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Russia's 'War' Mentality Boosts Treason Case Count

By Howard Amos

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Russian activist Svetlana Davydova spends time with her children after she returned home in Vyazma, Feb. 4. Russia has conditionally released the activist accused of high treason for phoning the Ukrainian embassy in Moscow to warn that Russian soldiers might be heading to eastern Ukraine.

The number of convictions for treason in Russia tripled in 2014 and experts say the figure looks set to rise again this year as relations with the West deteriorate, tensions over Ukraine persist and Russia's intelligence services focus their attention on uncovering yet more spies, turncoats and traitors.

The maximum sentence for treason is 20 years and the secrecy associated with the charge usually means court sessions take place behind closed doors.

Many cases gain little or no public attention, and sometimes the defendant and their lawyers do not have access to all the information about the crimes they are supposed to have committed.

"Everything is linked to Ukraine," said Ivan Pavlov, a lawyer specializing in treason cases who saw charges against two of his clients dropped this year. "When there is a war they look for enemies."

Amid Russia's deepening international isolation over Ukraine and now Syria, officials routinely characterize association with foreign organizations as a possible threat to national security.

There were 15 treason convictions last year, all resulting in lengthy prison terms, according to Supreme Court data. In 2013 there were a mere four convictions.

There are no official statistics for 2015, but Russian media have reported on four treason convictions so far this year and at least one treason trial is currently ongoing. A spokesperson for a Moscow court told state news agency RIA Novosti in March that seven people accused of treason had been placed under arrest in the capital's high-security Lefortovo prison since January.

"There are new cases every month," said Zoya Svetova, a journalist and human rights activist who has met many of those accused of treason in Lefortovo, and tracks their cases.

Many treason trials never get reported because the Federal Security Service (FSB), a successor agency of the KGB, frightens relatives and defendants into silence, according to Pavlov, with a favorite tactic being to promise shorter sentences in exchange for cooperation with investigators.

Many treason defendants are given state-appointed lawyers who oversee a confession of guilt from their clients, said Pavlov. One such lawyer, Andrei Stebenev — who was appointed to represent treason defendants Yevgeny Petrin, Gennady Kravtsov, Svetlana Davydova and Valery Selyanin — was disbarred earlier this year for failing to provide proper legal support to Davydova.

Russia's treason laws were controversially broadened in 2012 so that there are now three main definitions of the crime: spying, accidentally or deliberately divulging state secrets, and passing information to a foreign organization that harms Russian security.

A lesser charge, that of revealing state secrets, carries a much lighter sentence than treason. Foreign nationals accused of spying cannot be accused of treason, and are charged instead with espionage. Both of these charges also appear to be being used more and more frequently in Russia.

The Moscow Times has compiled a list of 13 treason cases that have emerged this year using open source data and interviews with lawyers and human rights activists.

Yevgeny Chistov

Arrested: 2014

Status: Unknown

Almost nothing is known about Yevgeny Chistov. The treason charges against him were made

public in July when a spokesperson for Lefortovo court in Moscow said that his detention had been extended until September. According to Russian news agency Interfax, he was arrested last year. Human rights activist Svetova said Chistov is a former FSB officer who refuses to talk about his case.

Svetlana Davydova

Arrested: January 2015

Status: Freed in February 2015

Of all the treason cases in recent months, the accusations against Svetlana Davydova, 37, created the biggest public outcry. The mother of seven children, including a two-month-old girl, Davydova was arrested because of a phone call she made to the Ukrainian Embassy in Moscow in April 2014 to inform them that Russian troops stationed near her home in the town of Vyazma in the western Smolensk region had left their barracks and could be on their way to fight in Ukraine. Davydova, a staunch opponent of Russian interference in Ukraine, was released from Lefortovo prison on Feb. 3 after more than 40,000 people petitioned the Kremlin on her behalf. The charges — a rare case of security officials using new treason clauses added in 2012 — were dropped in March.

Kasyan (first name unknown)

Arrested: February 2014

Status: Unknown

The only public mention of Kasyan (whose first name has not been disclosed) was in a June report from the Interfax news agency, citing unidentified security sources, that said he had been arrested for treason in the southern city of Sochi one day after the end of the 2014 Winter Olympics held there. "Since then more than a year has passed, but neither the local FSB press service nor regional media has mentioned him," Interfax noted.

Gennady Kravtsov

Arrested: May 2014

Status: Sentenced to 14 years in September 2015

Reading the verdict for Gennady Kravtsov in a Moscow court earlier this year, the judge said that he had taken into account Kravtsov's two young children — aged 4 and 8 — when deciding the sentence. He proceeded to give Kravtsov 14 years behind bars — one year less than that requested by prosecutors. Kravtsov, who worked as an engineer specializing in satellites for Russia's GRU military intelligence agency between 1990 and 2005, was convicted of treason on the basis of a job application letter he sent to a Swedish defense firm five years ago. Kravtsov, who denies his guilt, described his sentence in court as "madness."

Germanov (first name unknown)

Arrested: Unknown

Status: Unknown

No information about Germanov (whose first name has not been disclosed) is available apart from the June Interfax report that also mentioned Kasyan. Interfax, citing unidentified security sources, said Germanov was a soldier accused of treason who has been under arrest for more than a year.

"Germanov's case has already been transferred [up] to the regional level and his term of arrest was extended at the start of the year by the North Caucasus district military court," the Interfax report read.

Vladimir Lapygin

Arrested: Unknown

Status: Pretrial detention

The arrest of Vladimir Lapygin only became public knowledge in late July when Interfax cited an unidentified security service source as saying that the 75-year-old scientist was facing treason accusations. Lapygin's house arrest was extended by a Moscow court to Nov. 13 earlier this month. According to Interfax, Lapygin worked at the Central Research Institute of Machine Building (TsNIImash), an offshoot of Roscosmos, Russia's national space agency, and was also a professor at the prestigious Bauman Moscow State Technical University.

Maxim Lyudomirsky

Arrested: 2014

Status: Pretrial detention

The first public mention of Maxim Lyudomirsky by Russian officials was in July, when Russian news agencies quoted a court spokesperson as saying that Lyudomirsky's detention was being extended. Russian tabloid LifeNews, which has close ties to the security services, reported at the time that Lyudomirsky, 58, was head engineer at the Moscow-based laser technology company Electrooptika and is suspected of passing secrets about weapons development to a foreign state. Lyudomirsky previously owned 23 percent of Electrooptika and was arrested in 2014, according to Interfax. Lyudomirsky's detention was reportedly extended last month until Nov. 25.

Sergei Minakov

Arrested: January 2015

Status: Freed in March 2015

Unexpectedly released from Lefortovo just two months after he was detained on treason charges, little is known about Sergei Minakov. According to a March blog entry by human rights activist Svetova, Minakov grew up in an orphanage and was a soldier in the Soviet army in Afghanistan before serving on the Black Sea Fleet as an electrician. When he was arrested, he was working on civilian trawlers in the Black Sea, according to Svetova. Other media

reports suggest he was serving on the Black Sea Fleet's Koida tanker when he was detained. Days after a relative of Minakov's hired Pavlov as a lawyer, investigators dropped the case. Minakov has made no public statement since he was set free.

Pyotr Parpulov

Arrested: March 2014

Status: On trial

Currently standing trial in Krasnodar, the accusations against Pyotr Parpulov reportedly arose from a trip he took to neighboring Georgia in 2010. Parpulov denies the treason charges. According to his relatives, Parpulov was employed by Sochi Airport for more than 30 years, and was working in a senior position there at the time of his arrest. Parpulov's 25-year-old daughter Yulia Parpulova told the Kavkazsky Uzel (Caucasian Knot) news website in February that her father was arrested in a dawn raid on the family's apartment and that she had not been allowed a meeting with him for almost a year. "I have seen more unfairness and more legal violations in Parpulov's case than I have seen in my whole career as a lawyer," Parpulov's lawyer Oleg Yeliseyev told Kavkazsky Uzel on Oct. 8.

Yevgeny Petrin

Arrested: June 2014

Status: Pretrial detention

A major in the FSB until 2013, Petrin was accused of working in the interests of the U.S. and arrested in June 2014 while employed in the internal communications department of the Russian Orthodox Church's Moscow patriarchate. Petrin, who denies his guilt, maintains that he uncovered a group of spies in the Russian Orthodox Church trying to worsen relations with the Orthodox Church in Ukraine — and was meeting with foreigners, with the knowledge of colleagues, in an effort to find out more. In an interview in February with the Yod news website, Petrin's brother Andrei said that investigators threatened to poison Petrin and kill his cat, which had been left alone in his apartment after his arrest, and bring it to him in pieces. According to his brother, Petrin is an accomplished linguist, thought seriously about becoming a monk and decided to join the FSB at the urging of nationalist firebrand politician Vladimir Zhirinovsky. Petrin's lawyer Ivan Pavlov said on Oct. 9 that the investigation into Petrin was complete and the defense team had received the case materials ahead of the upcoming trial.

Valery Selyanin

Arrested: 2013

Status: Sentenced to 15 years in June 2015

Little is known about Valery Selyanin, whom human rights activist Svetova described as a 59-year-old physicist who got involved in business in the 1990s. He is reportedly accused of treason because of equipment he handed to two Iranian men. In a handwritten letter

from Selyanin that Svetova posted on her blog earlier this year, he wrote: "Today even the most incorrigible idealist does not believe that there can be fair sentences in criminal proceedings in Moscow courts based on evidence from the FSB." Selyanin denies his guilt, according to Svetova.

Viktor Shur

Arrested: December 2014

Status: Sentenced to 12 years in October 2015

An amateur coin collector and former oil worker, Viktor Shur was arrested on a trip to the western Russian city of Bryansk from his adopted home of Ukraine where he held a residency permit. A spokesperson for a court in Bryansk — where Shur was convicted earlier this month — said that Shur admitted he was guilty of collecting secret information for Ukrainian intelligence services about Russian military installations. Shur's son Valery told Ukrainian media earlier this year that his father was not a spy and was cooperating with investigators to avoid a long sentence.

Roman Ushakov

Arrested: August 2013

Status: Sentenced to 15 years in March 2015

Roman Ushakov was reportedly arrested after collecting money and orders from the CIA that were left under a specially modified rock in the Moscow suburb of Biryulyovo. The 33-year-old from Siberia was working as a police major in 2009 when investigators allege he contacted the CIA via their website and began a four-year collaboration with agents from the U.S. intelligence agency. Ushakov reportedly admitted all the charges and asked for forgiveness. The judge in Moscow's district court gave him three years more than the 12 years requested by prosecutors. Russian counterespionage officers became suspicious of Ushakov in 2013 when, after leaving the police force, he took trips abroad to Finland, the United Kingdom, Spain and Turkey, the Kommersant newspaper reported in March.

Zakhar Agapishvili, Sergei Danilchenko, Levan Charkviani and Konstantin Yashin

Arrested: Unknown

Status: Serving prison sentences

Zakhar Agapishvili, Sergei Danilchenko, Levan Charkviani and Konstantin Yashin were sailors in Russia's Black Sea Fleet who were sentenced on treason charges, according to a February report by the Interfax news agency, citing an unidentified source. The Interfax report is the only public mention of the four men, other than information on Russia's Supreme Court website stating that their appeal was denied and that the sentence against the four men on treason charges came into force in November 2014. Agapishvili and Danilchenko were officers in the Black Sea Fleet, while Charkviani and Yashin were rank-and-file sailors, according to Interfax.

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