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Daughter of Fugitive War Critic Handed Over to Estranged Mother

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Maria Moskaleva with her mother Olga. **Maria Lvova-Belova / Telegram**

Maria Moskaleva, the daughter of the single father who was detained after fleeing house arrest on the eve of his sentencing in a criminal case for "discrediting" the Russian military, has been handed over to her estranged mother, Russian media reported Thursday.

In early March, Russian authorities separated 13-year-old Maria Moskaleva from her father Alexei Moskalev, and placed her in a juvenile detention center in her hometown of Yefremov, in Russia's western Tula region.

Following a police investigation last year, Moskalev was charged with breaking wartime censorship laws for anti-war comments he made on social media.

However, the 53-year-old fled house arrest in late March, only to be apprehended by the authorities in the Belarusian capital Minsk a few days later.

Moskalev had been due to appear in court in Yefremov on Thursday for a hearing that was

expected to see him deprived of custody of his daughter, but civil rights organization OVD-Info reported he was a no-show at the hearing.

The court also said it did not know his whereabouts.

Related article: Father Fleeing Jail Term for 'Discrediting' Army Apprehended in Minsk

Ahead of the trial, Russia's children's rights commissioner Maria Lvova-Belova, who along with Russian President Vladimir Putin is wanted by the International Criminal Court over the "unlawful deportation" of Ukrainian children, announced Maria had been handed over to her mother to whom she had not spoken for over seven years.

"As many know, [Maria] did not live with her [mother] for a long time, and they rarely communicated," Lvova-Belova wrote on Telegram Wednesday.

According to the official, Maria did not initially want to live with her mother, but later the teenager's "position changed — she told me this herself over the phone."

Tula activist Elena Afagonova, who had hoped to look after Maria, told journalists that Maria's mother wouldn't allow her to speak to her daughter.

The Kremlin has defended the case against Moskalev, describing his parenting as "deplorable."

AFP contributed reporting.

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