The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
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Khodorkovsky Video Technician Detained in 'Provocation' Before Russian Forum

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March 24, 2015



In what critics have decried as an act of provocation, a video technician was detained in Novosibirsk a day before he was scheduled to work on a televised conference for self-exiled opposition activist Mikhail Khodorkovsky.

Shortly after leaving his hotel in downtown Novosibirsk on Monday, an "agent provocateur" shoved technician Leonid Yuldashev, the Khodorkovsky-initiated pro-democracy group Open Russia reported Tuesday.

"A man came up to me and carefully but forcefully bumped me with his shoulder then threw his cell phone onto the pavement. The telephone broke into pieces," Yuldashev was quoted by Open Russia as saying.

The unknown man then started shouting out for help. Within moments, police officers rushed

to the scene, at which point the man claimed Yuldashev had snatched his cell phone and broken it, Open Russia reported.

As the police questioned Yuldashev, another man approached and said he had filmed the whole incident on his smartphone and could serve as a witness, according to Yuldashev, who added that he has not seen the video.

Yuldashev was detained on the spot and spent the night in jail, but was released the next day after a local judge found that a lack of evidence had been presented.

Various media outlets identified the man whose phone Yuldashev was accused of breaking as Andrei Gashkin, reportedly a former member of Russia's special forces.

In December, a similar teleconference hosted by Khodorkovsky was mired in problems.

First the conference hall was searched for drugs, then police attempted to evacuate the building due to a bomb threat. During the conference, sirens wailed and the whole building's electricity supply was cut off — though the event's organizers were prepared with backup batteries.

Khodorkovsky was Russia's richest man before being imprisoned for about a decade on allegedly politically tinged charges. He was freed upon a personal pardon by President Vladimir Putin in 2013 and allowed to leave the country.

He has been based abroad ever since, but has remained active in Russia's opposition movement, including with the launch of Open Russia, a project aimed, according to its website, at "bringing together citizens living both inside and outside of Russia, who share the European values of a strong, dynamic and forward-looking state founded upon effective democratic institutions and the rule of law."

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Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2015/03/24/khodorkovsky-video-technician-detained-in-provocation-before-russian-forum-a45105