The Moscow Times
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Alleged Wagner Deserter on Trial After Oslo Street Brawl

By AFP

April 25, 2023



Andrei Medvedev (R), who claims to have deserted the Russian mercenary group Wagner, and his lawyer Brynjulf Risnes speak before the start of his trial at the District Court in Oslo. **Gorm Kallestad / NTB / AFP**

A Russian man claiming to be a deserter from the Kremlin-linked Wagner mercenary group went on trial Tuesday in Oslo over a street fight in the center of the capital.

Wearing a beige shirt and pants, Andrei Medvedev pleaded guilty to participating in a brawl outside a bar in February, resisting arrest and carrying an air gun three weeks later.

The 26-year-old, who is seeking asylum in Norway, denied assaulting officers at the police station in the early hours of February 22.

A police officer told the court that the accused had been agitated, "visibly drunk" and "in fight mode" that night.

Medvedev meanwhile said he did not remember the details of the brawl and explained that the acts of resisting and violence of which he is accused of were just reflexes to the pain of being restrained.

"I had no intention of hurting anyone," he told the court.

"It was just a natural physical reaction to pain being inflicted."

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He also said he bought an air pistol "for self-defense because in my situation the risk of being attacked is enormous."

The prosecution has yet to announce what punishment it will seek.

Heavily guarded border

Medvedev claims to have fought in Ukraine as a member of Wagner for four months before deserting in November when the group allegedly extended his contract against his will.

A potentially valuable witness in shedding light on the group's reported brutality in Ukraine, Medvedev has been questioned by Norwegian authorities since arriving in the country.

In particular, he claims to have knowledge of Wagner's executions of mercenaries who refused to return to combat and says he has a video showing this.

Since his arrival in Norway he has been a headache for authorities.

In January, he was briefly arrested for refusing to follow restrictions imposed by police, according to his lawyer.

He was also briefly detained in neighboring Sweden in early March. His lawyer said he had crossed the border to buy cigarettes, which are cheaper there, without knowing he could not leave the country while his asylum application was being processed.

Many questions remain about Medvedev's past and the circumstances of his escape. Some experts have said he could not have crossed the heavily guarded border without assistance.

He claims to have dashed across the frozen Pasvik river that marks part of the Russian-Norwegian border while being chased by attack dogs and Russian border guards, who fired at him.

AFP has not been able to independently confirm his account.

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