

# Why Is Russia's Most Prominent Libertarian Being Investigated for Sexual Misconduct?

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Mikhail Svetov **Youtube**

Mikhail Svetov, one of the main figures of Russia's Libertarian Party and an organizer of this summer's mass protests in Moscow, was interrogated overnight by the Investigative Committee and his apartment searched over allegations of sexual misconduct against a minor.

Initial reports said that Svetov, 34, had been charged with "indecent assault" against a minor over photos of his ex-girlfriend that were posted on his Instagram in 2012, when he was 27 and she was 16. The criminal case was allegedly opened after a complaint from the state-run Izvestia newspaper.

Here's what we know about the case so far:

**The case:**

— The investigative Novaya Gazeta newspaper [reported](#) that the case was opened because of a sexually suggestive photo of Svetov's ex-girlfriend, Anastasia Starodubovskaya, that he posted on his Instagram in 2012. Starodubovskaya was also summoned to the Investigative Committee for questioning.

— Svetov hasn't yet been charged and is currently being considered a witness in the case. Both Svetov's lawyer Mikhail Biryukov and the head of Russia's Libertarian Party Sergei Boiko confirmed this to The Moscow Times.

— Earlier this month, Svetov [announced](#) his withdrawal from his post on the federal committee of the Libertarian Party to work on a book.

— The plaintiff in the case is the state-run Izvestia newspaper, Biryukov said, a claim that Izvestia's press office has [denied](#).

### **The reasons:**

— Boiko has said he thinks the case is politically motivated and an attempt to intimidate Svetov. "I assume that the case is an attempt to make Mikhail leave the country," he told The Moscow Times.

— Sergei Smirnov, the chief editor of the independent Mediazona news website, told The Moscow Times that while he doesn't know the exact motives behind the case, it likely has to do with Svetov's prominent role as an organizer of this summer's opposition protests in Moscow and with his nationwide speaking tour.

### **The possible outcomes:**

— Smirnov added that the case could go in several directions, but it will most likely result in one of two outcomes: Svetov could be charged and sent to pre-trial detention or the case could remain open, implying that he should leave Russia.

*This article has been updated to clarify that Svetov withdrew from his post on the federal committee of the Libertarian Party, not from the party itself.*

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