

Suppression of rallies in support of Alexei Navalny on January 17 and 18, 2021

Review of the violations

On January 17 and 18, 2021, peaceful assemblies were held in Russia in connection with the return of opposition politician Alexei Navalny from Germany and his subsequent arrest. They were accompanied by mass detentions of participants, as well as journalists covering the events.

The detentions of assembly participants and journalists on 17 and 18 January, which in themselves constituted a disproportionate restriction on the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and expression, were accompanied by additional violations, which are listed in this review.

Persecution for participation in peaceful assemblies is unacceptable. On January 21, OVD-Info, the Human Rights Center Memorial and the Moscow Helsinki Group asked the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association as well as the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of freedom of opinion and expression to call the Russian authorities to respect the rights of peaceful protesters and media workers, to ensure that Russia complies with its international obligations in the field of human rights, namely, to provide an opportunity for citizens to gather and express their opinions. This report has also been sent to the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights.

Warnings and preventive detentions

On January 15, the Moscow Prosecutor's office [warned](#) that Navalny's meeting at the airport was not notified to "the executive authorities of the city of Moscow in accordance with the procedure established by law." The agency added that it sent official warnings to 15 people.

However, the notification for the rally was impossible to file. Firstly, Navalny's return was announced only on January 13, and the formal requirements for the notification time frame bar it from being filed at such a short notice under any circumstances. Secondly, since March 2020, Moscow and St. Petersburg have banned all rallies, pickets, and even solo demonstrations, and although this measure was taken to counter the COVID-19 pandemic, such restrictions seem disproportionate and discriminate against peaceful gatherings: the ban on them was not lifted for ten months, while other forms of mass gathering were allowed, such as the use of public transport, public catering, sports and entertainment events.

On January 17, it was reported that the police handed or tried to hand such warnings to Moscow municipal deputies [Konstantin Yankauskas](#), [Yulia Galyamina](#), [Sergey Vlasov](#), the coordinator of Navalny's Moscow headquarters [Oleg Stepanov](#), the executive director of Open Russia, an NGO,

[Andrey Pivovarov](#), as well as [Fedor Khudokormov](#), journalist for Real View, a Telegram channel.

The day before Alexei Navalny's arrival, preventive detentions began in St. Petersburg. Open Russia's branch head in the Leningrad region had his car with the inscription "Tell Putin" NO!"" [seized](#), and then he [himself was detained for a last year's rally and was escorted to a police station](#). [Activist Alexandra Shashok](#) was detained for, allegedly, a rally held last year. Three activists who were going to go to welcome Navalny in Moscow [were detained](#), namely Navalny's regional headquarters coordinator Irina Fatyanova, civil activist Ilya Gantvarg and the editor of Objective Reality, a YouTube channel, Andrey Makashov, who were going to go by train to Moscow for a meeting, were detained. Early in the morning of January 17, civil activist Pavel Ivankin, libertarians Alexander Krai and Alexey Barich, as well as journalist David Frenkel [were detained](#) at Pulkovo airport in St. Petersburg. Participants of pickets in support of Navalny, [Pyotr Ilyin and Svetlana Kovalets](#), were also detained.

Detentions

On the evening of January 17, OVD-Info recorded the detention of **64** people during peaceful assemblies in connection with the return of Alexei Navalny to Russia.

- 58 people were detained at Moscow's Vnukovo airport, where the plane was supposed to land.
- 3 people were detained at Sheremetyevo airport near Moscow, where the plane was diverted before landing.
- 3 people were detained in St. Petersburg.

On January 18, **73** people were detained at rallies in support of Alexei Navalny in **5** cities:

- 13 people were detained in the Moscow region city of Khimki, where the 2nd police department held a court hearing that decided to detain Navalny for 30 days.
- 56 people were detained in the center of St. Petersburg. In the afternoon, three people standing in single pickets were detained at Gostiny Dvor, where mass detentions took place later in the day.
- 2 people were detained in the center of Moscow.
- 1 person was detained in Irkutsk.
- 1 picket was [detained](#) in Arkhangelsk.

At the same time, the events were exclusively peaceful and did not pose a threat to public order, the rights, life, health and property of others. The only motive for the detention was the public expression of support for the opposition politician:

- Several people were [detained](#) for raising their hands in solidarity.

- The administrative offense report on violating the "self-isolation" rules, drawn up by the police in relation to Artem Uymanen, detained on January 18 in St. Petersburg, [states](#) that the violation consisted in the fact that he “purposefully continued his participation in the rally, while < ... > loudly discussing the detention of Navalny, clapping his hands in support of Navalny.”
- As a [media report](#) on the detentions on January 18 in St. Petersburg stated: "At first, law enforcement officers detained only those who took up posters. < ... > When the number of protesters began to approach a hundred, the police began to act more harshly: activists were grabbed by the hands and dragged into paddy wagons not only for posters, but also for no apparent reason".

The detention of journalists

We are aware of the detention of media workers in connection with their professional activities.

At least **10** journalists were among those detained in Moscow and St. Petersburg on January 17 and 18.

In St. Petersburg, during preventive detentions, the editor of YouTube channel Obyektiv Realiy Andrey Makashov (at a railway station) and Mediazona correspondent David Frenkel (at the airport) were detained. Andrei Makashov [was later released](#). David Frenkel was taken to the police station and later [released](#) without charges.

According to MBK Media, at 16:00 on January 17, a few hours before the arrival, [at least 5 journalists were detained](#) in Moscow at Vnukovo airport: Kirill Borisov (“Roserzhava”), Eduard Burmistrov (“TV Rain”), Ivan Vodopyanov (“Kommersant”), Vlad Dokshin (“Novaya Gazeta”), Anton Starkov (Daily Storm).

- A man in a police uniform " nodded to his subordinates in my direction. They approached me, did not introduce themselves, I showed them a press card, but I was still taken to the paddy wagon,” Anton Starkov, the Daily Storm correspondent, [said](#) about his detention.
- The correspondent of the TV channel “Rain” was detained when he was [on the air](#), the police did not introduce themselves and did not explain to him the reasons for the detention.
- Ivan Vodopyanov (Kommersant) was hit several times during his arrest. “We were pushed out into the street. There were many media outlets working near me. I was chosen, and dragged out without any explanation. I was asking who they were and why. They put me by the police car and gave me two blows to the kidneys. They tried to take away the camera. After that, without letting me get up, they dragged them to the paddy wagon,” the journalist [said](#).

On January 18, Victoria Simenkova, a correspondent for Readovka, [was detained](#) in Khimki: she was snatched from the crowd and taken away without any reason given. A correspondent for RIA Novosti was also detained, [his name is unknown](#). On the same day, [Denis Kabakov](#), a journalist for the Dozhd TV channel and a correspondent of Navalny's local headquarters, was detained in St. Petersburg during solo demonstrations in support of Navalny. All of them were released without a police report.

Use of force in detention

Cases of police use of force during arrests have been recorded.

Important Stories [reported](#) that police officers used a taser during the arrest at Vnukovo airport. Novaya Gazeta [wrote](#) that some of the detainees were dragged along the asphalt by police officers.

- During the arrest in Vnukovo, Andrei Zhadan was beaten, his eye was injured, and later he was taken to the hospital in an ambulance. Ekaterina Bushkova was taken to the hospital after her arrest. There she was [diagnosed](#) with a closed craniocerebral injury, a concussion, and a hemorrhage in the eye.
- In the section “Detentions of journalists” above we have already mentioned the use of force against Kommersant photojournalist Ivan Vodopyanov detained at Vnukovo airport.

[According to OVD-Info](#), on January 18, at a rally in support of Navalny in St. Petersburg, a police officer used force to detain human rights activist Vladimir Vasilenko. He grabbed Vasilenko by the arm, and when asked not to use physical force, he pushed the human rights defender, so that he hit the wall and the handrail.

Prolonged escorting and time of detention

Many of the detainees at Vnukovo airport were transported to remote police departments: the Luzhniki police department (about a 26 km drive), Troitsky (29 km), Shcherbinsky (37 km), Dmitrovsky (50 km).

The detainees complained about the poor conditions in the paddy wagons:

- “The cage in the car is extremely cold, although I am warmly dressed. I warned the police that I should not be freezing with a pin in my hand, so I was simply thrown into a cage in the car by my hands and feet,” [wrote](#) David Frenkel, who was detained on January 17 in St. Petersburg.

- In Moscow, some of the detainees on January 17 [were kept](#) in a paddy wagon for a long time in the cold (about -20°C), only one or two people at a time were allowed out into the police station for processing.
- On January 18, detainees in St. Petersburg [reported](#) that the paddy wagon is overcrowded and the detainees cannot get a seat, “people often fall, and in general, it shakes a lot”. “We were being driven in a cold paddy wagon since 19 o'clock,” [wrote](#) one of the detainees at 23:42. The detainees told OVD-Info that they were not allowed to go to the toilet: “In the paddy wagon, the question of the toilet hangs more and more. When asked what to do, they say ‘Navalny will help you’”.

The period of detention is limited by law to three or 48 hours, depending on the alleged offense. However, this period is calculated not from the moment of detention, but from the moment of registration with the police department. The terms of escorting are not clearly limited by the law, it is only stated that it must be carried out as soon as possible.

Since the detentions took place in the afternoon, many of the detainees were released from police departments located in remote areas of Moscow late in the evening or at night when public transport is not working.

At the same time, in some cases, activists were simply released from police stations without drawing up an offense report or under the obligation to appear for drawing up another day. For example, in police stations [Ochakovo-Matveevskoe](#), [Luzhniki](#), [Dorogomilovo](#), [Troitsky](#) on January 17.

Thus, there was no need for an arrest and escorting to the police station.

Restriction of the right of detainees to defense and barring defense lawyers

The detainees told OVD-Info that the police took away their phones while they were in the police buses in order to deprive them of the opportunity to get legal assistance and to inform their relatives and human rights defenders about their detention.

Nellie Vavilina, who was detained on January 18 in St. Petersburg, had her phone and documents [taken away](#) from her in a paddy wagon, and her personal belongings were searched without witnesses. Other detainees, too, had their mobile phones taken away.

In Dorogomilovo police station, where some of the detainees were escorted, the police [introduced](#) the “fortress”¹ plan and refused to allow lawyers in.

On January 17, the Shcherbinsky police department forced the detainees to turn down legal aid (while the defender was already in the building of the police department), [threatening to hold them until the morning](#).

On the same day, the human rights project Apologiya Protesta reported that their lawyer Mansur Gilmanov was initially not allowed to enter [the airport](#) for not having a ticket, referring to the decision of the administration, and later [to the detainees](#) in the airport’s police department, because the “fortress” plan was introduced.

Another lawyer with Apologiya Protesta, Fyodor Sirosh, was not allowed to enter the Luzhniki police station. The lawyer reported from the scene: “[The police are not responding in any way. Phones are silent](#)”, “[The door was slammed in front of me and they won't let me in.](#)” The lawyer had to stand in the freezing cold for many hours.

On January 18, lawyer Daniil Semenov [was not allowed](#) to visit the detainees in St. Petersburg at the police station No. 10. The police station No. 1 in Khimki did not let OVD-Info’s lawyer Sergey Telnov visit the detainees.

Publication of personal data

On January 17, social networks began to publish photos of the participants of the gathering at the airport with their personal data (first and last name, phone numbers, home address, information about education, participation in other opposition actions, and others). The anonymous Telegram channel published the personal data of at least 16 activists, and the channel gained more than 1,800 subscribers. It was subsequently removed.

Pressure in universities

Detained on January 17, Ekaterina Bushkova the next day recounted the pressure from the leadership of the university (the Bonch-Bruевич St. Petersburg State University of Telecommunications), where she studies. “I have received a letter from the Department of Educational and social work, which demanded to clarify the situation in Vnukovo. In addition to the letter, I received a lot of calls, but I did not pick up the phone, because I don’t feel well,” Bushkova [told](#) the MBK Media outlet.

¹ A classified contingency plan to repel an armed attack on the police station. The police regularly refer to the alleged execution of such a plan as justification for refusing to allow lawyers to visit people detained at opposition rallies.

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About the report

Review of violations in the suppression of peaceful assemblies in support of Alexei Navalny on January 17 and 18.

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