

URGENT ACTION

PROSECUTED FOR CRITICISING GOVERNMENT

Shop assistant Yekaterina Vologzheninova is facing trial on 27 October for “inciting hatred and enmity” against the Russian government and Russians fighting in eastern Ukraine. The charges stem from her posts on social media criticizing Russia’s annexation of Crimea and Russia’s involvement in Donbass, eastern Ukraine.

Yekaterina Vologzheninova, a shop assistant from Yekaterinburg, in the Urals Region, Russian Federation, will be standing trial on 27 October for “publicly inciting hatred or enmity as well as denigrating human dignity”. The charges against her stem from her posts on the Russian social media site VKontakte criticizing Russia’s annexation of Crimea and Russia’s involvement in Donbass, eastern Ukraine.

During 2014, Yekaterina Vologzheninova reposted content from several publications, films, texts and images relating to the situation in Ukraine, on her VKontakte social media account. Several of these publications were critical of Russia’s annexation of Crimea (this annexation is in violation of the international law), and of Russia’s involvement in Donbass, eastern Ukraine. Her account is only accessible by her registered friends. On 12 December 2014, her apartment was searched by law enforcement officials and she was taken to the police station for questioning. She then learned that a criminal case against her had been opened for “publicly inciting hatred or enmity as well as denigrating human dignity” (Article 282, part 1 of the Russian Criminal Code). If convicted, she will face up to five years’ imprisonment.

During the investigation of her case, the authorities solicited “psycholinguistic expertise” to analyse her postings and questioned her colleagues and other acquaintances in an attempt to prove that her motivation had been specifically to incite hatred. The investigation concluded that Yekaterina Vologzheninova’s intention by criticizing the government’s policies online (with only her friends) had been to incite hatred against the Russian government, and Russians fighting in eastern Ukraine. In late September 2015 the case was forwarded to the Zheleznodorozhnyi Court in Yekaterinburg. The trial is expected to start on 27 October.

Please write immediately in Russian, English or your own language:

- Urging the Russian authorities to close the criminal case against Yekaterina Vologzheninova as she has exercised her right to freedom of expression and not committed an internationally recognisable criminal offense;
- Calling on them to respect and protect the right to freedom of expression.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 1 DECEMBER 2015 TO:

Prosecutor General of the Russian Federation

Yurii Yakovlevich Chaika
Prosecutor General’s Office
ul. B. Dmitrovka, d.15a
125993 Moscow GSP- 3
Russian Federation
Fax: +7 495 987 5841 / +7 495 692 1725

Salutation: Dear Prosecutor General

Prosecutor of Sverdlovsk Region

Sergei Alekseevich Okhlopkov
Ul. Moskovskaya 21
Yekaterinburg GSP 1036
620612 Russia
Fax: +7 343 377 02 41
Email: sverdloblprokuratura@mail.ru

Salutation: Dear Prosecutor

And copies to:

Head of Federal Security Service (FSB) Sverdlovsk Region

Viatkin, Aleksandr Petrovich
Ul. Vaynera 4
Yekaterinburg 620014
Sverdlovsk Region, Russia
Email: sverdlovsk@fsb.ru

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Since the annexation of Crimea by Russia and the outbreak of fighting between Ukrainian forces and armed groups supported by Russia in Donbass in eastern Ukraine in spring 2014, several people have been sentenced in Russia. They have been sentenced for allegedly inciting hatred and enmity on the Internet in connection with their posts that criticised Russia's policy towards Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea.

The number of Internet users who have faced prosecution for their peaceful but critical views on Russia's current politics is growing. Article 280 (public calls to commit extremist activities) and Article 282 of the Russian Criminal Code are increasingly being used to silence dissent and to intimidate those who question official government in relation to Ukraine.

The UN Human Rights Committee's General Comment 34, on the right to freedom of expression, states that 'it encompasses even expression that may be regarded as deeply offensive'. In any event, criminal sanctions for private social media posts would be excessive and disproportionate under international human rights standards, infringing on the right to freedom of expression. Yekaterina Vologzheninova's posts included content from Ukrainian sources, including a satirical cartoon depicting a man – with some remote likeness to President Vladimir Putin – with a knife in his hand over a map of Donbass. His hand is being stopped by another hand and the text under the image reads "Stop the pest!" She also posted some poems and statements in which Russians are described as "eternal slaves – body and soul", as having "brains of chicken", and state that those who fight in Donbass follow a "bloody covenant".

Yekaterina Vologzheninova told Amnesty International that her account on VKontakte was not public and only accessible to friends. She browsed Ukrainian media because she was looking for alternative information to that provided by the state-controlled television and other media in Russia, and shared some publications from Ukraine on her personal page. The investigation claimed that the "likes" under some of her online posts indicate that she did incite hatred via these posts.

For several months in 2014, she was subscribed to the email list by the Ukrainian nationalist movement Pravy Sektor (Right Sector), an organization which was banned in Russia in November 2014 as extremist. The investigation claimed that Yekaterina Vologzheninova was a member of Pravy Sektor, something she herself vehemently denies.

The Russian authorities have consistently denied, in spite of the mounting evidence to the contrary, Russia's direct involvement in the conflict in eastern Ukraine. The national television and other state-controlled media have portrayed the conflict in Donbass as an assault by forces under the command of a "fascist" government in Kyiv against the peaceful Russian-speaking population.

Name: Yekaterina Edvardovna Vologzheninova

Gender m/f: f

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