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Activist Pavlensky Flees Russia Seeking Political Asylum Amid Rape Allegations

By Katie Marie Davies

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Pyotr Pavlensky **Sergei Bobylev / TASS**

Russian activist Pyotr Pavlensky is applying for political asylum in France, the Hromadske news outlet reported Monday.

Pavlensky, along with his partner Oksana Shalygina and their two daughters, reportedly fled Russia to Ukraine in December 2016.

The pair claim that Russian authorities are building a false sexual assault case against them in a bid to eradicate Pavlensky, a vocal anti-Putin critic renowned for his brutal performance art, from Russia's cultural scene.

Russian actress Anastasia Slonina has reportedly accused the pair of attacking her and attempting to rape her at their St. Petersburg apartment.

Pavlensky and Shalygina, who both advocate for open relationships, have dismissed the allegations, claiming that their relationship with the woman was consensual and that she filed her complaint under the orders of the Russian security services. If found guilty, the couple could be jailed for up to 10 years.

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"We have only two options: to either spend our time in jail or head beyond the Russian borders. For me to submit to doing time, to go with all the humility of a sheep to the slaughter, would only help the state. I do not agree with that under any circumstances," Pavlensky told Hromadske.

"All of these years, the regime has trying to prove that I am a criminal or a madman - not an artist, but the destroyer of cultural values. The state machine has been able to execute this play successfully. But we will be careful, and life will show who has the last word."

Vsevolod Lisowski, a producer and writer at the Teatr.doc group, told reporters on Monday that the actress' colleagues had noticed Pavlensky and Shalygina "taking an interest" in the performer. He also alleged that the group had video footage of Pavlensky and several other men beating an actor who confronted the artist about his intentions.

"One of our actors thought that Pavlensky and his partner were paying special attention to [Slonina]," Lisowski claimed. "He wanted to know why. They agreed to meet, a car drove up, four people got out and they began to beat up the actor. We have a recording of it on CCTV cameras," he told the Novaya Gazeta newspaper.

The incident did not deter the actress, who went to meet with the pair, he said.

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"Pavlensky and Shalygina called [Slonina] and invited her to visit," Lisowski told the Novaya Gazeta newspaper. "There was an attempt to rape her, and she received several non-life-threatening cuts on her arms. She came out of there almost naked with cuts on her hands."

Pavlensky and Shalygina deny all accusations.

Pavlensky, 32, has become notorious worldwide for his extreme performances protesting Kremlin policy. Previous actions have seen the artist slicing off part of his ear, wrapping himself in barbed wire while naked, nailing his own scrotum to Red Square and sewing his own mouth shut.

He was most recently arrested setting fire to the main entrance of the FSB headquarters on Moscow's Lubyanskaya Ploshchad on Nov. 9, 2015. The artist, who said that the action was a protest against repressive government policies, was ultimately fined 500,000 rubles ($7,750), but did not serve any jail time.

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