

Spanish-Russian journalist Pablo González held in Polish prison for nearly a year on bogus spy charges

Alice Summers
20 January 2023

Next month, Spanish-Russian journalist Pablo González will have been in prison for a year after being arrested for allegedly spying for the Russian government. González was detained on February 28, days after the NATO-provoked Russian invasion of Ukraine, as he covered the refugee crisis in the Polish town of Rzeszow. If convicted, he faces up to 10 years in prison.

On November 24, a regional Polish court in the southeastern city of Przemysl ruled that González's preventative detention would continue for a further three months—taking his imprisonment to a full year. This is the third time his detention has been extended, after previous court orders in May and August, despite González not having been put on trial or found guilty of any crime. Last week, the appeals court of the Polish town of Rzeszów rejected González's appeal against the extension of preventive detention.

No proof has been presented that the journalist handed any information to the Russian secret services or that he ever had any intention of doing so. Among the spurious “evidence” cited by the Polish authorities is that González, who has dual nationality, was in possession of two passports bearing different names, one Russian and one Spanish—implying that one was a false identity used for espionage.

González's Russian passport names him as Pavel Rubtsov, using his father's surname; his Spanish document identifies him as Pablo González Yagüe, using his mother's two surnames. Pablo is the Hispanicised version of the Russian name Pavel.

The arrest of a journalist on unsubstantiated espionage charges is an anti-democratic attack on freedom of speech. It is a reactionary measure aimed at

intimidating reporters and silencing opposition to the official, state-sanctioned narratives on the imperialist proxy war in Ukraine instigated by Washington and its NATO allies.

It has far-reaching implications for the ability of journalists to report on and criticise the actions of the imperialist powers globally, amid a concerted campaign to obscure and falsify the real origins of the war in Ukraine, presenting it as a one-sided Russian attack on its defenceless neighbour.

In reality, the war in Ukraine is the latest escalation in the imperialist drive to militarily encircle and weaken Russia, which has seen NATO expand hundreds of miles eastward since the end of the Soviet Union, provoke a coup in Ukraine in 2014 and carry out dozens of large-scale military exercises on Russia's borders.

Since the Russian invasion in February last year, Washington and its NATO allies have funnelled billions of dollars in weapons, training and other military aid to Ukraine, and encouraged this country to take direct offensive action targeting Russian territory. Madrid had donated €238 million in military aid to Ukraine by October last year and is now training hundreds of soldiers on Spanish soil.

The Spanish coalition government of the Socialist Party (PSOE) and Podemos is fully complicit in the arbitrary detention of González. At the end of July, during an official visit to Poland, PSOE Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez stated that the arrest of the journalist had been discussed with Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki, but refused to provide any specific information about the conversation. Since then, the PSOE-Podemos government has done nothing to secure

González's freedom.

At the end of November, at a meeting of NATO foreign ministers to discuss the war in Ukraine, Spain's PSOE Foreign Minister José Manuel Albares issued a pathetic appeal to his Polish counterpart, Zbigniew Rau, to bring González to trial "as soon as possible ... once the investigation is completed."

But speaking to the Spanish press the same day, Albares made clear that his government would do nothing to defend González: "We have to respect the Polish legal system in this matter. What I am asking is that, as soon as possible, he can be brought to trial, where he has a right to [legal] defence, as he has already had. His lawyer knows the charges, he can present whatever appeals he wants. He [González] has access to him."

This utter disregard for the democratic rights of its own citizen makes a mockery of any claim by Spain's PSOE-Podemos government to be a "progressive" or even "left-wing" administration. After making a few perfunctory calls for González's freedom after his arrest earlier this year, the "left-populist" Podemos, the junior partner in the Spanish government, has largely dropped the issue.

Recent letters, reported in the Spanish press and revealing the appalling conditions of González's imprisonment, are an indictment of the PSOE-Podemos government. In a letter to the platform #FreePablo received on November 21, but likely written earlier in the autumn, González had expressed his concerns about the Polish winter weather and his poor state of physical and mental health.

"Over here, truthfully, nothing much is new; it's what solitary confinement is like," the letter begins. "Most of the time I'm in good spirits, although I sometimes have moments when I'm feeling much lower. It's been several months in complete isolation and it's weighing down on me."

"I suppose that this winter we will not have heating," González continued. "They [the Polish government] have barely anything for schools, so imagine the prisons. ... I asked, and the Spanish Embassy has asked too, for thermal indoor clothing. They refused. On the other hand, the [prison] director did allow me to have an extra blanket."

Speaking about his cell block, the journalist's letter added: "In my section [of the prison] the windows

don't open, and there is no way of ventilating; it's hot in summer and condensation builds up in winter." As for food, González explained that "I'm lacking protein; what I do consume I have to buy with the money that is sent to me from outside the prison. I'm lacking a lot of vitamins, so I'm fighting to be able to buy them, as well as antioxidants."

In a separate letter to the Polish interior minister, Zbigniew Ziobro, also towards the end of November, Reporters Without Borders (RSF) also described the "particularly hard conditions" facing González.

"He has to use handcuffs at all times when he's allowed out of his cell, his cell and bathroom are constantly watched by cameras, the prison officers make him undress various times a day and put him through meticulous searches," the RSF letter explains. It continues: "He is only allowed to shower once a week and he has not received a visit from a dermatologist for weeks for his skin problem."

Denouncing the "unusually severe preventive methods" used against González, RSF also adds: "The [Polish] authorities have refused to inform him about what the accusations of spying are based on, and the journalist has still not been given a trial." RSF does not, however, call for González's release, instead making a tentative plea to the Polish government to "consider if it is necessary to keep a person who is presumed innocent in isolation for such a long time."

The International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) demands the immediate release of Pablo González and an end to the intimidation and censorship of anti-war journalists and activists. This must be part of a broader movement against the NATO war in Eastern Europe, and the participation of the PSOE-Podemos government in it.



To contact the WSWWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)