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Anti-Kremlin Activist Was Likely Poisoned According to Berlin Doctor

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Pyotr Verzilov (Andrei Lyubimov / RBC / TASS)

An anti-Kremlin activist who is in Berlin for treatment was likely poisoned, a doctor said on Tuesday, adding that while the man was no longer in danger he still needed intensive medical care.

Pyotr Verzilov, publisher of a Russian online news outletand affiliated with the anti-Kremlin band Pussy Riot, lost his sight, hearing and ability to walk but is doing better since he arrived in Berlin for treatment on Saturday, two friends said on Sunday.

"It is highly probable that he was poisoned," Kai-Uwe Eckardt, a doctor at the Charite university hospital in Berlin, told a news conference, adding that there was no other explanation so far for Verzilov's condition.

He said Verzilov was suffering from anti-cholinergic syndrome, a condition in which certain neurotransmitters get blocked.

The rapid onset of symptoms - including widely dilated pupils, high blood pressure and dry mucous membranes - was strongly indicative of a poison, Eckardt said.

But six days after the substance is likely to have been ingested, the chances of identifying it are not high, the doctor said, adding that it could be medicine, a natural substance or plant material.

Pussy Riot group member Olga Borisova confirmed that diagnosis to The Moscow Times, saying poisoning was "highly possible."

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Verzilov is publisher of Mediazona, an online news outlet that focuses on human rights violations inside Russia's penal system. He ran on to the pitch during the soccer World Cup final in Moscow in July along with three women affiliated with Pussy Riot.

Pussy Riot came to prominence in 2012 when its members were jailed for staging a protest against Russian President Vladimir Putin in a Russian Orthodox cathedral in Moscow. The group has since become a symbol of anti-Kremlin protest action.

Reuters contributed reporting to this article.

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