The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Razvozzhayev Tells Harrowing Tale

By Nikolaus von Twickel

October 23, 2012



Leonid Razvozzhayev

Opposition leaders and human rights groups on Wednesday lambasted the apparent kidnapping and torture of Left Front activist Leonid Razvozzhayev as a return to Stalinist political repression and an unprecedented escalation in the crackdown against dissenters.

"Our country has entered a new era of Stalin-like repressions," veteran rights activist Valery Borshchyov told reporters after visiting Razvozzhayev in Moscow's notorious Lefortovo detention center.

Baffled analysts offered various explanations of why law enforcement bodies would choose to persecute a hitherto little-known activist with a severity likely to invoke an international outcry.

Razvozzhayev on Tuesday told a delegation of the Public Monitoring Commission, an officially sanctioned prison watchdog, that he was subjected to psychological torture before signing an admission of guilt, said Borshchyov, who heads the commission.

Captors told Razvozzhayev that his wife and two children would be killed if he did not confirm allegations made in a recent documentary on the state-controlled NTV channel that he was plotting to incite anti-Kremlin riots, Borshchyov said.

Razvozzhayev disappeared Friday in Kiev, where he had sought assistance to obtain refugee status. He reappeared Sunday in Moscow, where a court sanctioned his arrest, and was charged Tuesday with plotting to incite anti-government riots.

If convicted, he faces up to a decade in prison.

According to Borshchyov, Razvozzhayev told the commission members that he was abducted by four men, three of whom were masked, after leaving the office of the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society in the Ukrainian capital to buy some food.

The attackers put him in a truck, handcuffed him and chained his legs to the handcuffs before wrapping his hands and legs in tape, he told the commission, adding that a balaclava was forced over his face. He said he would recognize his attackers, one of whom spoke with a Ukrainian accent.

He said that after a five-hour drive he was put into another car with other people, who he believes were Russian. He was driven to a basement, presumably just across the Russian-Ukrainian border, he said, where he was subjected to almost three days of intense pressure, which Borshchyov described as "psychological torture."

Razvozzhayev told the commission he had to write his confession crouching under the confines of the chains. "He was told he would be killed and no one would find his grave," Borshchyov said. He explained that Razvozzhayev wanted to reject his confession, but that such a move would be difficult.

"They didn't give him food or drink. He was not allowed to go to the bathroom and was constantly ridiculed," fellow commission member Zoya Svetova told reporters. "Any degradation of human dignity is torture," she said.

The commission members said Razvozzhayev told them he was also threatened with having to take a mind-altering drug if he did not answer questions in the desired way. Razvozzhayev slurred when he spoke, they said, causing them to suspect he had been drugged anyway.

They added that the captors' skills made it likely they were special service officers rather than ordinary criminals.

Razvozzhayev told the commission that when his captors drove him to the Investigative Committee in Moscow on Sunday, they seemed to know the officers there.

The chairman of the Kremlin's human rights council, Mikhail Fedotov, accused law enforcement authorities of criminal conduct. Speaking on Ekho Moskvy radio on Wednesday, Fedotov said that if Razvozzhayev's claims were confirmed, they entail a criminal case.

"If you look into the Criminal Code, you will see it black and white — to kidnap someone is a crime. I was taught from childhood on — to defend the law you must not break the law," he said, adding that he had asked both Prosecutor General Yury Chaika and Investigative

Committee chief Alexander Bastrykin to commence an investigation.

The Investigative Committee said it was looking into the accusations but stressed that Razvozzhayev had not complained. "No official complaint about torture or kidnapping or any other unlawful actions has been received," committee spokesman Vladimir Markin said in a statement on the agency's website.

Analysts suggested that authorities were going after Razvozzhayev because they had too little evidence against Left Front leader Sergei Udaltsov.

Alexei Makarkin, of the Center for Political Technologies, said investigators needed Razvozzhayev's admission of guilt. "The film is not enough evidence," he said, referring to the "Anatomy of a Protest 2" documentary.

Svetova, of the monitoring commission, said the film and the criminal cases were "a planned chain of operations" against opposition leaders.

Investigators opened a criminal case against Udaltsov and others after the film was aired Oct. 5. Udaltsov has been barred from leaving Moscow since he was questioned and police searched his home.

Udaltsov's lawyer, Violetta Volkova, on Wednesday dismissed a media report that said he might seek to flee the country but suggested that he expected to be detained soon. Udaltsov had stopped taking telephone calls because he did not want to give interviews and wished to spend his last days in freedom in his own way, Volkova told Interfax.

She also confirmed that Udaltsov had been summoned to the Investigative Committee this Friday.

Volkova had originally planned to defend Razvozzhayev but was refused by investigators who argued that she could not defend multiple suspects with contradicting interests.

Razvozzhayev's new lawyer, Mark Feigin, who had at first failed to get permission to visit the detainee, said Wednesday on Twitter that the Investigative Committee accepted his request and that he would see his client on Thursday. Volkova and Feigin are well-known for their defense of members of the punk band Pussy Riot.

Analysts warned that the case would further damage the government's standing, both nationally and internationally. "Clearly now everybody will be talking about torture. This is a poison pill for Putin," said Gleb Pavlovsky, editor of the Russ.ru website and a former Kremlin adviser.

President Vladimir Putin will hold a public discussion with members of the Valdai Club of international Russia experts this Thursday.

Pavlovsky suggested that Razvozzhayev's case did not reflect a Kremlin plan. "These are [law enforcement] agencies trying to fulfill orders," he said.

Putin's spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, refused to comment on the accusations Wednesday. "This is hardly a case for the Kremlin ... but for investigators, prosecutors judges and lawyers and

human rights activists," Peskov was quoted by Interfax as saying.

Alexei Mukhin, an analyst with the Center for Political Information, suggested that Razvozzhayev had made up the accusations. "There was probably nothing illegal here," he said, adding that the trial of the Pussy Riot members had shown how "lawyers, crowds and journalists" acted together to distort the truth.

The pro-Kremlin tabloid site LifeNews, which on Sunday posted the video in which Razvozzhayev first made his torture allegations, published a report Wednesday saying there was evidence that his claims were unsubstantiated. The report quoted an undisclosed Investigative Committee source as saying the agency was checking claims that the so-called abduction was staged.

Also, Interfax quoted an unspecified law enforcement source as saying the abduction and torture accusations reflect a "hysterical media campaign" organized by the opposition.

Related articles:

- Duma Deputy to Take Razvozzhayev's Case to Europe
- Udaltsov Won't Flee Russia, Lawyer Says
- Opposition Riot 'Conspirator' Alleges Police Torture

Original url: https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2012/10/23/razvozzhayev-tells-harrowing-tale-a18846