

# Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/russia-two-seizures-of-newspaper-issues-02-08-2011,40734.html>

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Europe & ex-USSR - Russia

Regional despotism

## Two seizures of newspaper issues by regional governments in past month

2 August 2011

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Reporters Without Borders condemns last week's seizure of all 40,000 copies of *Izvestia Kaliningrada*, a weekly published in Russia's western exclave of Kaliningrad. It was the latest example of regional governors abusing their power to silence media that annoy them.

"We are disturbed to see this form of censorship used more than once in a short space of time," Reporters Without Borders said. "By confiscating newspaper issues, local authorities are deliberately suppressing content they find embarrassing, thereby showing that they assume the power to control news and information in their region with the central government's tacit consent.

"We urge the authorities to stop using such methods, which also undermine the media financially, as all the confiscated copies cannot be distributed or sold. The Russian central government must adopt sanctions or else impunity will encourage the spread of this practice."

The entire print run of *Izvestia Kaliningrada's* latest issue was seized as it left the printer's on 29 July by members of the Road Safety Inspection Agency and the Regional Centre for Combating Extremism, where the newspaper's owner and editor, **Oleg Altovsky**, was detained for several hours.

The head of the Regional Centre for Combating Extremism, Alexander Shelyakov, told the *Interfax* news agency that he intervened because he had been informed that the issue contained extremist statements. If it turned out that this was not the case, the seized copies would be released for distribution, he added.

The issue, which was to have been published on the eve of a visit by President Medvedev, contained an open letter to Medvedev calling for the regional government's removal on the grounds that several of its members were implicated in corruption. The letter was signed by more than 2,000 local residents, a significant number in this exclave located between Lithuania and Poland.

"The letter's publication was not an act of political opposition, it was the dissemination of a public opinion," the editor told *RFE/RL*.

There have been other cases of local authorities taking similar action. Ninety per cent of the copies of the business weekly *Kommersant Vlast* were seized in Saint Petersburg on 4 July on the orders of the Municipal Press Committee. The issue, whose circulation was not blocked in other regions, criticized Saint Petersburg governor Valentina Matviyenko

The newspaper *Moy Rayon* was harassed last February after criticizing the same governor. It was suddenly visited by tax inspectors and received a summons from OBEP (a special police unit for economic crimes). Then distribution of the newspaper was blocked following pressure from the regional government.

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