

Spanish Police Arrest Khimki Forest Activist

By [Jonathan Earle](#)

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Pyotr Silayev speaking to the Dozhd online TV station in April.

Acting on a new request from Russian prosecutors, Spanish police have arrested one of the suspected masterminds of a July 2010 mob attack on Khimki's City Hall.

Pyotr Silayev was arrested at a hotel in Granada on Tuesday and faces extradition to Russia pending the decision of a Spanish court, a local police representative told Radio Liberty on Wednesday.

The information was confirmed by Denis Solopov, another suspect in the case.

"The arrest was a response to a new request by Russian prosecutors to Interpol. There's probably another one with my name on it," he wrote in e-mailed comments, adding that Silayev and his lawyer were unavailable for comment.

Silayev and Solopov are wanted in connection with an incident in which dozens of anarchist

and anti-fascist youths wearing balaclavas threw stones and fired pneumatic pistols at Khimki's main administrative building, causing 395,000 rubles (\$12,500) in damage.

The attack was a response to the city's support for the construction of a highway that would cut through local forestland and that activists say is illegal.

The act drew sharp words from Yevgenia Chirikova, a prominent figure in the forest defense movement who is running for mayor of the city. She said the masked youths had nothing to do with her movement. City Hall officials called the attack an act of terrorism.

Silayev and Solopov fled to Finland and the Netherlands, respectively, and were later granted political asylum.

But having asylum in one country won't stop extradition proceedings in another, said Tanya Lokshina of Human Rights Watch. "The Spanish are likely to follow the Finns' logic and refuse the extradition request, but they're under no obligation to do so," she said by telephone on Wednesday.

Solopov, however, said the chances of Silayev being extradited were "close to zero."

"Officials at Interpol's office in Russia periodically play these games. But aside from discrediting themselves, they don't accomplish anything. ... The police discover that a person has refugee status, and they release him," he wrote.

Asked whether they were aware of Silayev's political refugee status, a Spanish police spokesman said he was arrested carrying a Russian passport and no other documents, Radio Liberty reported.

Repeated calls to the National Court in Madrid, which was scheduled to hear Silayev's case on Wednesday afternoon, went unanswered on Wednesday.

Russian authorities have had little success prosecuting two other suspects in the case.

Alexei Gaskarov was acquitted by a Khimki court, which ruled that he was present but did not participate in the violence, and Solopov's brother Maxim received a two-year suspended sentence.

The outcome of Silayev's case could have implications for other political activists who have fled the country in recent months, including most recently a married couple seeking asylum in Ukraine for fear of being arrested in connection with a violent opposition rally in May.

It remains to be seen whether the detention of 13 suspects linked to the rally, the jailing of the punk protest band Pussy Riot last week, and increased fines for illegal rallies and statements will persuade more activists to move abroad.

In addition to his political activism, Silayev is known as "Petya Kosovo," author of a journal on Openspace.ru and the book "Iskhod" ("Exodus"), a finalist for the Andrei Bely prize.

Should he be extradited, he might at least have the pleasure of knowing that he outlasted former Khimki Mayor Vladimir Strelchenko, who resigned last week.

Strelchenko, a former Afghan war veteran and close associate of former Governor Boris Gromov, had been accused by opponents of ordering attacks against naysayers to the \$8 billion toll road's construction, which activists have failed to halt.

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