2 Detained Over Stunt To Overturn Police Cars

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Moscow police have detained two artists on suspicion of flipping over police cars in St. Petersburg on a hot September night in a protest against police corruption.

The artists, Leonid Nikolayev and Oleg Vorotnikov, members of the radical art group Voina (War), were detained by police officers from the anti-extremism department at an apartment near the Begovaya metro station on Monday, St. Petersburg news site Fontanka.ru reported Tuesday.

Nikolayev and Vorotnikov were sent to St. Petersburg to face possible hooliganism charges, punishable by up to five years in prison, the report said. They were not charged as of Tuesday evening.

A third suspect, Natalya Sokol, was also detained at the apartment, but she was subsequently released, it said.

A Voina activist criticized the hooliganism charges as "absurd."

"Every radical member of the opposition is charged with this," the activist, who would only give her first name, Nadezhda, said by telephone.

She said no one was injured in the Sept. 16 stunt, dubbed "Palace Revolution," and the cars themselves only received slight scratches. Police officers remained in two of the six cars that were overturned in the vicinity of the downtown Mikhailovsky Palace.

Lawyer Yury Yeronin, however, said the absence of injuries was a poor legal defense. Yeronin represented Khimki forest activists Alexei Gaskarov and Maxim Solopov, who were charged with hooliganism this summer.

The police car stunt borders on showing resistance to the police and making an attempt on the lives of police officers, activities that carry criminal charges, Yeronin said.

Calls to the St. Petersburg police press office went unanswered Tuesday.

Nadezhda vowed that Voina would press ahead with its theatrical protests against state corruption despite the arrests. Among other things, the group painted a 65-meter penis on a St. Petersburg drawbridge on the eve of an international economic forum in June.

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