

High-Profile Activist Charged in May 6 Protest Violence

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Maria Baronova is captured on a video exhorting protesters to charge a police line, which led to an indictment.

Moscow police filed criminal charges Thursday against a high-profile activist and hinted at further legal troubles for a pair of Duma deputies in the latest move in an increasingly forceful crackdown on opposition leaders.

Maria Baronova, a former assistant to Duma Deputy Ilya Ponomaryov, was formally charged with inciting violence during a chaotic May 6 rally on Bolotnaya Ploshchad. She was not detained but was ordered not to leave the country.

Baronova becomes the 13th activist charged in connection with the May rally, where clashes between protesters and riot police at the entrance to the site of a sanctioned demonstration ended with dozens of injuries and over 400 detentions.

A YouTube video from the protest appears to show Baronova urging protesters to charge police lines, but Baronova wrote on her blog on Thursday that the legal action was politically motivated.

“Apparently, the logic is: Let’s charge her with something, then show the whole country how opposition leaders are ‘throwing a girl under the bus’” she told Radio Liberty.

Baronova’s apartment was among those searched by investigators last week during raids that also targeted the homes of opposition leaders Alexei Navalny, Sergei Udaltsov, Ilya Yashin and Ksenia Sobchak. Investigators seized electronics, propaganda — and at Sobchak’s apartment, \$1.7 million in cash.

Of the group, only Baronova has been charged, while the others have been repeatedly questioned as witnesses.

News of the charge against Baronova came as First Deputy Prime Minister Igor Shuvalov called on the government to work with anti-government protesters.

“We are, of course, obliged to work with everyone, including those who protested on Bolotnaya and Prospekt Sakharova, as well as those who don’t agree with them. The task of government is to form a social consensus,” Shuvalov told investors and senior officials in St. Petersburg, adding that the government should explain necessary but unpopular decisions.

Meanwhile, pressure appeared to be mounting on A Just Russia Duma Deputies Gennady and Dmitry Gudkov after a tabloid news website published allegations Thursday that police seized a truckload of “gray-market” iPhones and iPads on the grounds of their family’s companies.

The two denied the Lifenews.ru report, which cited an anonymous police source, saying that the electronics were discovered in a neighboring building.

But a police representative insisted that the electronics were seized at the address where the Gudkovs’ businesses are located, RIA-Novosti reported. The representative said a decision had not yet been made to open a criminal case.

Last month, a private security company belonging to the Gudkov family was stripped of a key license after inspectors said the company was storing weapons improperly. They said the move was retaliation for their support of the opposition.

Staff writer Howard Amos contributed to this report.

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