' car and, without explanation, was driven to an isolated spot in a forest on the outskirts of Moscow for a one-

on-one meeting with Bastrykin. According to the open letter, Bastrykin threatened to kill him, said what he thought about Novaya Gazeta, its editorial policies and Anna Politkovskaya "in a manner that could not have been more expressive" and said that if something happened to Sokolov, "he would be the one who led the investigation."

The Investigative Committee declined to comment when contacted by Reporters Without Borders.

Follow the protest outside the Investigative Committee live [here](#) or [here](#)

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(Photo: Yuri Timofeyev, Radio Svoboda)

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