

Russian Journalist Reporting on Corruption Kidnapped in Dagestan

By [Anna Dolgov](#)

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Vyacheslav Starodubtsev

A Russian journalist who reported on corruption in the North Caucasus republic of Dagestan was kidnapped, forced into a car and severely beaten by masked assailants over the weekend, news reports said.

Journalist Vyacheslav Starodubtsev said he was abducted from the city of Derbent on Sunday and driven out into the countryside, where his assailants made a series of threats to his family and demanded that he leave Dagestan, the Meduza news site reported.

Starodubtsev is the Moscow-based coordinator for a project that he founded last year called "My Derbent," which runs pages on Russia's social networks VKontakte and Odnoklassniki to report on corruption in the city government, the report said.

The project allegedly infuriated some people in the municipal administration, with Derbent

Mayor Imam Yaraliyev describing Starodubtsev as his personal enemy a few days before the attack, according to Meduza.

The journalist told Meduza that he had identified one of his attackers as the mayor's son Aziz Yaraliyev.

However, the head of Dagestan's Ogni (Lights) anti-corruption association, Magomed Khanmagomedov, told the Kavkazsky Uzel (Caucasian Knot) news site that Starodubtsev was unable to identify the man, even though his mask slid off during the attack.

Starodubtsev told Meduza that his attackers also asked him about a State Duma lawmaker and co-owner of a Derbent brandy producer, Murad Gadzhiyev — questions that he interpreted as an indication that the attackers thought Gadzhiyev was funding his anti-corruption project.

Starodubtsev said he was not acquainted with the lawmaker, Meduza reported.

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