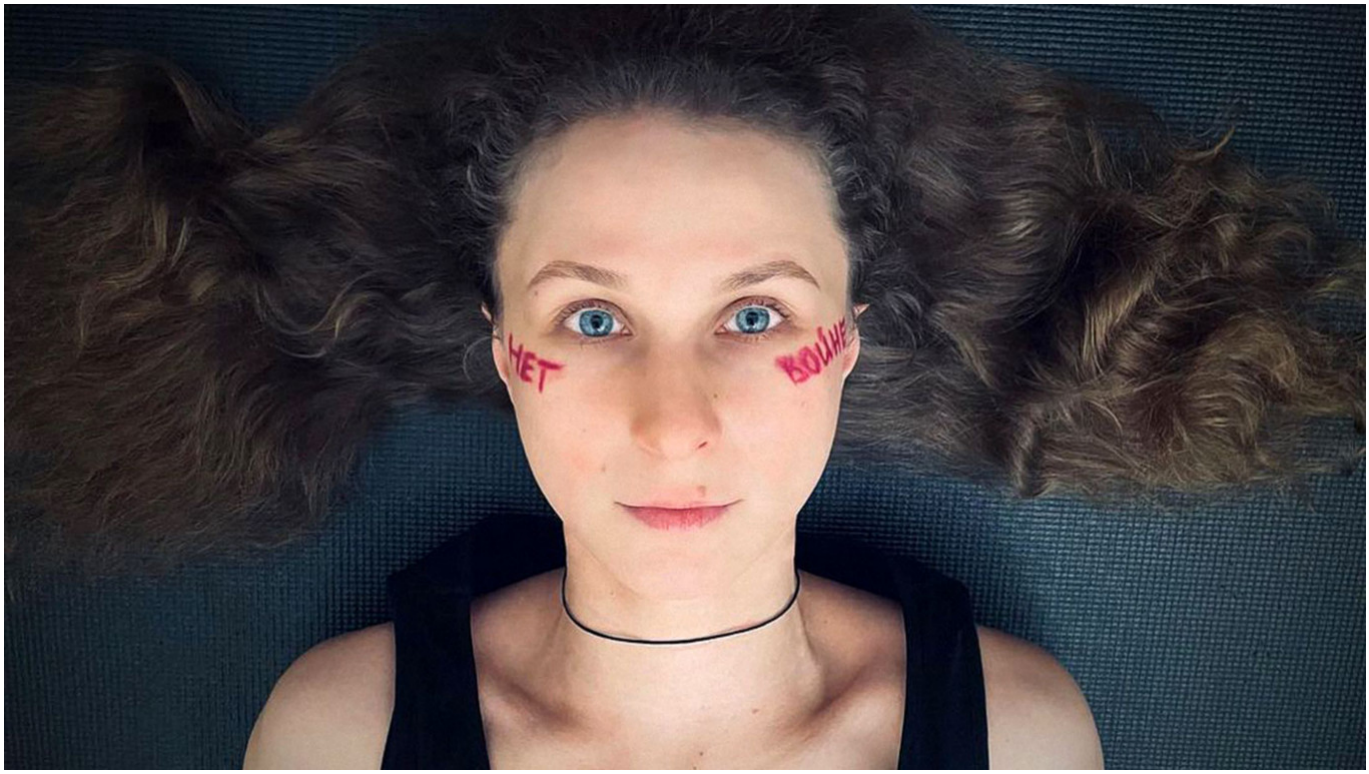
The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Pussy Riot Activist Maria Alyokhina Leaves Russia – NYT

May 11, 2022



Maria Alyokhina. **Maria Alyokhina / instagram**

Leading Pussy Riot activist Maria Alyokhina has escaped to Lithuania after being declared a fugitive by the Russian government.

Alyokhina made the journey to Vilnius after leaving Moscow disguised as a food courier, she said in a New York Times interview published Tuesday.

She later made several failed attempts to travel to the European Union via Belarus, before finally crossing the border with outside help from unnamed EU officials and Icelandic artist Ragnar Kjartansson.

She compared her weeklong journey to a spy novel.

"I was happy that I made it, because it was an unpredictable and big [kiss-off to the Russian authorities]," the activist told The New York Times.

Alyokhina now plans to join her Pussy Riot bandmates in a tour across Europe to raise money

for war-torn Ukraine.

Several fellow Pussy Riot members claimed that Alyokhina's departure from Russia had been planned in advance to coincide with the tour, and stressed that the artist had not "fled" Russia.

But Alyokhina's position in Russia has become increasingly difficult since being declared a fugitive by the authorities on April 26. The anti-Kremlin activist was placed on wanted lists after being sentenced in absentia for violating a court-mandated curfew from September 2021.

Alyokhina, who has been jailed six times over the last year in what she and her fellow activists say is revenge for her political activism, was placed under the curfew after being found guilty of encouraging others to break Covid-19 laws to attend opposition protests.

Alyokhina told The New York Times that she dressed as a food courier to avoid the police staking out the apartment where she'd been living with a friend, and left her cellphone behind to avoid being tracked.

Her girlfriend and fellow Pussy Riot bandmate, Moscow municipal deputy Lucy Shtein, also donned a delivery service uniform when she left Russia for Lithuania last month.

Alyokhina then traveled to Belarus, where guards on the country's Lithuanian border turned her away twice.

Her third attempt was successful after Icelandic artist Ragnar Kjartansson appealed to officials from an unnamed European country, who issued the activist a travel document effectively granting her the same status as an EU citizen.

Alyokhina credited "disorganized" Russian law enforcement for her successful escape from the country.

"From here it looks like a big demon, but it is very disorganized if you look from the inside," she told The New York Times.

"The right hand doesn't know what the left hand is doing."

Maria Alyokhina is best known for her role in Pussy Riot's "Punk Prayer," the provocative 2012 protest which saw the band stage an anti-Kremlin performance inside Moscow's Christ the Savior Cathedral. She and fellow member Nadya Tolokonnikova, who has since fled Russia, spent two years in a prison colony following the protest.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2022/05/11/pussy-riot-activist-maria-alyokhina-leaves-russia-nyt-a77634