

106TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

S. RES. 261

Expressing the sense of the Senate regarding the detention of Andrei Babitsky by the Government of the Russian Federation and freedom of the press in Russia.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

FEBRUARY 24, 2000

Mr. HELMS (for himself, Mr. BIDEN, Mr. ROTH, Mr. LOTT, and Mr. DODD) submitted the following resolution; which was considered and agreed to

RESOLUTION

Expressing the sense of the Senate regarding the detention of Andrei Babitsky by the Government of the Russian Federation and freedom of the press in Russia.

Whereas Andrei Babitsky, a dedicated and professional journalist for Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) for the last 10 years, reported on the 1994–1996 and the current Russo-Chechen wars;

Whereas on December 27, 1999, the Russian Information Committee (RIC) in Chechnya accused Babitsky of “conspiracy with Chechen rebels” after he broadcast a story that shed unfavorable light on Russian military actions in Chechnya;

Whereas on January 8, 2000, Russian security agents raided Babitsky’s apartment in Moscow and confiscated several

items and later ordered his wife, Ludmila Babitskaya, to report to a local militia station in Moscow after she attempted to pick up photographs taken by her husband in Chechnya;

Whereas on January 18, 2000, Babitsky was reportedly detained by Russian authorities in Moscow but later reports indicated that he was not formally arrested until January 27, 2000;

Whereas on January 26, 2000, Russian presidential spokesman Sergei Yastrzhembsky said that Babitsky “left Grozny and then disappeared” and declared that Russian security services had no idea as to his whereabouts and that “his security is not guaranteed”;

Whereas on January 28, 2000, Russian media officials told RFE/RL that Babitsky would be released with apologies after having been charged with participating in “an illegal armed formation”;

Whereas on February 2, 2000, Moscow officials announced that Babitsky would be transferred from Naursky district near Chechnya to Gudermes and then to Moscow where he would then be released on his own recognizance;

Whereas on February 3, 2000, Russian presidential spokesman Sergei Yastrzhembsky said that Russian officials exchanged Babitsky for 3 Russian prisoners of war and on the same day, Vladimir Ustinov, acting Russian prosecutor general, said Babitsky had been released and had gone over to the Chechens on his own accord;

Whereas the Government of the Russian Federation has repeatedly issued contradictory statements on the detention of Andrei Babitsky and provided neither a credible ac-

counting of its detention of Babitsky nor any credible evidence of his well-being;

Whereas United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Mary Robinson stated on February 16 that Russian behavior in Chechnya and the detention of Andrei Babitsky appears to violate the Geneva conventions to which Russia is a signatory;

Whereas on February 16, 2000, Russian Human Rights Commissioner Oleg Mironov denounced Moscow's handling of Babitsky as a violation of Russian law and international law and stated that the situation surrounding Babitsky signals "that the same thing may happen to every reporter";

Whereas the Union of Journalists in Russia declared on February 16 that the case of Andrei Babitsky is "not an isolated episode, but almost a turning point in the struggle for a press that serves society and not the authorities" and that "the threat to freedom of speech in Russia has for the first time in the last several years transformed into its open and regular suppression";

Whereas freedom of the press is both a central element of democracy as well as a catalyst for democratic reform;

Whereas the Government of the Russian Federation has repeatedly violated the principles of freedom of the press by subjecting journalists who question or oppose its policies to censorship, intimidation, harassment, incarceration, and violence; by restricting beyond internationally accepted limits their access to information; and by issuing misleading and false information; and

Whereas the Government of the Russian Federation has egregiously restricted the efforts of journalists to report on

the indiscriminate brutality of Russia's use of force in Chechnya: Now, therefore, be it

1 *Resolved*, That it is the sense of the Senate that—

2 (1) the detention of Andrei Babitsky by the
3 Government of the Russian Federation and the mis-
4 information the Government of the Russian Federa-
5 tion has issued concerning this matter—

6 (A) constitute reprehensible treatment of a
7 civilian in a conflict zone in violation of the Ge-
8 neva Conventions and applicable protocols; and

9 (B) demonstrate the Government of the
10 Russian Federation's intolerance toward a free
11 and open press;

12 (2) the conduct of the Government of the Rus-
13 sian Federation leaves it responsible for the safety
14 of Andrei Babitsky;

15 (3) the Government of the Russian Federation
16 should take steps to secure the safe return of RFE/
17 RL reporter Andrei Babitsky to his family;

18 (4) the Government of the Russian Federation
19 should provide a full accounting of Mr. Babitsky's
20 detention and the charges he may face; and

21 (5) the Russian authorities should immediately
22 halt their harassment of journalists, foreign and do-
23 mestic, who cover the war in Chechnya and any
24 other event in the Russian Federation and should

1 fully adhere to the Universal Declaration of Human
2 Rights, which declares in article 19 that “everyone
3 has the right to freedom of opinion and expression;
4 this right includes the freedom to hold opinions
5 without interference and to seek, receive and impart
6 information and ideas through any media regardless
7 of frontiers”.

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