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Putin Gets Involved in Case Against Mother Who 'Outed' Russian Troops

By Allison Quinn

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Yabloko political party leader Sergei Mitrokhin attends a rally in support of Svetlana Davydova, who was detained on suspicion of treason.

President Vladimir Putin will personally consider a petition advocating for the pre-trial release of Svetlana Davydova, a mother accused of treason for informing Ukrainian diplomats of suspected Russian troop movements, the president's spokesperson said Tuesday.

Also on Tuesday, Davydova's husband Anatoly Gorlov said he had been summoned for questioning in connection with the case, The Associated Press reported.

Confirming that the Kremlin had received the petition, Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov said: "It will be considered. There are appropriate procedures for the processing of such applications," adding that the president himself would be involved in the process, news agency Interfax reported.

The charges against Davydova stem from a phone call made to the Ukrainian Embassy last April, in which she allegedly warned Ukrainian diplomats that Russian troops might have been deployed to Donetsk in eastern Ukraine. After initially admitting to having made the phone call and passing on such information, Davydova later retracted the confession and said it had been given under pressure from investigators, newspaper Kommersant reported Tuesday.

Initially, Davydova said she had noticed that a military base near her home had been almost completely emptied, adding that she overheard a soldier on a bus in Smolensk telling someone he was being deployed on a mission. Fearing that this would lead to a spike in violence in Ukraine, where a conflict was brewing between pro-Russian separatists and forces loyal to Kiev, she informed her husband and the Ukrainian Embassy, according to earlier reports.

Davydova, who is currently still breastfeeding a newborn baby, faces up to 20 years behind bars on charges of high treason.

As Davydova rescinded that testimony on Tuesday, a source in the Ukrainian Embassy was cited as saying by Kommersant that there was no record of Davydova ever having contacted the embassy.

"Thousands of people call the embassy, they announce a lot of information, but we know nothing about Davydova or this specific military base [she allegedly reported]," said Yevgeny Perebiynos, a spokesman for the Ukrainian Embassy.

The case has outraged many prominent human rights activists and triggered an outpouring of support since Davydova was taken into custody on Jan. 21.

Peskov's remarks on Tuesday represent the Kremlin's first official comments on the matter.

Apparently aware of the building support for Davydova, Peskov promised that the Kremlin would consider the petitions started by human rights activists as soon as they were received, Kommersant reported Tuesday. "The situation is, without a doubt, headline-making," Dmitry Peskov said.

His comments come in response to at least two petitions launched by activists to have Davydova released from detention to await trial.

On Tuesday, a petition in support of Davydova on the website Change.org contained 22,724 signatures, and a separate one on the website of Novaya Gazeta contained 28,605 signatures.

In addition to the petitions, several video appeals have already been made to attract attention to the case.

Celebrity doctor Yelizaveta Glinka, better known by her stage name Doctor Liza, was one of many prominent figures to take part in a video appeal calling for Davydova's release and urging people to sign the petitions.

"I am not one for politics. My video appeal was recorded exclusively from the perspective of a mother: I have three children, and in this situation it would be wrong to remain silent. ...

Whatever offense this woman committed, they shouldn't take away her 2-month-old child. They can choose another pre-trial measure to create more favorable conditions for the baby," Glinka said in the video, which was released Monday.

Also on Tuesday, children's rights ombudsman Pavel Astakhov offered at least one small relief for Davydova: Social services would not take her children away while she is in custody, Interfax reported. Astakhov said social services had decided the children were fine under Gorlov's sole care.

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