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Russia: “What did each of us do to stop this nightmare?”

Thursday 8 June 2023, by [PASCAR Igor](#) (Date first published: 8 June 2023).

On 31 May the Southern District military court in Rostov-on-Don sentenced Igor Paskar to eight-and-a-half years’ imprisonment on charges of “vandalism” and “terrorism”. He was found guilty of burning a Z-banner [a pro-war symbol] and the symbolic firebombing of the FSB [federal security services] building in Krasnodar. The day before his sentencing, Igor gave his final statement in court. Here is a translation of his speech. [1]

Almost a year has gone by since I carried out this action. During that year, I pictured this moment time and again, the moment when I would be given the opportunity to make my final statement. I agonised over the words I would say, and the motives that drove me to act as I did.

During the last sitting, your honour, you asked whether I regret my actions. I understood that the extent of my professed regret would influence the severity of the sentence. But if I renounced my beliefs, I would be acting against my conscience.

On the contrary, **during the time I have been in prison, I have seen first-hand the injustices perpetrated against the people who we call our brothers: both prisoners of war who have served in the Ukrainian armed forces and ordinary Ukrainian citizens.**

The war – or whatever term we use to label it – came to their homes, destroying their lives as they knew them. No matter what slogans and geopolitical interests we use to varnish this, in my eyes it can not be justified.

Do I regret what has happened? Yes, perhaps I’d wanted my life to turn out differently – but I acted according to my conscience, and my conscience remains clear.

Rather than reflecting on who is right and who is guilty, I would like to pose this question: what did each of us do to stop this nightmare? What, ten or fifteen years from now, will we tell our children and grandchildren about these troubled times?

Unfortunately, God has not granted me the joy of fatherhood; the people who were closest to me have gone, and I am left alone with myself. It was easy for me to do what I did, even though I was well aware of the consequences. There was no-one to agonise about my fate, no-one to worry about me, or to cheer me on. But what I really did not expect was the huge number of letters and messages of support that I have received.

People have written from every corner of Russia, and not only Russia. Many were grateful for my position, so completely at odds with the notion of unanimous national support for what is being perpetrated. There were so many messages of encouragement: “stay strong”, “don’t despair”. So many warm words, so much sympathy.

But I'll be so bold as to read just one part of a letter that I received in May, which really touched me, and pushed me to write this final statement to the court. Here it is:

"There is very little left of everyday life. It turns out that we can't live everyday lives any more. I am listening to the memoirs of prisoners from the 1930s, 40s and 50s. Right now I'm on the breathtaking biography of [the actress] Tamara Petkevich [who spent seven years in a prison camp]. She was arrested in 1943, and lived until 2017. When they came for her she was only 22 – just a girl, half the age I am now. I have not read Solzhenitsyn's Gulag Archipelago, and I never got round to Shalamov's Kolyma Tales either. But now I'm listening to Petkevich, and it's making me realise that this is exactly what we must listen to, what we must read at school. As a country we are obsessed with the past, but we hardly ever think about the present or the future. The Americans have their American dream: something to strive for. We have nothing but a fixation on that which happened long ago, that which can not return. But time and again we try to bring back what has passed, and these attempts are absolutely pointless. It's as though the whole country is stuck in the mud. As individuals we are caught in our feelings. It's terrible that even now, for as long as we stubbornly turn our heads back, we will never live happily, never the way we want to. Let's hope people can find happiness in the little things."

Igor Paskar



Igor Paskar in court. Photo from Solidarity Zone

You can support Igor Paskar by sending letters:

- ☐ Address: Russia 344022, Rostov-on-Don, 219 Maksim Gorky street, SIZO-1, Igor Konstantinovich Paskar (d.o.b. 1976).
- ☐ You can send letters on line via the volunteer service RosUznik.

Solidarity Zone gives full support to Igor Paskar. His legal representative is Felix Vertegel.

Note. Letters sent to Russian detention facilities that are not in Russian are unlikely to be delivered to prisoners, and Rosuznik is also a Russian-language service. If you send short messages to Igor via Solidarity Zone supporters in the UK at 2022ukrainesolidarity gmail.com, we will arrange for them to be translated and passed on.

P.S.

- IVP. THURSDAY 8 JUNE 2023:

<https://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article8121#nb1>

Russian original of Igor Paskar's statement. Source:

<https://www.facebook.com/solidarityzone/posts/pfbid0Uaf1C6MMWKRYnyRruFJgSm2WSvSakszTJE2vaJzVyYpvTMyBvHmMcMUBdamA3zRcl>

Footnotes

[1] Download this as a [flyer](#).