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Russian Soldier Captured in Ukraine Under Pressure, Offered Asylum

By Anna Dolgov

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A man, according to Ukraine's state security service (SBU) is named Yevgeny Yerofeyev and is one of two Russian servicemen recently detained by Ukrainian forces, is examined by medics at a hospital in Kiev.

Yevgeny Yerofeyev — who identified himself as a Russian army captain when he was captured last month in the rebel Luhansk region of eastern Ukraine — is "under very serious pressure" to cooperate with investigators looking into his case, his lawyer Oksana Sokolovskaya said Wednesday, news agency Interfax reported. "He is being offered political asylum," Sokolovskaya said.

Another Russian captured along with Yerofeyev — Alexander Alexandrov, who said he was a Russian army sergeant on a military assignment in the rebel region — has agreed to participate in the investigation, while Yerofeyev declined, his lawyers said earlier.

Now Yerofeyev is facing pressure to "open up all the cards that are possible," Sokolovskaya

was quoted by Russian and Ukrainian media as saying.

"He is under very serious pressure from pre-trial investigative organs, and from jail employees, and from everybody else," she was quoted as saying. "He is being offered political asylum, his family is being offered political asylum, while he is accused of betraying the Russian Federation and [warned] that if he ends up in Russia he would be killed or would be imprisoned for the rest of his life and so on."

In video interviews from the Kiev hospital where they are being treated for their injuries, Yerofeyev and Alexandrov both said they had been on an intelligence-gathering mission in eastern Ukraine when they were captured.

Kiev has accused them of "terrorism" — a term Ukrainian authorities use for the acts of Moscow-backed separatists in the country's eastern regions. While Moscow has publicly endorsed the separatists' cause, it denies accusations of supplying troops and weapons to the insurgents, and claims that the captured soldiers had resigned from the Russian military before leaving for Ukraine.

Ukrainian authorities have offered Yerofeyev a minimum sentence should he accept the asylum offer, his lawyer said, news portal RBC-Ukraina reported.
Sokolovskaya was speaking after a court hearing on Yerofeyev's appeal to be released from custody for health reasons, the report said. The court turned down the petition, RBC-Ukraina reported.

The men have received visits from envoys of international organizations and from the Russian consul in Ukraine while in the hospital. The consul said after his visit in late May that the men were "feeling relatively well."

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