The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

2 Militant Nationalists Arrested for Killings

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May 12, 2013



Two members of a militant nationalist group that has been implicated in a number of high-profile killings, including those of a prominent judge and an opposition journalist, have been detained in Serbia and Ukraine, the Investigative Committee said Monday.

Foreign law enforcement authorities detained Ilya Goryachev and Mikhail Volkov, members of the Militant Organization of Russian Nationalists, or BORN by its Russian abbreviation, investigators said in a statement.

Various members of the group have been implicated in more than a half-dozen killings, including those of Moscow City Court judge Eduard Chuvashov, who presided over court hearings on far-right groups, in 2010; lawyer Stanislav Markelov, who defended so-called "antifascists" in court cases, in 2009; and three leaders of the Russian antifascist movement. According to investigators, the group also killed a number of Caucasus and Central Asian natives from 2008 to 2010.

Goryachev and Volkov had been on an international wanted list as part of an investigation into BORN members and are suspected of racketeering, trafficking in illegal arms and explosive devices, and killings, the Investigative Committee said. It was unclear which killings in particular the pair was implicated in.

A Moscow court has ordered them detained in absentia, the committee said. It said both men faced imprisonment and the question of extradition was under discussion with Serbian and Ukrainian authorities.

Natalya Yudina, an expert with the Sova Center, a think tank that tracks racism and migrants' rights, said Goryachev was a leader of the Russian Image nationalist organization created in the early 2000s that was believed to have had links to the Kremlin.

In 2010, Goryachev testified in the trial against fellow BORN members Nikita Tikhonov and Yevgenia Khasis, who were convicted of killing Markelov and Novaya Gazeta journalist Anastasia Baburova, who was shot dead along with Markelov in central Moscow. Goryachev said Tikhonov confessed to having committed the crime.

He later recanted his testimony, saying it was given under pressure by law enforcement officers, but it was used anyway. Tikhonov was sentenced to life in prison and Khasis received 18 years behind bars.

News of Goryachev's detention surfaced last week, when unidentified officials told Interfax that he was detained in Belgrade on Thursday by the Serbian intelligence service. At the time, an unidentified Russian law enforcement official told Interfax that Russian security agencies had no claims to Goryachev and that he was not on a wanted list.

Goryachev's lawyer, Yevgeny Valyayev, told Interfax last week that his client called his mother and said he had been detained for violating the terms of his visa, although he had a residence permit to live in Serbia.

Goryachev moved to Serbia right after testifying against Tikhonov and Khasis. Novaya Gazeta reported Monday that he had close ties with Serbian nationalists and government officials, and the newspaper published a photograph of Goryachev drinking tea with Serbian Interior Minister Ivica Dačić. It is not clear when the photo was taken.

The newspaper also alleged that Serbia decided to extradite Goryachev to Russia due to its desire to enter the European Union, and such foreign residents as Goryachev might be an obstacle in Serbian-EU negotiations.

Little is known about Goryachev's associate, Volkov. "It's a significant fact that he was detained in Ukraine, as it shows that Ukraine has become an asylum for Russian radicals," Yudina said, adding that Alexei Korshunov, who was convicted in the killing of Chuvashov, the Moscow City Court judge, was found in Ukraine as well.

Korshunov died in 2011 in an apparent accident when a bomb of his own making exploded unexpectedly. Two of his alleged accomplices in the killing of Chuvashov, Maxim Baklagin and Vyacheslav Isayev, were arrested last summer.

Among the various nationalist organizations in Russia, BORN is believed to be one of the most

militant. But Yudina said it was unclear what BORN really was, how many members it had or whether it even still existed.

"It was a kind of virtual organization that passed death sentences, like one for the judge Chuvashov," she said, adding that many people may have been involved in any given killing planned by the group.

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Original url:
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