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All Climbers Under House Arrest for Ukraine Flag on Stalinist Building

By The Moscow Times

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Alexei Shirokozhukhov (R), one of four climbers placed under house arrest on suspicion of attaching a Ukrainian flag to a Stalin-era skyscraper, during a hearing in a Moscow courtroom on Aug. 22.

All four activists accused of having scaled a Moscow skyscraper to attach a Ukrainian flag to its spire were placed under house arrest on Thursday and may face years in jail.

A Moscow court late on Thursday placed all four suspects — Alexander Pogrebov, Alexei Shirokozhukhov, Anna Lepeshkin and Evgeny Korotkov —under house arrest until Oct. 19.

According to the suspects' lawyer Sergei Badamshin, they stand accused of hooliganism and vandalism.

"House arrest. I'm glad they did not eat us," he wrote on his Twitter account.

Residents of Moscow's Taganka district woke up Wednesday morning to find a Ukrainian flag attached to the Soviet star on the spire of one of the area's iconic Stalin buildings.

The flag appeared atop the high-rise, one of the city's so-called "Seven Sisters," at about 7:15 a.m. and remained in place for at least three hours before authorities were able to remove it, the Interfax news agency reported, citing a source within the municipal emergency services.

Police said later Wednesday that they had opened a criminal case on vandalism charges and were questioning four suspects — two men and two women — in relation to the stunt, Interfax reported.

According to a preliminary police report, the culprits climbed the stairs to the top floor of the 32-story residential complex and then continued their ascent with the help of climbing equipment.

In addition to attaching the Ukrainian flag to the spire, the perpetrators also covered the Soviet-era star at the top of the building in blue and yellow paint — Ukraine's official colors — tabloid LifeNews reported.

A video captured by a local resident and published by LifeNews claims to show one of the suspected perpetrators escaping the scene of the stunt by parachuting off the building's roof.

One of the detained parachutists later told LifeNews he had been detained by police after landing, but insisted he had nothing to do with the stunt.

"I was detained for parachuting off the skyscraper. I chose that place because it's beautiful," Alexander Pogrebov was quoted as saying.

"It just so happened that at the time of the jump, someone else committed an act of vandalism — they destroyed the spire with paint, and raised the Ukrainian flag."

Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko praised the act in a video published Wednesday on his Facebook page.

Referring to Kiev's preparations at the weekend for Independence Day and national flag celebrations, he said: "I like very much the fact that, on the eve of celebrating the Ukrainian flag, one of Moscow's highest buildings was painted in our colors."

"I congratulate these Ukrainians," he said, with a smile.

Wednesday's stunt comes as relations between Moscow and Kiev have become increasingly fractured following Russia's annexation of the Black Sea peninsula of Crimea from Ukraine in March.

Ukraine has also accused Russia of supplying arms to separatists in the east of its country, a charge that Moscow has repeatedly denied.

See also:

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