

Elderly Russian Opposition Activist to Seek Political Asylum in Ukraine

December 22, 2015



Activist Vladimir Ionov

A 76-year-old opposition activist charged with breaking Russian protest laws has fled to Ukraine and plans to seek political asylum in the country, independent Grani.ru news portal reported Monday.

Vladimir Ionov crossed the border into Ukraine “illegally” over the weekend, despite having no passport to travel abroad, the report said.

He made the decision out of love, Ionov said.

“When I was alone, I didn't care,” he said, Grani.ru reported. “Now I am not alone – I'm with a woman I love, and her constitution is a lot more delicate than mine. For my love and care for her, I've made this decision.”

Ionov was hospitalized earlier this month 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.

Ionov was badly affected by the three-year prison sentence handed down to Ildar Dadin earlier this month — 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.

“I don't think I've left forever,” Ionov was quoted on Monday as saying by Grani.ru. “My home is in Russia and I think very big changes will be happening here soon. Praying to God that those changes happen without any bloodshed.”

Opposition-minded figures have made predictions recently of political protests brewing up in Russia. Exiled former Russian oligarch Mikhail Khodorkovsky has said the country was heading toward a “revolution,” and as well expressed hope the turmoil would avoid any bloodshed.

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