The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Russian Mom Facing Treason Charges Granted Conditional Release

By Allison Quinn

February 03, 2015



Davydova leaving Moscow's Lefortovo detention center after securing conditional release on Tuesday evening.

A mother of seven whose detention on suspicion of high treason last month triggered a major outcry has been released from Moscow's Lefortovo detention facility, but will be subject to travel restrictions and still faces up to 20 years behind bars if convicted.

"The petition to change [Svetlana] Davydova's pre-trial detention measures has been granted by investigators, and she has signed a pledge not to leave town," Ivan Pavlov, the defendant's attorney, wrote on Facebook late Tuesday.

Davydova's husband, Anatoly Gorlov, said his wife was on her way home in comments to Reuters. The family lives in the Western Russian city of Vyazma.

The announcement came just hours after petitions containing more than 40,000 signatures in

support of Davydova's release were submitted to the Kremlin.

Many prominent human rights activists and cultural figures have come out in support of Davydova since her detention on Jan. 21, with children's rights ombudsman Pavel Astakhov having openly said on Sunday the woman should be returned to her children to await trial.

Prior to Davydova's release on Tuesday, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the petition to free Davydova would be considered by President Vladimir Putin himself.

"It will be considered. There are appropriate procedures for the processing of such applications," Peskov said, state news agency Interfax reported.

The charges against Davydova stem from a phone call she allegedly made to the Ukrainian Embassy in April, during which she is accused of having 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 a deployment could 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 breast-feeding a newborn baby, could spend two decades behind bars if convicted 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.

Meanwhile, Gorlov said on Tuesday that he too had been summoned for questioning in connection with the case, The Associated Press reported.

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