



## Tightening Security in Russia's Info Space

**OE Watch Commentary:** To a first time observer, the Russian media space might appear almost completely uncensored. Internet access continues to expand and traditional media (TV, radio, newspapers, etc.) provide a wide range of viewpoints, to include sources which feel free to criticize certain government policies and personnel. Over the past decade, however, alongside this greater access to opposing sources of information, the Kremlin leadership has enacted legislation which restricts information which might fall under the broad rubric of “national security.” The two accompanying excerpts illustrate how the Kremlin leadership is working to ensure that information which could tarnish its security image remains unpublished.

The first excerpt from the military weekly, *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer* (VPK) describes possible bureaucratic motives behind the recent arrest of former military journalist, Ivan Safronov. While he had just begun working for Russia's space agency, Roscosmos, Safronov had earned a reputation as an expert journalist who explored some of the shadier aspects of Russian military exports. Safronov was arrested by the Federal Security Service (FSB) on 7 July, allegedly for revealing classified military information to a foreign country. Since VPK focuses on military-industrial issues, it is significant that it would publish an article criticizing this arrest.

The authors suggest that they have considerable doubts regarding the FSB allegations against Safronov, positing that because the security services “have become very swollen in recent years [where] many employees want rapid promotions, new titles and opportunities,” there is an incentive to fabricate cases. As the authors point out, these sham arrests are abetted by a corrupt legal system, since “the courts in the Russian Federation are fiction.” Such arrests, however, serve to warn other journalists from publishing materials which might reflect poorly on the authorities.

The second excerpt from the opposition source, *Fontanka.ru*, examines recent legislation which prohibits “current and former FSB officers from disclosing information about their professional activities.” The article goes on to point out that “previously, the law only protected state secrets,” but “the new amendments will allow security officials” to regard any information as “confidential,” particularly that which would “damage their reputation.” The timing of this law is propitious, as some of the most egregious cases of corruption among uniformed personnel have recently occurred within the FSB. While Russia's information space may appear free and uncontrolled, recent measures like the above have constrained freedom of speech. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

***“On 31 July, President Vladimir Putin signed a law prohibiting current and former FSB officers from disclosing information about their professional activities...”***

**Source:** Artur Nesviyazhsky, Vladimir Kucherenko, “Оценим шпиона Сафронова в звездочках,” [Let's evaluate the spy Safronov in the stars] *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer*, 22 July 2020. <https://vpk-news.ru/articles/57874>

*...In general, the story is extremely strange - one could call it stupid, but we are talking about broken destinies, there is no time for jokes. According to the lawyer, by the time the journalist was detained, a case had already been opened, and not a thin case, but seven full-length bound volumes. Ivan was allegedly recruited by Czech intelligence, and he leaked all the state secrets known to him. At the same time, he himself had no access to secrets, although yes, due to numerous contacts in the military-industrial complex, he probably knew a lot.... Therefore, of all that is voiced about Ivan Safronov in official and unofficial sources, the least likely seems to be exactly what he is accused of - treason....*

*What is happening with our special services? We dare to make some assumptions. The general decomposition and decline of professionalism also affected the special services of the Russian Federation. That is why such incidents as the “Safronov case” are born....*

*...It seems that we are dealing with a common disease not only of the special services, but also of law enforcement agencies in general. Their staffs have become very swollen in recent years, many employees want rapid promotions, new titles and opportunities.... Fortunately, the courts in the Russian Federation are fiction, the judges do not listen to the arguments of the defense, obediently repeating everything after the investigators (the prosecution). That is, no obstacles: concoct yourself “cases” either against the boys (extremist conspirators), or against agents of foreign intelligence services. ... Fates are ruined for people, they rot in jail ... and someone gets new stars for shoulder straps and good support from the state.*

**Source:** “Путин подписал закон о запрете действующим и бывшим сотрудникам ФСБ публично рассказывать о своей работе,” [Putin signed a law banning current and former FSB officers from publicly speaking about their work] *Fontanka.ru*, 31 July 2020. <https://www.fontanka.ru/2020/07/31/69397936/>

*On 31 July, President Vladimir Putin signed a law prohibiting current and former FSB officers from disclosing information about their professional activities.... Amendments to the Federal Law “On the Federal Security Service” imply a ban on the publication of opinions, comments and statements about the FSB without the permission of the management.*

*...Previously, the law only protected state secrets. The new amendments will allow security officials to secure their “confidential information.”*

*...In accordance with the law, a professional secret is information “that does not contain information constituting state and other secrets protected by law,” while its disclosure or dissemination “may threaten the own security of the federal security service or damage their reputation.”*