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Elderly Russian Opposition Activist Hospitalized After Court Sentence

By Anna Dolgov

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A 76-year-old opposition activist standing trial for breaking Russian protest laws was hospitalized Thursday with heart problems, after a younger man received a lengthy prison sentence on the same charge and police crudely dispersed his supporters at the courthouse, news reports said.

Vladimir Ionov was badly affected by the three-year prison sentence handed down to Ildar Dadin earlier this week — despite the prosecution calling for a two-year sentence — the older activist's friends and lawyers were quoted by Russia's independent media as saying.

Ionov's health suffered a "breakdown ... after the mockery of justice in the case against Ildar Dadin, after the beatings in court," Olga Brown, a friend, was quoted as saying by opposition-minded Grani.ru news portal.

"The horror in the courthouse and that verdict have taken a toll on him," she said. "People were thrown out from the courthouse into the street, laid down with their heads on the

ground."

When a judge in Dadin's trial announced the verdict, a gathering of the activist's supporters in the courtroom broke into a chant of "Shame," and "Fascists," according to video footage from the hearing posted online.

Police pushed the crowd back, and after some activists lay down on the floor in a non-violent expression of protests, officers dragged them by their legs out of the room.

Activists reassembled and locked arms in a corridor outside the courtroom, arguing they had the right to stand there, but police pulled them apart and dragged them down the stairs into the street, according to the video footage.

Ionov was hospitalized with a diagnosis of "unstable stenocardia" and placed in intensive care, his lawyer Olga Chavdar was quoted by Russia's The New Times as saying.

The abrupt development of heart troubles was also caused by the stress of Ionov's own trial, she said, The New Times reported.

Ionov "has been ill — this was no news for anybody — but the trial has been harsh; we were constantly getting yelled at, barred from presenting evidence," Chavdar was quoted as saying. "He was rattled. One can certainly say that this has also affected his condition."

Ionov was scheduled to make his closing statement this week in his trial at a Moscow city court on charges of "repeatedly" breaking Russian protest laws — the same charge that Dadin faced — but the hearing was adjourned until Dec. 16, the report said.

The prosecution is seeking a suspended three-year sentence for Ionov, with a three-year probation and a series of restrictions, including a ban on attending "places of mass accumulation of citizens," Grani.ru reported.

After returning home from Dadin's trial on Monday, Ionov complained of chest pain and then briefly lost consciousness, Grani.ru reported. By the time an ambulance arrived, he felt better and declined hospitalization, the report said.

But Ionov's health took another turn for the worse on Thursday morning and he was rushed to a hospital's intensive care unit, Grani.ru reported.

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