



Olga Nazarenko / Photo: OVD-Info

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ARTICLES

“I am sure that I will go to prison”: The professor who stood up against the war

Until recently, Olga Nazarenko was a professor in the Medical Academy of Ivanovo, a city northeast of Moscow. She had been working at the pharmacology department for 22 years. But in 2022 she was suspended. The reason for such suspension was the criminal charges due to her anti-war activity and support of political prisoners. In October she passed away, reportedly from an accident.

ОБ ЭТОМ НИКТО НЕ УЗНАЕТ

Если об этом никто не напишет. Подпишитесь на регулярные пожертвования ОВД-Инфо, чтобы плохие дела не оставались в тишине.

ПОДПИСАТЬСЯ

Текст на русском

Olga Nazarenko has been taking part in protests since 2018. Olga said: «When Oleg Sentsov [Ukrainian dissident director imprisoned after Putin's annexation of Crimea] went on a hunger strike, I was really upset by it all: his case and the conditions [of his hunger strike] and his demands.»

Aside from pickets in support of Sentsov, Nazarenko has also taken part in protests to support Ukraine and political prisoners in general.

Olga's protest activity was not supported by her colleagues and managers of the Ivanovo Medical Academy, where she has been teaching since 2000, but there wasn't any resistance either. Her department head said to her: «Do whatever you want in your free time, that is your own business». But she was also reminded of the academy's rules, according to which any political agitation during class is prohibited.

Olga said: «Combining [teaching and protesting] was quite easy because a professor doesn't have an eight to six schedule. You are present [at the academy] when you have classes to teach; when you don't, you can leave a little bit earlier. You make a poster in the evening after classes and go to a protest the day after work.»

On 24 February 2022, the day of the full-scale invasion, Olga came out to protest against the war. Olga tried to protect a young woman from being unlawfully detained by the police

but as a result, she was detained as well. She was subsequently charged with section 19.3 of the Administrative Code of Administrative Offences against the police.



Olga Nazarenko / Photo: OVD-Info

After that Nazarenko conducted three pickets during the year and got three administrative sentences. All three times she was charged with the ‘protest’ article (part 8 of Article 20.2 The Code of Administrative Offenses). For today, her last **administrative case** was for discrediting the Russian military (part 1 of article 20.3.3 of the Code of Administrative Offences). These charges were motivated by the picket with a poster and her social media post about it.

On her protest sign, Olga quoted the beloved Soviet novel «Kingdom of Crooked Mirrors» by Vitaliy Gubarev: «Everyone, except some really bad people, wants to live in peace. War brings grief and destruction». In her social media post, Olga

quoted the Ukrainian poet Lina Kostenko: «No matter what anyone says, the evil will die and the truth will win».

During 2022, the professor was sentenced to an overall 260 thousand rubles of fines (\approx US\$2670) and 260 hours of community service. Olga was cleaning the children's park and taking care of animals at the Ivanovo Zoo.

But neither fines nor community service have stopped her from protesting again. «Community service was no problem at all because it took just a couple of hours after work. Besides, I was happy to help at the zoo considering their shortage of staff. My friends helped me to raise money for my fines via social networks and the platform „Zaodno“ („Together“, a legal fund promoted by OVD-Info). I wouldn't be able to pay such amounts on my own.»

Pickets helped Olga to support herself morally: «If you consider doing something important or saying something important but you don't do it or say it because of fear, it can seriously damage your self-confidence.» But it was also important to Olga to support her peers in Ivanovo and her friends in Ukraine. This is why she kept protesting despite the multiple fines.

Sometimes protests provoked an aggressive reaction from people passing by. Olga recalled an incident when a man approached her and said: «Oppositionists like you need to be shot.» He then tried to snatch the poster from her, injuring Olga's finger. «However, I defended the poster: I also rushed at him and chased him down the alley yelling and using strong language, » Olga said. Most often, passersby either did not notice the posters or approached Olga offering her words of support.



Olga Nazarenko / Photo: OVD-Info

In 2022, two criminal cases were initiated against the professor: first case was about discrediting Russian military (Part 1 of Article 280.3 of the Criminal Code), and the second one was about repeated violation of the established procedure for holding public events (Article 212.1 of the Criminal Code also known as the «Dadin’s Article» unofficially named after Ildar Dadin, the first protester prosecuted under this article who exercised his rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly).

CRIMINAL CASES

On 20 September 2022 Olga Nazarenko, as usual, came to work at the academy. Two of her colleagues as witnesses, an investigator and an officer of the so-called Center «E» (a unit within the Ministry of Internal Affairs specialized in combating extremism) have already been waiting for her. This is how the woman found out that a criminal case had been initiated against her under the article on repeated

discrediting of the Russian military (Part 1 of Article 280.3 of the Criminal Code).

The professor was allowed to contact an attorney whereas her search itself was quick: the officers inspected the woman's workplace only. Then they went to her home to carry out the search in her apartment. On the way to the apartment, the officials tried to get Olga to talk about the reasons for her point of view and why she «did not support her president.» «I told them that I had a completely different understanding of patriotism, and quoted Adam Michnik (a Polish journalist and historian): „Patriotism is measured by the amount of shame that one feels for crimes committed in the name of his people.“ Of course, they didn't understand anything, ” recalled Nazarenko.

The search at home lasted longer: officers seized Olga's and her family's computer, phones, posters, and leaflets. In addition, there was a Ukrainian flag hanging on Olga's balcony. The officers also removed the flag and took it with them. However, the next day the professor hung up a new one. Olga recalled how one of the raiders kept trying to make fun of her:

«Where did you hide your rocket launcher? You definitely should have one. Where do you hide Tajik corpses? Or maybe we'll find prohibited substances at your place.» After the search, a cop handed Olga a notice to appear for questioning and simply left.

Less than a month later, the professor was searched again, now in a new criminal case under the «Dadin article» on repeated violations of the procedure for holding public events (Article 212.1 of the Criminal Code). This time the police arrived at seven in the morning and went straight to Olga's home. Olga managed to contact an attorney. The search itself, according to Olga, was more of a formality and lasted less than an hour. Subsequently, both criminal cases were combined.

After the second search, Nazarenko was summoned to the HR department and suspended from work without pay. «Perhaps the academy itself would not have done this, but they received an official letter from the regional Ministry of Internal Affairs. The letter mentioned both criminal cases against me and that, according to **Article 76 of the Labour Code**, they are obliged to suspend me from work until the court verdict is there, ” recalled Olga. She expected the verdict to be „guilty“.

Olga lived with her husband and two children. After the criminal proceedings started, her husband, who has different political views, tried to remain distant. «It is clear that, as a close person, he sympathizes, but at the same time, he does not understand and does not share my decisions and views.»



Olga Nazarenko / Photo: OVD-Info

Olga did not admit her guilt and continued to openly oppose the war in Ukraine: «Now it's difficult for me to make any

plans for the future. If the sentence would not be connected with a prison term, then obviously I will have to look for a new job that has nothing to do with teaching. But for some reason, I am sure that I will go to prison for my anti-war position.»

In early October, Olga reportedly fell to her death, passing away later that month at a local hospital.

ЧТО Я МОГУ С ЭТИМ СДЕЛАТЬ?

Прочитать, рассказать, поддержать. Подпишитесь на регулярные пожертвования ОВД-Инфо, чтобы как можно больше людей узнали о политических репрессиях в России сегодня.

ПОДДЕРЖАТЬ