

Astakhov Makes Contact With Russian Teen, Missing in the U.S. for 18 Months

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A Russian orphan who ran away from his adoptive U.S. parents has resurfaced after going missing about 18 months ago, and is planning to continue his education and work in the United States, Russian children's ombudsman Pavel Astakhov said Thursday.

Some "concerned U.S. citizens" had identified the teenager, Alexei Klimov, and contacted the Russian authorities, Astakhov said, Interfax reported.

"I spoke with him by phone yesterday, he is getting all his documents restored," Astakhov said.

The teenager was getting a new U.S. social security card and has no intention of returning to Russia. Instead he plans to finish school and find work in the United States, Astakhov added.

The teenager celebrates his 18-year-birthday this November, RIA Novosti reported, without specifying the exact date. Once minors turn 18, they are considered adults in the vast majority of U.S. states — including Texas, where Alexei's adoptive parents live — and are no longer required to live with their parents or other adult guardians.

Unlike runaway children, adults cannot be subjected to mandatory drug testing, fines or any other forms of sanctions for having been runaways, unless they commit a separate offense.

"We are appealing to the authorities to approach his fate in a humane way, so that he isn't punished for running away," Astakhov said. "And he had run away from violence, he told me that his adoptive mother had kicked out his front teeth with a boot."

Astakhov warned that the teenager could even go to jail for being a runaway.

"There is another danger. They prosecute running away from home as an offense," Astakhov said. "Big politics could play a role now, and Alexei may be arrested and put in jail. This is what can happen."

Most U.S. states don't consider it illegal for minors to run away from home. A few states consider running away a "status offense," and can oblige the runaway to return home. No punishment is envisaged for runaways once they reach the so-called age of majority and become adults.

The police are unaware of Alexei's whereabouts at present, Astakhov said, adding that he would stay in contact with the teenager via telephone.

Alexei was adopted together with his two younger sisters by U.S. couple Michael and Penny Deckert in 2003. One of the girls said that the Deckerts abused her, though the accusation was later withdrawn, and the sisters were placed in a foster home. Alexei ran away in 2012 and his whereabouts had been unknown until Thursday.

His sisters, Anastasia and Svetlana, have said they were content living with their foster family, though a social worker said that Anastasia had to be hospitalized with post-traumatic stress disorder as a result of her time spent living with the Deckerts, Russian media reported. Her younger sister Svetlana was diagnosed with depression but didn't require medical treatment, her foster parents said.

The Deckert case was one of a series of scandals touted by Russian officials as proof that a ban on U.S. adoptions of Russian children was justified.

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