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Member of Secretive Anti-Censorship Group Flees Russia, Citing FSB Pressure

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Sofia Chepik. **Sofia Chepik / Instagram**

A young Russian woman who was part of a secretive online group calling for protests against government internet restrictions has fled the country after being held in police detention for two weeks and reportedly facing pressure from security services.

Sofia Chepik, 20, told independent journalists that she was a member of an anonymously run group called Scarlet Swan, which appeared as a Telegram channel earlier this year after Russia began introducing tighter internet controls.

In April, Chepik was arrested and ordered to serve a 15-day jail sentence for disturbing the peace. According to court documents cited by the exiled news outlet Vyorstka, she was accused of swearing in public and harassing people.

While serving that sentence, Chepik claims agents from Russia's FSB security service pressured her to appear in a self-incriminating video that was later used as evidence in an investigation into an alleged plot to assassinate senior officials at Roskomnadzor, the

government agency responsible for internet restrictions.

“What I said in the video was all a memorized script that I was told to say on camera. I didn’t even know what I was talking about,” she told the RusNews outlet after her release from jail on Sunday.

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On Wednesday, Vyorstka said it was able to confirm that Chepik had fled Russia.

“I feel better than ever... No fear, no anxiety,” Chepik told Vyorstka in an interview, noting that border agents had questioned her for longer than others at one of the border checkpoints.

Chepik is believed to be at least the third member of Scarlet Swan to have fled the country since several individuals affiliated with the group were recently arrested. In March, the group issued cryptic calls on social media for protests against government restrictions on the internet.

Russian authorities, including President Vladimir Putin, have defended mounting internet restrictions as a necessary shield against Ukrainian drone strikes and what they describe as terrorist activity.

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