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# Pussy Riot Detention Extended to 2013

By Jonathan Earle

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Orthodox believers rallying on Suvorovskaya Ploshchad on Sunday in defense of the church. The T-shirt reads, “We are Russians! Glory to Russia!” **Vladimir Filonov**

A court extended into next year the detention of three women suspected of performing an anti-Putin song in a Moscow church, prompting condemnation from opposition figures and comparisons to the case of jailed tycoon Mikhail Khodorkovsky.

Just as with Khodorkovsky, some observers placed the blame for the women's jailing squarely at the feet of President Vladimir Putin, accusing him of being behind the decision to keep the trio locked up.

"President Putin is keeping three young female artists behind bars for their insubordination," said Marieluise Beck, a member of the German parliament's foreign relations committee.

"The prolongation of their detention until 2013 ... will encourage the president to make these women his personal prisoners," she said in a statement.

At a closed hearing at the Khomovnichesky District Court, the site of Khodorkovsky's 2010 trial for embezzlement and tax evasion, Judge Marina Syrova on Friday approved prosecutors' motion to keep the women in pretrial detention until Jan. 12, 2013, more than nine months after they were arrested.

Their lawyers pledged to appeal the decision.

The women face up to seven years in prison if convicted of hooliganism charges stemming from their alleged participation in a performance of a song called "Mother of God, Cast Putin Out!" by four masked members of feminist punk band Pussy Riot in Christ the Savior Cathedral on Feb. 21.

The performance was strongly condemned by state and church officials, who have called on the women to repent. The suspects have denied the charges.

Prosecutors have argued that the three women — Nadezhda Tolokonnikova, 22; Maria Alyokhina, 24; and Yekaterina Samutsevich, 29 — are flight risks and could commit new crimes if let go.

Lawyers for a group of churchgoers and church security guards who witnessed the performance made a more sensational claim Friday, arguing that Pussy Riot's "rock prayer" had inspired bloody attacks on Muslim leaders in Tatarstan on Thursday and that therefore the women should not be freed, defense lawyer Violetta Volkova said, Gazeta.ru reported.

Another of the women's lawyers, Mark Feigin, called the ruling illegal and described it as a show of force by the Kremlin in the face of growing calls for the women's release.

"It's not a matter of law. It's not a matter of reason," he said by telephone after the hearing. "It's a way of saying, 'We can do what we want.'"

Feigin speculated that the trial, whose date is expected to be announced at a hearing Monday, would take place next month and that the women would be found guilty and imprisoned.

The women have already filed an appeal regarding their detention with the European Court of Human Rights.

On Monday, the court is also expected to announce its ruling on a raft of motions by the defense, including requests for testimony by Putin and Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill and for new psychological and linguistic analyses.

Dozens of the women's supporters, including novelist Boris Akunin and poet Lev Rubinshtein, and about an equal number of their critics demonstrated outside the courtroom during the hearing Friday.

Four protesters were detained, including a young woman and an elderly man after they started shouting, "Free Pussy Riot."

According to the results of a poll released Friday by the independent Levada Center, 50 percent of Muscovites oppose criminal prosecution of the members of Pussy Riot.

In a reminder of how the case has polarized society, a sanctioned rally Sunday that was billed as a defense of the chuch attracted hundreds of people, many holding icons and waving the nationalist tricolor. Two young women held a sign that said "Blasphemers should go to jail!"

Friday's decision was met with denouncements and lamentations from the opposition, which has made vehement calls for the women to be released, calling them political prisoners.

"This goes beyond blatant lawlessness. It's sadism. They're behaving like cannibals," opposition leader Alexei Navalny wrote on his Facebook page.

Amnesty International declared the women prisoners of conscience in April, and last month, over 100 prominent cultural figures, including actress and Putin supporter Chulpan Khamatova and rocker Boris Gribenshchikov, signed an open letter to the Supreme Court calling for the suspects' release.

In a sign that the case is attracting increasing international attraction, the lead singers of the rock bands Red Hot Chili Peppers and Franz Ferdinand voiced support for Pussy Riot during concerts in Russia on Friday and Saturday, respectively.

The case has increasingly been compared to that of Khodorkovsky, the former Yukos CEO, who has become a symbol of Kremlin repression in the eyes of his liberal supporters.

Khodorkovsky was convicted on charges of fraud and tax evasion in 2005 and, in a second trial, of embezzlement and tax evasion in 2010. His defenders call his jailing punishment for conducting anti-Kremlin political activities.

"Six months without a sentence is far worse than a suspended sentence. ... It looks like they've decided to turn the girls into stars like Khodorkovsky," Moscow State University professor and Public Chamber member Ivan Zassoursky wrote on his Facebook page.

While Friday's hearing took place in the same courthouse where Khodorkovsky and his business partner, Platon Lebedev, were convicted in late 2010, the case is also expected to be heard by the same judge who ruled in the second Khodorkovsky trial, Viktor Danilkin.

Stanislav Belkovsky, a former Kremlin insider who has been accused of helping mastermind the first trial against Khodorkovsky in 2004, said it did not matter who the judge was in the case against the Pussy Riot women, calling the outcome predetermined.

"I'm almost completely certain that the women will be imprisoned regardless of who presides over the trial," Belkovsky said by telephone.

Former Kremlin spin doctor Gleb Pavlovsky said Putin was making a "colossal mistake" by keeping the suspected Pussy Riot members in prison.

"Now everybody believes that he's directing this," Pavlovsky said by telephone. "It doesn't look at all like a show of force to keep three young women in prison. It looks both stupid and pathetic."

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