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New Suspect in Bolotnoye Case Pleads Guilty

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The Zamoskvoretsky District Court began hearings Tuesday against a previously unheard-of suspect in the so-called Bolotnoye case who pleaded guilty to participating in the alleged riots.

The plea by Dmitry Altaichinov, 22, which came on the heels of an amnesty for four other Bolotnoye suspects, seems to have come as a surprise to both lawyers and observers, as it was the first time his name was mentioned in the case. Lawyers earlier speculated that there could be several other "secret prisoners" in the case.

On Tuesday, Sergei Badamshin, one of the lawyers in the case, told Radio Svoboda that "it is difficult to say how many people will be charged" in the case ultimately because "there is a large, unified Bolotnoye case, just like the Yukos case, stored at the Investigative Committee."

The case has seen nearly 30 people charged with participating in mass riots, organizing mass riots or violence against police after clashes erupted at a major opposition rally on Bolotnaya Ploshchad on May 6, 2012 — on the eve of President Vladimir Putin's inauguration. The case is widely seen as politically motivated.

On Monday, the Prosecutor General's Office said in a statement that Altaichinov was charged with taking part in riots for throwing plastic bottles filled with water at law enforcement officers.

The statement did not say for how long Altaichinov had been involved in the case, but according to Kommersant, which contacted Altaichinov via Vkontakte on Monday, he was arrested in May, a year after the protests took place.

Since Altaichinov pleaded guilty, his case is being heard separately from other suspects charged in the case and, in accordance with the law, he cannot be sentenced to more than two-thirds of the maximum sentence for the crime, which is eight years.

Lawyers believe the fact that Altaichinov admitted guilt would not harm other suspects in the case but could be used by prosecutors as further confirmation that the clashes at Bolotnaya Ploshchad were in fact riots. The defense has disputed this fact, saying the clashes at the approved rally were provoked by police. Two other people in the case pleaded guilty previously and were sentenced to prison terms.

According to Rospravosudiye, a legal information website, Altaichinov already has two previous convictions. He was first convicted in 2011 when a court fined him for publicly insulting an official. He was convicted a second time in April 2012 for stealing a laptop and was sentenced to 120 hours of compulsory community service.

His criminal record and the accusation of violence make it unlikely that Altaichinov would be covered by the presidential amnesty, passed this month, because it only applies to first-time offenders who have not committed violent crimes.

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