



One of the patrons was forced to write “Z – for Russia” on the Underdog pub’s door by security forces

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ARTICLES

“Z—for Russia”: Moscow authorities raid hip pubs and a cultural centre

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Текст на русском

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On the evening of Friday, 17th of March, two Moscow pubs that are run by the same team, Underdog and La Virgen, were **raided** by the special forces equipped with a sledgehammer, tasers, and K-9. Official reason for the raid was «to check up on Ukrainian Army sponsoring». Soon, the Instagram accounts for both establishments announced that they are being shut down «indefinitely». «We will tell you all the details later, or you will learn them from friends», Underdog employees **said**.

«Special forces burst in, ordering us to stand along the wall and not to move. They had some kind of irregular patches on their helmets and because of that, to be honest, nobody took them seriously at first, it looked like some kind of prank», said Vera (name is changed for security purposes), one of the La Virgen's patrons. «We were forbidden to go out and use our phones, a man in civilian clothes found the administrator and demanded that she turn off the pub's surveillance cameras», she told OVD-Info

When it turned out that the administrator did not have access to the CCTV, the special force officers demanded the technical director to arrive. When asked about the reasons for detention, one of the special force policemen responded with «You were at the wrong place at the wrong time».

According to another patron, Sophia, whose name is changed for security purposes, law enforcement officers had blocked the door by a giant sledgehammer.

Around 40 people were detained in Underdog and La Virgen and taken to the Basmanny police station. Cash registers from both pubs had been **confiscated**.

«Some people were lucky enough to get a seat in the paddy wagon, but some had to stand up all the way, the car was absolutely packed, there were 20 of us in one. We were once again forbidden to make calls or videos», says Vera.

Lawyer Konstantin Yerokhin, who came to defend the rights of the detainees, was not allowed into the police station. According to eyewitnesses, one of the detainees was slammed headfirst into the paddy wagon because they had painted nails, and some others were hit with tasers.

As the detainees recall, police took people out, one by one, from a «room that looked like a typical school classroom» into another room. «I don't know what happened to them next. Several guys who returned asked for plasters; one was bleeding from his fingers, but he claimed he just burned himself on accident. It might be paranoia, but then another guy came in, his forehead injured, and I am not sure whether he was injured before», says Vera.

Most of the detainees were released after the police **made sure** they were not on the wanted list and checked their Telegram chats. No offence reports were drawn up.

As lawyer Erokhin later **wrote**, the raids were carried out by Federal Security Service (FSB), division for protection of the constitutional order and the antiterrorist activities, according to a decree issued on the 14th of March.

The invaders **forced** one of the to write «Z — for Russia» on the Underdog pub's door. Furthermore, the police put various nationalistic songs on the speakers. As one of the employees **told** Mediazone, people were forced under the threat of being tased to sing along. The state agency «Moskva» («Moscow») **published** a video in which the patrons

are forced to sing along to the song «Berezy» (Birch trees) by Lube, while the special force policemen tell them «Reach the notes, mates, reach the notes».

 Агентство "Москва" 



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В бар Underdog в центре Москвы сегодня пришли силовики, проверили присутствующих и покинули заведение, никого не задержав.

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Two days later, on the 19th of March, a new inscription appeared on the Underdog's doors: «ZOV. For Russia». Lawyer Erokhin **shared** this on his Telegram channel and said that the pub's employees are planning to file a complaint with the police.

In the comments to this post different accounts spammed with the exact same text: «How much will it cost to ass-fuck your mother on your back?» The Kremlin often uses bot farms that tend produce a similar effect.

During a conversation with OVD-info, Erokhin clarified that he himself takes a neutral position because he doesn't want his political views to influence his cases: «They are starting to look for some kind of enemies and rank me among them, despite me never expressing my support towards the Ukrainian military. I oppose financing any foreign organisation that sponsors troops fighting against Russia».

Prior to this, on the 18th of March, Erokhin **published** a statement from the pubs' management team, informing about threats towards staff and patrons alike. The team stated that due to the prospect of new police raids, they were forced to part with one of their members, Pavel, without specifying their last name. The link between Pavel and special forces' attention towards the pubs was not clarified.

Besides, the team apologised to the special forces, without pressing any charges against them: «We also would like once again to apologise for the events of the past days to everyone, including all law enforcement officers who had to participate and waste their time because of us».

On the same day, the pubs' co-founder and creative director Pavel Kosov **announced** that he is leaving the project on his Instagram page. Similar statement was also **published** on the Underdog's page. «I don't have a moral right to create issues for my friends, colleagues, and patrons», — stated Kosov, without specifying the details. When requested, he refused to comment.

The management team and Kosov himself consider the events that happened in the summer of 2022 to be the cause of the raid. In June 2022 Baza **wrote** that founders of Underdog and La Virgen faced threats for

an announcement of a charity vinyl record market in support of the Kyiv Angels collective, a charitable foundation that supports the Ukrainian army and civilians. The Underdog team also **cancelled** without an explanation a pre planned event dedicated to the pub's second anniversary.

Later, according to Baza, the owners reported that the La Virgen Instagram account had been hacked, and the post promoting Kyiv Angels appeared as a result of said hack. They stated that the money was actually donated to the «Tvoyo Sobachye Delo» («That's your business») animal shelter. These publications are no longer available.

In the same month Underdog's page **announced** a campaign for donations towards the Russian Red Cross. «There are millions of refugees in Russia, ordinary and frightened people, a vast number of orphaned and disabled children», the restaurateurs explained their new initiative.

At the same time, on his personal Instagram page Pavel Kosov **wrote** that he had been experiencing pressure from the law enforcement this whole month: «I can't tell what I've experienced this month, feelings can't be described, fear can't be measured <...> Investigation, interrogations, interrogations, interrogations, a prison cell, and so much more before and after <...> It seems I very lucky, I managed to defend the truth, I hope everything is over now. It was truly a „Journey into the Whirlwind“».

On the 19th of March, about eight masked policemen **disrupted** a book launch in Moscow's «Open Space». This book was written by the artist Sasha Skochilenko who is accused of spreading «fake news» about the Russian army (clause «d», part 2 of article 207.3 of the Criminal Code) due to the fact that she replaced price tags in a shop with leaflets containing information (collected from the open sources) on the Russian military's actions in Mariupol.

Photographer Sasha Astakhova was among those who were present during the search of the «Open Space», as **reported** by her sister, Elisaveta Nesterova, who is a journalist with Mediazona. According to Astakhova, special force policemen separated media workers from the rest of the attendees and led them to the basement. OVD-info's lawyer Maxim Ovchinnikov was not allowed to see them. One of the detainees, Konstantin Novikov, was **beaten** on the head with a shoe for refusing to show his ID. As Astakhova reports, the policemen were hinting at rape during their communication with Novikov: «They said while pointing at a microphone: „Do you have an idea what this thing looks like and what can we do with it?“».

About 10 people from the «Open Space» were **taken** to the Basmanny police station. The policemen tried to prevent a lawyer from entering the station, let him in later, and afterwards kicked him out, attacking him on the street. The detainees were refused parcels with food. Offence report was drafted against Alexey Belozarov, friend of Sasha Skochilenko, on the grounds of illegal sale of books, he was fined two and a half thousand roubles (around 33\$). The rest of the detainees were released without any offence reports, but a laptop was confiscated from one of them. Konstantin Novikov was later **arrested** for five days under the article on insubordination to the order of the authority representative.

People present in the «Open Space» during the raid **said** that the special forces officers wanted to force them to sing along to nationalist songs, but couldn't figure out how to turn on the speakers. According to visitors' reports, they **recognised** members of the General Directorate for Countering Extremism of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation, known as «Center E», and of the Second Special Force Police Unit, that were previously spotted in the Underdog and La Virgen pubs on the 17th of March.

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