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Turkey’s Deportation of Anti-War Russian Signals Growing Risks for Kremlin Critics Abroad

By Moscow Times Reporter

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Ariadna Litvinova. **Facebook**

Turkey has deported a Russian activist wanted by Moscow for protesting the Kremlin's invasion of Ukraine, in what appears to be the first known case of Ankara returning an anti-war Russian to their home country.

Russian authorities had charged Ariadna Litvinova, 24, with “discrediting” the army after she wrote messages on banners at a pro-war exhibition in St. Petersburg that read: “Murderers,” “Peace to Ukraine” and “Freedom for political prisoners.”

Litvinova was deported — meaning that her removal from Turkey was formally initiated by Ankara and not in response to a Russian extradition request — to Moscow's Vnukovo Airport on Saturday and detained on arrival, her lawyers said.

She faces up to seven years in Russian prison if convicted.

Human rights lawyers warn that deportation is becoming an increasingly common tool of transnational repression against Russian anti-war activists abroad.

Unlike extradition, deportation "does not require months-long extradition proceedings, appeals or other legal processes," said Anastasia Burakova, a lawyer and the founder of Kovcheg (The Ark), a project that supports Russian anti-war emigres.

Deportation also makes it difficult to establish whether states have cooperated behind the scenes.

While deportation is formally a sovereign right of the state, it can in some cases become a tool of transnational repression, Burakova told The Moscow Times.

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Russia is a party to 96 bilateral extradition agreements and a member of 20 international treaties, Burakova said in a recent report on transnational repression and politically motivated persecution against Russian exiles.

But the existence of such agreements does not mean countries automatically comply with Moscow's requests.

According to experts, countries where the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) interstate wanted list is in effect pose the greatest risk to Russian anti-war activists, with Belarus, Armenia and Azerbaijan among the least safe destinations.

Tactics used against Russian dissidents may include "detention based on bilateral extradition requests, imprisonment pending extradition proceedings, deportations under fabricated pretexts, entry bans, revocation or denial of residence permits for activists, as well as cases of kidnapping and forced transfer to Russia," Burakova's report said.

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Like Litvinova, who was placed on Russia's federal wanted list in February after a criminal case was opened against her, people facing criminal charges in Russia are most at-risk, she said.

Litvinova, a graduate of a police college, was arrested last year and initially charged with vandalism for her anti-war action. She admitted to damaging property and described her actions as the result of an emotional outburst, her lawyer told reporters last year.

She was able to leave Russia after her pre-trial arrest was changed to a ban on certain activities. At the time, she told reporters that the revised restrictions did not prohibit her from leaving the country and she flew to Turkey, where her father lives.

Her father later told BBC Russian that Turkey deported her because she overstayed her visa-free period in the country.

Contact with Litvinova has been lost since her deportation to Russia, her lawyer said, adding that she was expected to be transferred to St. Petersburg.

The Telegram channel Prison Lawyer, which first reported the news, did not explain why she was unable to flee to a third country before her deportation from Turkey.

While Turkey was seen as a relatively safe hub for anti-war Russians in the wake of the invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Kovcheg said that in 2025 it documented the first case of direct cooperation between the Russian and Turkish Interpol bureaus that bypassed the central office.

In that case, a Russian dissident was detained shortly after contacting the Russian consulate, and Turkish authorities subsequently ordered the person's deportation on national security grounds, Kovcheg said.

"The analyzed case materials indicate that the decision was based on information provided by the Russian Interpol bureau, linking the individual's anti-war comments on social media to 'extremism'-related charges," the report said.

"This case marks a precedent, suggesting that Turkey can no longer be regarded as a safe environment" for anti-war Russians, it said, adding that a human rights activist helped the person to flee to a safe country.

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Rights activists say that similar cases appear to be on the rise.

So far this year, Kazakhstan has granted at least four of Moscow's requests to extradite a Russian citizen facing criminal prosecution at home, according to the Russian Anti-War Committee.

In 2023, Kyrgyzstan transferred to Russia anti-war activist Alexei Rozhkov, who was wanted by his home country over an arson attack on a military enlistment office that he carried out in protest of the invasion of Ukraine.

"Countries appear to be increasingly beginning to normalize their relations with Russia, including when it comes to handing [anti-war] people over and engaging in informal forms of cooperation," Burakova said.

At the same time, she said, it is extremely difficult to document political pressure from Moscow, especially when cases are formally classified as deportations and presented as sovereign decisions by another country, she said.

"We can see the signs — unusual timelines or justifications that are highly atypical for such procedures and that sometimes match, word for word, the explanations given by Russian law

enforcement," she said.

"But human rights defenders cannot formally prove these links, and that remains the biggest challenge [when trying to protect at-risk individuals]," she continued.

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