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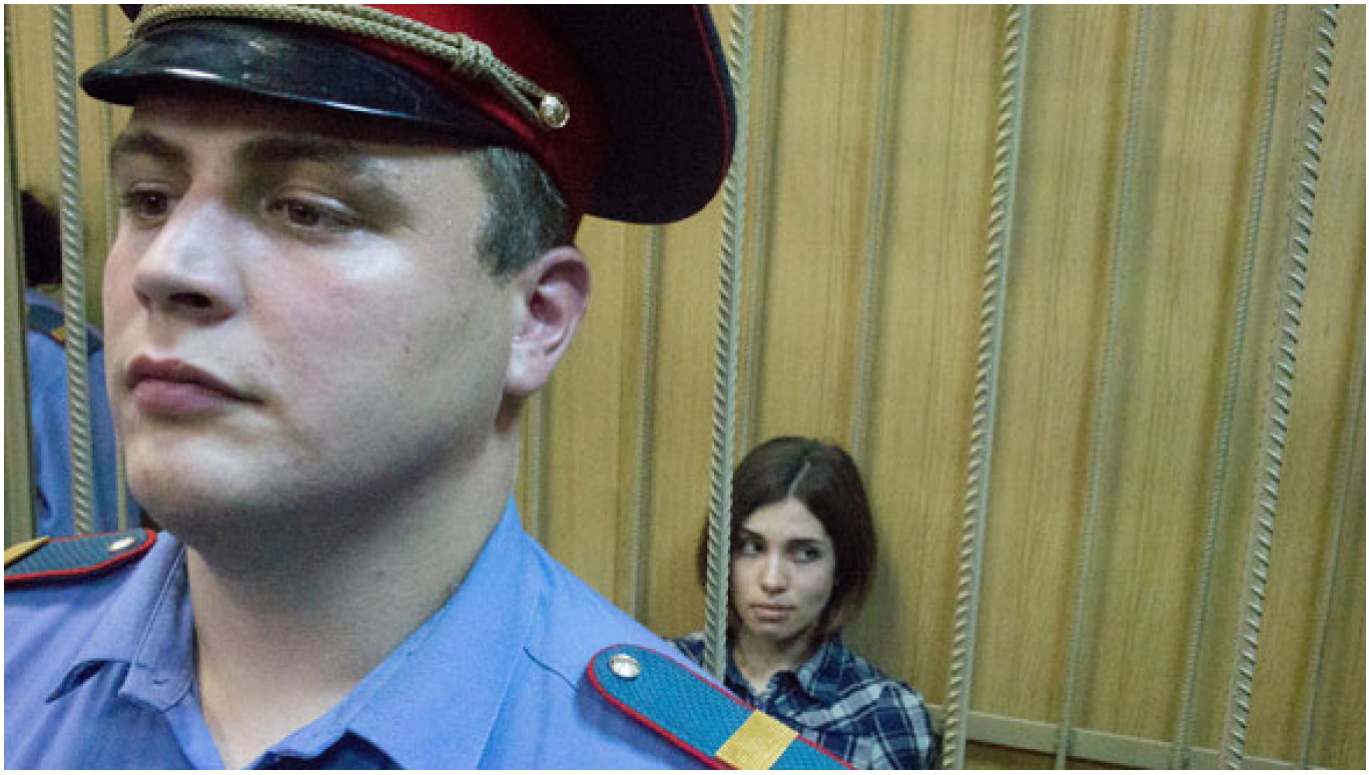
Initial Hearing on Pussy Riot Case Set for July 20

By The Moscow Times

July 12, 2012



Nadezhda Tolokonnikova, right, in court for a hearing on June 20. **Vladimir Filonov**

A first closed hearing will be held July 20 on the hooliganism case against three alleged members of punk band Pussy Riot, who are accused of having taken part in an unsanctioned performance of an anti-Putin song in Christ the Savior Cathedral.

The Khamovnichesky District Court, which was forwarded the case by prosecutors Thursday, will decide on a trial date and whether to keep the trio in detention, where the women have been held since March, Interfax reported. The women face up to seven years in prison if convicted.

The defendants — Nadezhda Tolokonnikova, Maria Alyokhina and Yekaterina Samutsevich — deny taking part in the Feb. 21 performance of a song with the lyrics "Mother of God, Cast Putin Out!" in the cathedral. Four women wearing colorful masks performed in the church. The fourth suspect remains at large.

The charges passed to the court Thursday state that the women "caused significant damage to the sacred values of the church ... and in a blasphemous manner disgraced the ancient foundations of the Russian Orthodox Church."

One observer criticized the charges' use of religious language, saying it was out of place in a state document.

"The wording is appalling, medieval," Nikolai Shaburov, head of the Religious Studies Research Center at Russian State University for the Humanities, told Nezavisimaya Gazeta in an article published Friday.

"We still have a secular government, after all. We have no such formulations in the criminal code," Shaburov said.

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