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<http://www.rsf.org/russia-after-10-month-ordeal-charges-17-03-2014,46012.html>

Europe/Ex-USSR - Russia

Case dismissed

After 10-month ordeal, charges finally dropped against Sochi journalist

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Reporters Without Borders is very relieved to learn that the authorities finally dropped [the trumped-up drug possession charges they first brought](#) against Sochi-based independent journalist **Nikolai Yarst** (Николай Ярст) in May 2013. Sochi police headquarters formally notified his lawyers on 15 March that the case has been dismissed.

"We are pleased that Yarst's senseless ordeal is finally over and that he has recovered full freedom of movement," said Johann Bihl, head of the Reporters Without Borders Eastern Europe and Central Asia desk.

"The decision to dismiss the case nonetheless leaves a bitter taste. Yarst was subjected to six months of house arrest, slandered and unable to work just because his investigative reporting upset people. Why did the authorities need all this time and several additional investigations to finally take account of the contradictions and irregularities that were evident from the outset?"

Bihl added: "An investigation must be ordered to identify those responsible for fabricating these charges and the reason for this persecution. All possible light must be shed on this case in order to render justice to Yarst and to dispel the intimidatory effect on his colleagues."

Yarst and a colleague were heading to an appointment at the Sochi office of the Investigative Committee (Russia's FBI equivalent) in the hope of getting information for a story on 23 May 2013, when their car was stopped and an envelope containing drugs was "discovered" on the back seat.

Official accounts of the circumstances of his arrest quickly proved inconsistent. Nothing was found in a search of his home and analyses for evidence of drug use were negative.

Manipulation of evidence and retraction of statements by prosecution witnesses supported Yarst's repeated claims that he was the victim of trumped-up charges that had been prompted by his reporting. At the time of his arrest, he was investigating the possibility of police complicity in the actions of a convicted person.

Yarst was placed under house arrest from 3 June to 5 December, during which time he was completely isolated. Thereafter, the restrictions were loosened but he remained under judicial control and continued to face prosecution on a charge that carried a maximum sentence of ten years in prison.

More information about this case can be found in the report by Reporters Without Borders entitled, "[Sochi: independent journalism, a combat sport.](#)"

(Photo: [Svetlana Kravchenko / Kavkazsky Uzel](#))
