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Belarus Extradites Russian Single Father Facing Jail for Anti-War Comments

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A supporter of the Moskalev family at the courthouse in Yefremov. **EPA / TASS**

A Russian single father who was detained in Minsk after fleeing house arrest in late March has been extradited back to Russia, the independent rights organization OVD-Info reported Wednesday, citing a Belarusian activist.

Alexei Moskalev was handed a two-year jail sentence late last month by a Tula region court for "discrediting" the Russian military over anti-war comments he made on social media.

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

Russia's Foreign Ministry later said that Moskalev was awaiting extradition back to Russia at a detention center in Zhodzina, a city located about 50 kilometers northwest of Minsk.

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News of the man's extradition came Wednesday after a Belarusian civil rights activist tried to meet with him, OVD-Info reported.

Moskalev was detained after his daughter, 13-year-old Maria Moskaleva, drew an anti-war picture during a school art class. Authorities removed Moskaleva from her father and placed her in a juvenile detention center in her hometown of Yefremov in the Tula region.

Moskalev had been due to appear in court in Tula last Thursday for a hearing that was expected to see him deprived of custody of his daughter, but he did not appear at the hearing.

On April 6, Moskaleva was handed over to her estranged mother, whom she had not spoken to for over seven years.

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

Russia and its neighbor Belarus are formally joined in a "union state" and cooperate in extraditions. There is virtually no border control between the two countries.

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