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30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

# 30,000 People Ask Putin to Let Mother-of-7 Await Ukraine Treason Trial at Home

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Artur, son of Russian activist Svetlana Davydova and her husband Anatoly Gorlov, holds up a photo of his mother to the camera, at their home in Vyazma, Jan. 30, 2015.

More than 30,000 people have signed a petition asking President Vladimir Putin to release until trial a woman accused of treason for a call she placed to Ukrainian diplomats, warning them that Russian troops may be en route to their country.

The appeal to allow Svetlana Davydova to await trial at home — rather than in the Moscow detention facility where she is currently being housed — had gathered more than 23,500 signatures on the Novaya Gazeta website as of Monday afternoon. The same appeal registered on the Change.org petition website had garnered more than 10,000 signatures.

It was not immediately clear whether the two groups of signatories overlapped, but

organizers of the Change.org petition said on their page that "there are 30,000 of us" when the combined count of the two petitions was tallied Sunday night.

The appeal came after a State Duma lawmaker asked prosecutors to clarify the apparent contradiction between charging mother-of-seven Davydova, who alerted Ukrainian diplomats to the possible troop movements in April last year, and Russian denials of its involvement in Ukraine.

If Moscow has not sent troops to Ukraine then Davydova appears to be facing prosecution "purely for voicing her fantasies and her subjective interpretation of reality," independent lawmaker Dmitry Gudkov said in his letter to the Prosecutor General's Office, asking it to "confirm or deny" the fairness of the interpretation.

Gudkov has been pushing the Russian government for answers ever since reports began to surface last summer over the burials of Russian paratroopers supposedly killed in Ukraine. In response to one of his inquiries, the Defense Ministry dismissed claims of Russian soldiers fighting in Ukraine as "rumors."

"So, now they want to sentence a mother of seven children to 12 years in prison for spreading rumors?" Gudkov wrote on his Facebook page last week.

If convicted, Davydova would face between 12 and 20 years in prison on the charge, lawyer Yury Shulipa said Thursday in his blog on the Ekho Moskvy independent radio station's website.

"Through a trumped-up criminal case against an innocent woman, the regime is attempting to frighten not only her, but also the part of Russia's society that is not indifferent to this war — and by doing so to neutralize the negligibly small public activity that remains in Russia after a sequence of imprisonments," he added.

Dmitry Agranovsky, another lawyer, said that as long as Russia maintains its claim of having no military involvement in Ukraine then Davydova's report to the Ukrainian Embassy constitutes no crime, Gazeta.ru reported.

But Alexander Khinshtein, a lawmaker from the ruling United Russia party, suggested that Davydova deserved to be charged with something: "One can argue about how to categorize the actions of this citizen, but we are dealing undoubtedly with an infliction of damage to the country's security," he was cited by Gazeta.ru as saying.

Davydova's husband, Anatoly Gorlov, said his wife — a former member of Russia's post-Soviet Communist Party, or KPRF — was a passionate opponent of the war in Ukraine.

"She saw the emptied-out base, made some assumption, and expressed her wish that no one else would die," Gorlov was quoted as saying by RFE/RL.

The Novaya Gazeta petition calling for Dayvdova's release argues that she has no criminal record, no passport for foreign travel, and that she has seven young children — including one that she is currently breastfeeding.

The petition also noted that in accordance with the Constitution, Russian courts — which

decide whether a suspect should be taken into custody before trial — are independent of the Kremlin. The petition also appealed to Putin to himself show "humanity and compassion" toward the accused.

The Kremlin's children rights ombudsman Pavel Astakhov said this weekend that Davydova should be released and returned to her children before and during her trial, the Interfax news agency reported.

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