The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Belarus KGB Summons Swedish Teddy Bear Stunt Team

August 12, 2012



Belarussian President Alexander Lukashenko fired two generals over the July 4 teddy bear drop. **Denis Grishkin**

STOCKHOLM — Belarus' top security agency, the KGB, has summoned a Swedish advertising team for questioning after the group air-dropped hundreds of parachute-wearing teddy bears that carried pro-human rights messages onto Belarussian soil.

The KGB has threatened the Swedes with fines or even jail time if they don't show up within 10 days.

The July 4 teddy bear drop by Studio Total infuriated Belarussian President Alexander Lukashenko, who fired two generals over it. The incident also may have added stress to already deteriorating diplomatic relations between Stockholm and Minsk.

The summons, signed by an investigator identified as P. Tsernavsky and posted on the KGB's website Saturday, says the agency is investigating the "criminal case" of the ad group's "illegal crossing" into Belarussian airspace.

The KGB said it wants the Swedes to participate in its "investigative actions" so it can clarify the role each person played and help it decide how to deal with two Belarussian men accused of aiding the Swedes.

One of the Belarussian suspects, a journalism student, was arrested after he posted photos of the teddy bears on his personal website; the other is a real estate agent who is said to have offered the Swedes an apartment when they visited Belarus sometime before the stunt.

If the Swedes don't show up within 10 days, the agency said they could face a fine or "correctional work for up to two years, or imprisonment for up to six months."

Studio Total co-founder Tomas Mazetti, who piloted the plane in the teddy bear drop, said that he received the summons via e-mail and that it demands that he and two colleagues, Hannah Frey and Per Cromwell, appear.

It's "a bit cute and tragic at the same time," he said. "They just expect us to show up just because they say so."

Mazetti said that the group wants legal advice before deciding what to do and that the team members would likely demand guarantees that they would not be detained if they showed up.

Studio Total has previously staged attention-grabbing campaigns by burning up stacks of cash and setting up a fake sex school in Austria. Mazetti said it orchestrated the noncommercial air drop of the 879 teddy bears to shine a light on Belarus' poor record on human rights and freedom of speech and to embarrass its military, a pillar of Lukashenko's power.

Earlier this month, Belarus effectively expelled Sweden's ambassador and ordered the Nordic state to close its embassy. The United States and the European Union have expressed strong support for Sweden in the dispute.

Although the teddy bear drop was not officially cited as a reason for the embassy closure or the barring of Sweden's envoy, Lukashenko has accused Swedish diplomats of involvement in the stunt.

EU governments agreed at an emergency meeting in Brussels on Friday to reprimand Minsk for expelling the Swedish ambassador, Reuters reported.

"There is going to be a very clear message to all Belarussian ambassadors around Europe in the next few days expressing full solidarity with the Swedes on this," Swedish diplomat Olof Skoog said.

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