

SHUT DAILY APPEALS TO ARMENIA, ARTSAKH PRESIDENTS

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Independent "Third Force Plus" (TFP) newspaper, closed through the efforts of the Russian FSS (Federal Security Service), appealed in a letter to the presidents of Armenia and Artsakh on March 22, 2015.

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The appeal stated:

"Dear Mr. President!

The need to write this letter comes from an unprecedented situation around the Armenian independent newspaper "Third Force Plus", which is mainly staffed with citizens of the Republic of Armenia and the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic. As you know... the newspaper has been forced to suspend its activity due to the theft of its funds by Lieutenant Colonel Vadim Pozdyshev of the FSS. In autumn 2010, the FSS opened a criminal case against V. Pozdyshev for this crime, and in summer 2011 he was dismissed from government service. This fact is confirmed by numerous testimonies not only from relatives and a representative from the FSS authorities of Pozdyshev, but also from the offender himself (the newspaper can provide you with a copy of their written messages). In other words, the FSS itself was assured of the fraudulent actions of V. Pozdyshev, "punished" him for the robbery of journalists and even forbade him from travelling abroad, at least until 2015, but when it comes to returning the money, honestly earned by an international staff of the paper, it's not, to put it mildly, in a hurry.

For three years, TFP has repeatedly appealed to all the legal authorities of the Russian Federation, but neither the Prosecutor General nor the Investigative Committee, or the military prosecutor's

office, let alone the FSS of the country, in violation of the current legislation of the Russian Federation, did bother to even interview witnesses in this case despite our numerous requests and willingness to provide all the evidence of theft of newspaper assets. The Russian Embassy in Yerevan stays silent. A seeming of an investigation was attempted by the Ministry of Interior, but after three months of deliberation it decided to transfer the matter to the FSS, citing its "special importance".

The FSS responded very peculiarly. The Head of DSP of this department Mr. Zakharov, in response to our protests, cynically declared that the FSS stopped correspondence on this case - without an explanation and without telling when we will finally get our stolen money back. It seems that the head of any department should be interested and should respond to numerous written protests of journalists and, at least, conduct a formal investigation, as required by laws of even the least developed countries of the world. But the director of the FSS Alexander Bortnikov isn't investigating the case, and somebody "mysteriously" blocks the letters from the journalists to Russian President Vladimir Putin and Prime Minister D. Medvedev. I would like to know why.

Editorial board of the TFP also received a letter from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia, which has called us to turn to law enforcement of the Republic of Armenia. Naturally, we did not follow the advice of the Foreign Ministry of the Russian Federation - for the simple reason that it demonstrates the absolute ignorance of the elementary norms of law: the law enforcement agencies of Armenia, even with a strong desire, can not examine this matter. As the crime was committed against the newspaper on the territory of the Russian Federation, and the perpetrator - Colonel Vadim Pozdyshev FSS - is a citizen of Russia... In this situation, it is only within the power of law enforcement agencies of Russia, which openly cover the perpetrator. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the country, apparently trying to direct the anger of Armenian journalists against the Armenian authorities, knowing that in the course of a criminal investigation the case will get publicity and quite fascinating details of lawlessness and numerous abuses towards the Armenian edition from the FSS will come out. And maybe even more serious circumstances as well.

Dear Mr. President!

Based on the foregoing and following requirements of the Constitution of Armenia and NKR, we ask your assistance in resolving this issue in the framework of bilateral relations with the Russian Federation, as our three-year attempts to achieve an elementary investigation and restoration of the rule of law in law enforcement bodies of Russia ended in vain. The latter are afraid to even interview witnesses in the case and, according to clarifying information, block all our letters to the President and the Prime Minister of the Russian Federation. Evidence of a crime committed by an officer of the Federal Security Service in relation to the newspaper is so plentiful it would suffice for several criminal cases. And even a village deputy would be able to solve this case.

Reminding: not only the written acknowledgment of the offender about the theft of journalistic

means (21 pages) have been saved. There is evidence, in his household, that he was hiding at home stolen from bank funds of TFP and was afraid of law enforcement searches. There is even evidence of his immediate superiors, which confirms the correctness of the staff (one of the officers of the FSS in a letter to the paper urged Armenian journalists to achieve justice in this case, because, in his words, "evil must be punished"). Our requirements are as lawful and just that even the relatives of the offender - honest and decent citizens of Russia - are taking letters of Armenian journalists to the FSS and other law enforcement agencies of the Russian Federation.

Mr. President!

The newspaper is currently checking the information that on 24 December 2013 after the famous meeting in Moscow with the participation of the Head of the Administration of the Armenian President Vigen Sargsyan and his Russian colleagues, a political order came from Moscow to Yerevan, aimed at neutralizing TFP's protest. This order, they say, is being carried out now – both in Armenia and in Nagorno-Karabakh, under the personal supervision of the two Armenian presidents. At the same time we are receiving reports that the National Security Services (NSS) of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh have been ordered to find at least some compromising material against the chief editor of TFP and his family. The FSS in this case is possessed by panic and something should be opposed to the impeccable reasoning of TFP. For this purpose, the NSS officers of Armenia and NKR, trained in the Russian FSS, have recently been busy recruiting some unemployed staff members of TFP, in attempt to split the team, hacking emails of the newspaper, change their passwords, etc. We hope that this information is not true, because we believe that we live in a democratic country, mindful of its international obligations. Just as we believe that you are the guarantee of our constitutional rights, including the rights for freedom of speech and press. To remind, our newspaper is registered on the territory of the Republic of Armenia, in full compliance with the requirements of the Armenian legislation (state register certificate number 031077336, issued 17.09.2007).

Our only wish is the restoration of the basic laws in this matter and the return of our savings. The FSS, in fact, have not only deprived us of the right for professional activity, but also our savings earned for years, stored in Moscow, Alfa-Bank. One can only speculate about the reasons for this lawlessness. According to the opinion of observers, the real reason for the closure of the Armenian edition is the fact that the Third Force Plus is one of the few publications in the world, whose team was staffed mainly of journalists from conflict countries and nations. The newspaper had cooperation between the journalists from Armenia, NKR and Azerbaijan, Russia and Georgia, Iran and Israel, Turkey, Syria and Kurdistan, Abkhazia, Ossetia, Serbia, the Czech Republic, etc. This is an unprecedented phenomenon in the history of the media, at least in the South Caucasus region. They say that this fact wasn't approved by some of the forces whose plans apparently don't include cooperation between peoples, especially in our region.

Anyhow, we believe that the authorities of the Republic of Armenia are interested in solving this

blatant offense and help the team of TFP restore justice in the mentioned case.

We inform you that we have sent a similar appeal to Nagorno-Karabakh President Mr. Bako Sahakyan.

Dear Mr. President, we ask you to respond to our letter in accordance with the order of consideration of citizens of the Republic of Armenia".

Vahram Aghajanyan
Editor-in-chief of "Third Force Plus"

