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Ukrainian Pilot Savchenko Slapped With New Charges

By Anna Dolgov

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The Russian Investigative Committee has been seeking to charge Savchenko with illegally crossing the border since last October, according to documents released at that time by her lawyers, but the charge never materialized until Thursday.

Detained Ukrainian pilot Nadezhda Savchenko, who was seized by pro-Moscow separatists in Ukraine last summer and sent to Russia, now stands accused of illegally crossing the border, her lawyers said.

The Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) informed Savchenko of the new charges against her on Thursday, lawyer Nikolay Polozov said via Twitter.

Polozov added in a separate Twitter message that Russia and its proxies "have not only abducted Savchenko from Ukrainian territories, but are now also framing her for supposedly illegally crossing the border."

The charge against Savchenko came a day after Russia announced it was resuming its boycott of the European human rights body PACE, which the Russian delegation said was in protest against at the suspension of its voting rights there.

Russia also said it was withdrawing its invitation for monitors from the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) to visit Savchenko in jail.

Lawyers said the timing of the new charge against Savchenko — whose release PACE has been demanding — was a further attempt to disregard the assembly.

"This is a retaliation for [what happened yesterday]," another lawyer, Mark Feygin, said via Twitter. "They really have opened a new case against Savchenko for illegally crossing the border. They brought her over themselves, and then they charged her themselves."

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"Just so that nobody has any illusions: The second case against Savchenko is [Russian President Vladimir] Putin's response to the PACE resolution for her immediate release within 24 hours," Polozov said via Twitter.

The initial charge against Savchenko accuses her of abetting the killing of two Russian journalists who died during artillery shelling in eastern Ukraine last June.

Savchenko's health has taken a sharp turn for the worse after she has been on hunger strike for weeks, prompting her transfer on Thursday to a prison hospital, lawyer Ilya Novikov said via Twitter.

But he also posted a copy of a defiant letter Savchenko wrote from detention on Thursday, extending her thanks to Russian activist Mark Galperin who was recently sentenced to jail for a rally in her support, and saying that "together Russia and Ukraine will defeat evil and dishonest authorities."

"I don't know who told you that I'm so weak, but that is not true," she said ahead of her hospitalization later Thursday, adding: "Doctors think that I'm on the edge. But I will yet fight!"

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