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ARTICLES

“The world has turned upside down.” A young man with schizophrenia is on trial for opposing the war

At the end of July, a department of The Investigative Committee in Nizhny Novgorod, a major city in western Russia, pressed charges against 21-year-old Alexei Volsky for spreading «fake news» about the Russian army through his posts on social media (part 1 of Article 207.3 of the Criminal Code). He has been under house arrest since the 13th of July. Alexei has also been diagnosed with schizophrenia. Here's how the case is developing.

ОБ ЭТОМ НИКТО НЕ УЗНАЕТ

Если об этом никто не напишет. Подпишитесь на регулярные пожертвования ОВД-Инфо, чтобы плохие дела не оставались в тишине.

ПОДПИСАТЬСЯ

A criminal case against Alexei Volsky was initiated in early July, as was told by OVD-Info affiliate lawyer Kristina Tyurina. In mid-July he was **arrested**.

«Neighbours said that four riot policemen arrived at Alexei's apartment. It seemed like they did not beat Alexei, but they immediately put him in handcuffs and started to search his apartment. They flipped the whole place upside down», said Alexei's mother Natalia.

During the search, they seized her son's phone, a hard drive from a computer and a USB flash drive. After that, they took Alexei to the police department, where he was held the entire day. They reached out and informed Alexei's mother only at 7 P.M., even though, according to neighbours, the search was conducted in the morning.

Natalia recalled that some unknown number kept calling her. She usually doesn't pick up the phone unless she knows who it is. Then she received a text message saying that her son was detained by the police. She thought that it was a scam and started calling Alexei. He didn't pick up the phone. She called again after a while, but the investigator answered instead of Alexei.

She contacted her son's neighbours later. According to Alexei's mother, the neighbours were more familiar with her father, Alexei's grandfather, but it was not possible to inform him about the search because shortly before that he changed his phone number.

Alexei spent a night in the police department, and a court hearing was planned for the next day. Natalia managed to contact OVD-Info that evening, and by the morning, OVD-Info sent an affiliate lawyer, Kristina Tyurina. Natalia and the lawyer spent the whole morning collecting documents in order to get a «house arrest» verdict for Alexei.

A criminal case was initiated because of two posts on his personal social media account. Both posts were made in April 2022. He wrote: «There are many dead civilians and total destruction. The Russian occupiers and the Russian government itself are to blame. They do inhumane things».

Kristina Tyurin, his defence counsel, said that there was a linguistic examination of the posts. «The expert divided the comments into separate sentences. He concluded that, in some places, Alexei expressed a personal opinion but, in others, published information that does not agree with the official position of the Ministry of Defense».

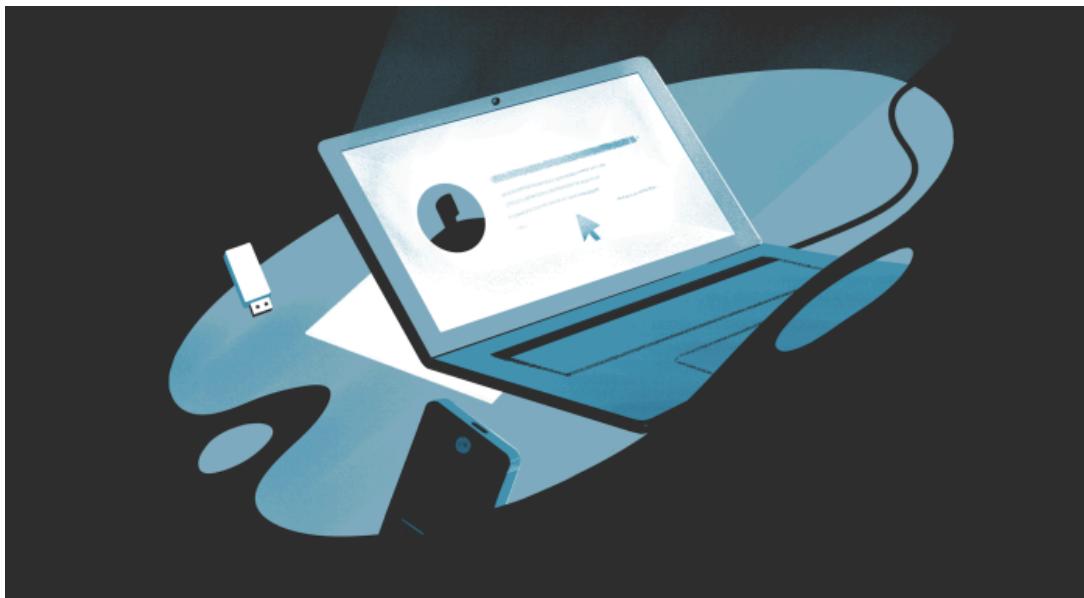
The expert's report states that Alexei attributes crimes to «Russians» as a national group, including accusing them of murdering Ukrainian civilians and raping the wives of dead Ukrainian men.

The defence finally managed to achieve a house arrest for Alexei even though the investigator insisted on putting him in a pre-trial detention centre.

More than anything, Natalia is worried that her son may be sent for compulsory psychiatric treatment, as he has been registered with, a psychiatrist since childhood. The prospect of pre-trial jail scares her as well. She hopes that the court will rule for probation or a fine.

She wonders why people are being persecuted as criminals or repeat offenders. She says that «black has turned white and white has become black». The whole world has turned upside down. Career criminals are now supported while

normal people are imprisoned. She realises that this is just the nature of the times. We must experience it and get through it. Nothing lasts forever, but this is so wrong.



A year before his arrest, Alexei decided to move away from his mother and grandfather to live alone. Around the time he turned 20, he told his mum about his decision, and Natalia agreed that giving him a chance to be independent was necessary. She is frequently ill and spends a lot of time in the hospital, so when her condition worsened after Coronavirus, she realised that he needed to be able to adapt to life on his own if anything happened to her. It was impossible to keep him under her wing all the time.

His relatives continued to support him both morally and financially, although his family did not have much money. Natalia wasn't working at the moment because she had to constantly undergo treatment and was in the process of applying for disability. Alexei didn't work either — all three of them had to live on his grandfather's pension.

«Alexei was always visiting us. He ate here, and took some food home, » — Natalia says. At some point, Alexei started looking for a job.

Before that, he tried to make money only as a kid. He and his friends would pick up scrap metal and take it to be recycled. That's how he got his first ever money: for lemonade and chips.

After he finished school he didn't go to university, so he had to choose from job openings that did not require higher education. «He told us that he didn't want to study anymore. Allegedly, in school, they discouraged his desire to study», she said.

According to her, Alexei had trouble with teachers if they tried to push too hard. He could start acting aggressively in response.

Eventually, Alexei got a job at a gas station, but he only lasted there for about half a month. At that time he had stomach pain and couldn't work. They sent him to a hospital to get sick leave, but he refused. So they waved him goodbye, obviously, without paying him anything.

Alexei got some money from tips given to him by customers whose cars he helped refuel. Natalia adds that she is happy that her son at least tried to start earning money on his own.

After the failure with the gas station, Alexei decided to try applying for disability — he wanted to receive a pension and start living more independently. Although he was diagnosed with schizophrenia at the age of 14, he was not considered disabled. To get that status he had to be hospitalised first.

«It all started in the eighth grade when he stopped going to school. He didn't go anywhere, did not want anything, he was at home just doing nothing. He still somehow finished eighth grade with a big fuss at school. For the entire ninth grade, he went to school at best once a week. Due to this, he had a police record, inspectors came home to check on him, and I was constantly called to school. So I went to a psychiatrist for help», Natalia recalls.

Alexei underwent a medical examination for three months before the diagnosis was made. The school supported him, and the boy was transferred to homeschooling, which allowed him to graduate from the ninth grade with a general education certificate.

After the gas station incident, Alexei went back for another psychiatric examination, and after two and a half months he was finally granted disability status and put on welfare.

Natalia says that when they took Alexei home, he was completely unlike himself. It took two or three months for him to reach a more or less normal state. He only completely recovered six months later. They are afraid that if he is sent to a psychiatric facility, he will not be himself again. Now he is at least doing something, trying to live a normal life. She is afraid to even imagine what would happen to him there. Alexei said that during the «treatment», people are brought to such a state that they just lie there. They don't even get up.

Alexei is currently undergoing medical treatment. He needs to take pills to go into remission. According to his mother, he does not take medicine regularly, but only during periods of crisis. «He says that when he takes pills, his mind feels foggy and his head hurts», she adds.



Events in Ukraine have been worrying Alexei since February 24, 2022. He actively posted on social networks about his position and tried to convince those who did not share his opinion, says Natalia:

«Alexei said that he talked about politics with people in some online games. He explained his position to them. He tried to recall history and told them who Hitler was and what fascism was about. Someone did not like it and immediately left the conversation. Another started an argument, but there were those who thought about it».

Even though the persecution for an anti-war position then, in the spring of 2022, was only gaining momentum, Natalia understood that it might not be safe to express one's opinion on the internet. She talked to her son about it and explained that it made no sense to try to change people's minds since only a few would start thinking differently.

Natalia believes: «Most people don't understand and don't see what is happening. Some don't want to see it. There are those who are scared. Some people live their own lives thinking that it does not concern them. But either way, the consequences are going to affect everyone. If it immediately concerns you or not — in the end all of us will have to answer».

Alexei soon agreed with his mother and stopped posting on social networks. He hasn't even logged into his account for almost a year. He thought that he was safe from being persecuted for expressing his anti-war position.

Alexei is now serving house arrest at his mother and grandfather's house.

Natalia holds the same political views as her son. His grandfather also shares Alexey's anti-war position. «We, thank God, are all of the same views. Now people are being separated because of politics. Families are being destroyed. It's very hard. This system does everything intentionally. We understand everything, we know what is happening, we see everything, we follow what is going on. It's just scary to talk now. We try not to be too visible, but if something happens, we always stand up for each other», says Natalia.

Karina Merkuryeva

ЧТО Я МОГУ С ЭТИМ СДЕЛАТЬ?

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ПОДДЕРЖАТЬ

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