The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Gay Activist Says He Was Seized by Agents

September 19, 2010



A prominent gay rights activist who vanished from a Moscow airport last week said he is back in the capital after being held for more than two days by men he believes were state security agents.

The disappearance of Nikolai Alexeyev from Domodedovo Airport sparked concern in Western Europe, with the French Foreign Ministry publicly calling on Russia to respect his freedom of movement and a German lawmaker saying that country's diplomats were working for his release.

Alexeyev said by telephone Saturday that he was heading to board a Geneva-bound plane on Wednesday, but was stopped by airport officials after passing through passport and security control and told his baggage needed further inspection. He said he was taken to a small office and that the officials told a Swiss Airlines representative to offload Alexeyev's checked baggage.

Swiss spokeswoman Andrea Kreuzer said the company was informed that Alexeyev had not

properly passed security checks. Domodedovo officials have said Alexeyev was detained after refusing to remove his footwear at the security check.

Thereafter, he said, he was spirited out of the airport by four men who were not in uniform and didn't identify themselves and was driven to a police station in the city of Kashira, about 40 kilometers from the airport.

Once there, the men insulted him, using "all the slang words for homosexuals in the dictionary" and demanded he withdraw suits he had filed with the European Court of Human Rights protesting Moscow's banning of gay rights rallies.

The men also confiscated his cellular telephone, he said.

Interfax on Friday reported that it had received text messages from Alexeyev's phone claiming that he was seeking political asylum in Belarus and withdrawing the European court suits. Alexeyev said the texts were sent after his phone was seized.

The next night he was taken to Tula, some 200 kilometers south of Moscow, and by this time "I really thought something bad was going to happen; it was really frightening," he said.

But the men took him to the outskirts of the city around dawn on Saturday and released him, after which he made his way by bus to Moscow.

Alexeyev is widely known in the international gay rights movement for his repeated efforts to organize parades in Moscow. Mayor Yury Luzhkov has publicly called homosexuals "satanic" and routinely bans the gatherings, most of which are harshly dispersed by police within minutes.

Gay activists have announced plans to rally outside the Mayor's Office on Tuesday to protest his recent use of the word "fag," which a court subsequently ruled could not be deemed offensive.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2010/09/19/gay-activist-says-he-was-seized-by-agents-a1494