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Moscow Student Varvara Karaulova Jailed for 4.5 Years for Islamic State Ties

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Russian student Varvara Karaulova has been jailed for 4 and a half years after being found guilty of attempting to join the Islamic State.

She will serve three years in prison, having already spent 18 months in pre-trial custody.

Karaulova, who legally changed her name to Alexandra Ivanova, left Russia in May last year to marry an Islamic State recruiter she had met online.

She was detained in Turkey a week later, attempting to cross the border into Syria.

Karaulova went on to help Russian security services to communicate with her former fiance, but police arrested her in Oct. 2015. Prosecutors claim that she intentionally left Russia to join the terrorist group, knowing that her actions could harm Russia.

Read more from The Moscow Times: IS Fighter or Girl in Love? The Story of Varvara Karaulova

The student's lawyers maintain that Karaulova was "blindly in love" with her fiancé, who she only later found out was a terrorist recruiter.

In her closing statement in court on Wednesday, Karaulova said that she had made a mistake. "I want to stress one thing in particular. I communicated with a man I loved, not with a member of some organization. I'm sorry this love turned out to be unhealthy," she was quoted by the Life website as saying.

"I compare it to alcoholism and believe it's the first step towards healing."

Karaulova did admit that she had contacted her fiance without police supervision after becoming "depressed."

"At some point she opened her Vkontakte page and saw that Samatov kept messaging her, asking for her forgiveness and telling her how much he loved her," Karaulova's lawyer Ilya Novikov wrote on Facebook after the court hearing on Nov. 17.

"She noticed that FSB operatives messaged him back several times," Novikov said. "She couldn't help herself and started messaging him too. Several days into it, she was messaging him every day."

The Islamic State is a terrorist organization banned in Russia.

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