

Pussy Riot Greet 2-Year Sentence With a Smile

By [Natalia Krainova](#)

August 19, 2012



Maria Alyokhina showing the court's verdict as she sits in the defendants' cage with Yekaterina Samutsevich, center, and Nadezhda Tolokonnikova. **Vladimir Filonov**

Sad smiles broke out on the faces of the three Pussy Riot musicians as the judge announced that each would be jailed for two years for singing a punk song at a Moscow cathedral.

In a trial widely believed to have been directed by the Kremlin, the trio — Nadezhda Tolokonnikova, 22; Maria Alyokhina, 24; and Yekaterina Samutsevich, 30 — were found guilty on Friday of taking part in an unsanctioned performance denouncing President Vladimir Putin at Christ the Savior Cathedral in February.

They were convicted of hooliganism motivated by religious hatred in a case that prompted outrage from the political opposition and supporters around the world.

"The verdict was ... handed down from above," defense lawyer Mark Feigin said.

"This is Putin's decision alone," he said glumly. "The verdict is a reflection of the political situation that exists in Russia. Lawlessness has become normal."

Judge Marina Syrova took three hours to read her verdict in the Khamovnichesky District Court packed with journalists and political activists.

"Members of the group Pussy Riot ... criminally colluded to commit a flagrant violation of social order, expressing manifest disrespect to society," Syrova said, adding that they were motivated by "religious hatred and hostility."

The defendants "committed provocative and insulting acts in a religious building," Syrova said.

The trio earlier apologized to Orthodox believers and denied being motivated by religious hatred, calling the performance an act of political protest.

When the judge pronounced the two-year sentence at around 6 p.m., Tolokonnikova, Alyokhina and Samutsevich smiled from within the steel-and-glass defendants' cage, where they had sat calmly in handcuffs since the trial convened at 3 p.m.

But their smiles seemed less defiant than at numerous hearings during their five months in custody.

As the judge read the sentence, another defense lawyer, Nikolai Polozov, rested his forehead on his palm and looked down despondently at the table in front of him.

Speaking to reporters outside the courthouse after the verdict, Feigin called the ruling "absolutely illegal" with inaccurate facts and quotes, and he said he held Putin personally responsible.

Feigin said he, Polozov and a third defense lawyer, Violetta Volkova, would appeal the verdict both to the Moscow City Court and the European Court of Human Rights.

The musicians will not ask Putin for a pardon.

"'Let them go to hell with their pardon' — these are the words of our defendants," Feigin said.

If the Moscow City Court upholds the verdict, the women will be freed in March 2014.

Before reaching the sentence, Judge Syrova said the guilty verdict was partly meant as a deterrent to anyone who might want to commit similar actions.

"Only by imprisonment and making the defendants serve real prison terms is it possible to ensure justice, for the defendants to mend their ways, and to prevent similar actions in the future," Syrova said.

During a visit to the London Olympics, Putin said the punk band shouldn't be "too harshly" punished. The prosecution subsequently asked for three years in prison in its closing remarks. The women had faced up to seven years under the charges.

The judge added that the length of the final prison term was based partly on mitigating circumstances in the women's lives, including the fact that two of them, Tolokonnikova and Alyokhina, had small children and that all three had positive references and no prior convictions.

Pussy Riot has become the most high-profile case since the second trial of former Yukos CEO Mikhail Khodorkovsky in 2010, making the front pages of newspapers around the globe.

Hundreds of journalists and demonstrators who support and oppose Pussy Riot gathered outside the Khamovnichesky court ahead of the verdict.

Opposition leaders Sergei Udaltsov and Garry Kasparov arrived to the courthouse after 3 p.m. and were soon arrested by police. A total of 97 demonstrators were detained for various offenses, Interfax reported.

Anti-corruption lawyer and opposition leader Alexei Navalny attended the hearing as one of the few observers and journalists allowed into the courtroom.

After the sentence for the women was announced, competing cries of "Go to prison!" and "Free Pussy Riot!" arose from the crowd of demonstrators outside the court building.

Almost two hours after the trial ended, dozens of people remained gathered several blocks away from the court building, periodically shouting "Shame!" and "We are not afraid."

Support for the women has been voiced by the United States, the European Union and a chorus of Western politicians, including German lawmakers. International pop stars like Paul McCartney and Madonna and human rights groups have also rallied in their support.

Protests by people dressed in colorful clothes and balaclavas — Pussy Riot's trademark outfits — were staged around the world around the time the verdict was announced, including in London, Paris, Melbourne and other cities.

In Moscow, as protesters lingered around the court building following the verdict, two men in a red car turned on a loud Pussy Riot song that included the lyrics, "The country is heading into the streets with impudence, the country is going to bid farewell to the regime." Dozens of journalists and demonstrators immediately approached the car and began photographing it and dancing to the music.

Police then detained the two men in the car, prompting cries from the crowd of "Fascists!" At least eight more people who gathered around the car were subsequently detained as well.

One of the band's supporters, Tatyana Romanova, faces up to 15 days in prison after she was chased by a policeman to the Turkish Embassy near the court building.

Romanova, wearing a pink balaclava, holding a poster and chanting slogans, scaled a wire fence at the embassy to protest the trial. When the police officer reached for her, Romanova gracefully climbed over onto the Turkish side, followed by two police officers and chanting from the crowd.

A police colonel commanding the riot police at the scene saw the unfolding incident

and barked to the officers, "Don't climb there!" according to Interfax. But the policemen [brought Romanova down](#) on Turkish territory, where she was taken into the embassy building.

Turkish officials refused to allow the police to detain her.

"Turkey's ambassador led the policemen off the Turkish territory, gave me some water and voiced support," Romanova said on Twitter later Friday.

She safely left the building, but was quickly spotted by the police and detained.

Orthodox activists also gathered outside the court building, shouting, "Burn the witches!" Kommersant reported, while a group of Cossacks tried to light a bonfire.

The Russian Orthodox Church's leadership called on the authorities to "show clemency toward the convicted in the hope that they will refrain from new sacrilegious actions."

In the first official [statement](#) from the church on the case, it said that the band's stunt was "a grave sin" that had insulted believers, but now needed to be forgiven.

Related articles:

- [Guilty Verdict Puts the Heat on Putin](#)
- [Pussy Riot's Crime and Unfair Punishment](#)
- [Nudity, Masks and Color: Protests for Pussy Riot](#)

Original url:

<https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2012/08/19/pussy-riot-greets-2-year-sentence-with-a-smile-a17132>