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'Federalization' Activist Says Seeks Asylum in Ukraine After Russia Declares Him Terrorist

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Vyacheslav Martynov

A 21-year-old activist who took part in a summer rally in support of federalizing one of Russia's southern regions has reportedly fled to Ukraine and requested asylum there after being deemed a terrorist at home.

The activist, Vyacheslav Martynov, said in comments carried by Ukrainian online news site Segodnya.ua that he had been placed on a terrorist watch list and accused of making public appeals for extremist activities and separatism.

Two other activists were also added to the government's terrorist watch list, according to Lenta.ru: Darya Polyudova and Pyotr Lyubchenkov.

Both were involved in the mid-August protest rally in Krasnodar calling for broader autonomy in the region; Polyudova has been in detention since late August.

The rally for the "federalization for Kuban" — a part of southern Russian that comprises most of the Krasnodar region — called for broader economic autonomy and self-governance rights for the region but made no demands for succession.

The demonstration proved to be highly controversial, and opposition-minded publication Novaya Gazeta reported at the time that several pro-Kremlin activists had attended the event with the sole purpose of provoking "federalization" supporters to incite violence.

"We responded to the Russian state using its own weapon — we organized a rally for the federalization of Kuban. After clashes with some pro-Russian demonstrators, police detained us but let the provocateurs go, and I was arrested for 15 days," Martynov was cited as saying by Lenta.ru.

After being placed on the government's terrorist watch list, Martynov said, his bank accounts were frozen, as were those belonging to Lyubchenkov.

Currently, Martynov is in the eastern Ukrainian city of Kharkiv, where he recently staged a picket wearing a sign that read: "Emigrant from Russia to Ukraine, ask me whatever you want," Segodnya.ua reported.

The criminal case against the three federalization activists was launched on Sept. 10. The charges carry a combined maximum punishment of 10 years in prison.

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