

POLITICAL PRISONERS  
MEMORIAL

**FRAUDSTERS**  
**FROM THE FSB:**  
HOW LAW ENFORCEMENT  
AGENCIES FABRICATE  
PROSECUTIONS FOR TERRORISM  
AND TREASON

10 DECEMBER 2025



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**The footage is probably shot from a camera on an officer's helmet. A man jumps out of the front passenger seat of a car, holding what looks like a hammer in his hand. In the headlights or street lighting, his silhouette can be seen against the snow. He runs towards a car parked in front. Someone else runs up to the car from the other side.**

*'Fucking police! Get out of the fucking car!'*

**Someone is pulled from the back seat of the car, but it is dark in the street and very difficult to see what is happening.**

*'She fell, for fuck's sake, she fell!'*

**A girl, lying in the snow, responds surprisingly calmly, only slightly confused:**

*'I fell down, I fell down.'*

**The men shout over each other:**

*'She rolled over!'*

*'Get your hands up!'*

*'Hands behind your head, for fuck's sake!'*

**The girl is handcuffed.**

This is how the arrest of 20-year-old **Valeria Zotova** took place.

We shall return to her story a little later.

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## ABOUT THIS REPORT

Valeria Zotova is just one of the victims of entrapment by Russian law enforcement agencies.

In Russia, entrapment has long been a method used by law enforcement agencies (the MVD [Ministry of Internal Affairs], the FSB [Federal Security Service]) or their agents to artificially create the conditions for commission of a crime. Until recently, this method was most often used in high-profile but relatively specific cases, such as the 'New Greatness' [Novoe Velichie] case, as well as in the routine fight against drug trafficking. However, after the start of the full-scale war against Ukraine, the practice of entrapment has rapidly expanded beyond these limits, becoming an integral part of the system of politically motivated criminal prosecutions.

The current report presents an analysis of 33 criminal cases in which there is a very high probability of entrapment. In some cases, the incitement is obvious; in others, there are strong grounds to assume it. To get the full picture, we have analysed indictments, sentences, appeals, victim testimonies and letters from places of imprisonment, as well as publications by media and human rights organisations. Based on this information, we describe how entrapment works in politically motivated criminal cases. Of course, there are significantly more than 33 cases with evidence of entrapment. We have sought to select the most illustrative ones.

All the cases examined were initiated after the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and are directly related to the war. This does not mean we do not record entrapment in other types of politically motivated prosecutions. However, those are far fewer in number and, furthermore, cases of entrapment related to the war against Ukraine have their own distinctive features and need to be considered separately as part of a specific campaign of intimidation against opponents of the Russian invasion. Another characteristic feature of these cases of entrapment is that the vast majority of them were run by the FSB and only a small number by the Main Directorate for Combating Organised Crime of the Russian MVD (Centre 'E').

In considering this issue, it must be emphasised that the practice of entrapment is not only unethical and immoral, but also directly prohibited by Russian and international law. In accordance with Article 5 of the Federal Law 'On Operational-Investigative Activities,' *'bodies (officials) carrying out operational-investigative activities are prohibited from inciting, persuading, or encouraging, directly or indirectly, the commission of unlawful acts (entrapment).'* In violating this norm, law enforcement officers not only exceed their authority, but also create crimes where none existed, undermine trust in the legal system, violate the law, and deprive the accused of their right to a fair trial.

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## TWO STORIES

We begin with the stories of two young women who lived near each other and did not hide their anti-war views. In other regards, they were quite different people and did not know each other. However, at a certain point, events in their lives began to unfold according to a surprisingly similar scenario.

# 1 — VALERIA ZOTOVA

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**ARTICLES**

Art. 30, Part 3  
Art. 205, Part 1  
— Attempted  
terrorist act

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**SENTENCE**

6 years'  
imprisonment



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**DATE OF BIRTH**

4 September 2003

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**DEPRIVED  
OF LIBERTY**

17 February 2023

[Valeria Zotova](#) lived in Yaroslavl with her mother Svetlana and worked in a warehouse of the Magnit chain store. The two women attracted the attention of law enforcement because they openly disapproved of Russia's war against Ukraine, and Svetlana also expressed opposition views in general. Before the war, Svetlana would go to the center of Yaroslavl to hold single-person protests. In November 2022, she was fined for 'discrediting' the armed forces.

In early December 2022, Valeria Zotova began corresponding on WhatsApp with a man who introduced himself as 'Andrei,' an officer of the Ukrainian Security Service [SBU] from Kyiv. According to the investigative authorities, Zotova subscribed to 'various pro-Ukrainian groups and chats,' where 'Andrei' probably found her. According to Svetlana and one of Valeria's friends, Valeria's correspondence with 'Andrei' was a mixture of light flirting and discussion of the war situation. On one occasion, 'Andrei' allegedly sent Valeria a bouquet of flowers by courier.

Around this time, Valeria Zotova made a new friend who called herself 'Karina.' As it later became known, the girls' friendship was part of an investigative 'experiment' organised by the FSB. In court, 'Karina' was to act as a secret witness named 'Geranium' and testify against Zotova.

When 'Andrei' suggested Valeria set fire to a rural local government building, promising her \$2,000 in payment, 'Karina' supported the idea, found a car with a driver for the purpose and accompanied Zotova in this car until she was arrested. 'Karina' did everything she could to calm Zotova before the trip. *'Only think about the good things. Everything will be fine,'* she wrote to Valeria on VK a few hours before the latter's arrest.

Just before the arson was to take place, Zotova changed her mind. She came up with an idea she thought was better: to deceive 'Andrei' by pretending his request had been fulfilled. She decided not to set fire to the building, but instead just take pictures of herself standing in front of the building holding 'Molotov cocktails' and then report back with these photos. This is evidenced by the correspondence between the young women which is available in the case files. However, the court subsequently ignored these facts, which could have served as evidence of Zotova's innocence.

On 17 February 2023, Valeria Zotova was arrested in a car outside the offices of the Karabikhskoe village local government in the Yaroslavl municipal district of Yaroslavl region. In the car were gasoline purchased by Zotova, empty bottles, scraps of fabric and a lighter. On 28 June 2023, Zotova was found guilty of attempting to commit a terrorist act and sentenced to six years in a general regime penal colony.

## 2 — VERONIKA NETUNAEVA

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**ARTICLES**

Art. 33, Part 5  
Art. 30, Part 1  
Art. 205, Part 1  
— Aiding and abetting  
preparation  
of a terrorist act

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**SENTENCE**

6 years'  
imprisonment



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**DATE OF BIRTH**

4 October 1987

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**DEPRIVED  
OF LIBERTY**

14 July 2023

[Veronika Netunaeva](#) lived in the city of Uglich in Yaroslavl region and worked as a consultant in the city government's legal department.

Netunaeva expressed negative views towards the policies of the Russian authorities and the war against Ukraine on her Instagram and Telegram accounts. During April and May 2023, a certain 'Yakov' wrote to her on WhatsApp, saying he had read her Instagram post and then found her phone number through a bot. Netunaeva's interlocutor said he lived in Kyiv and was a soldier in the Ukrainian army. The phone number used by 'Yakov' had a Ukrainian code.

'Yakov' discussed the war and the situation in Russia with Netunaeva. He probably expressed admiration for her courage and determination. However, when 'Yakov' asked her if she had any acquaintances who would be willing to plant explosives under railway tracks and at the Uglich hydroelectric power station for a reward, Netunaeva replied she had no such acquaintances, there was no point in mining the railway tracks, and it was impossible to mine the hydroelectric power station.

Then 'Yakov' began to discuss with Netunaeva a drone attack on the Uglich hydroelectric power station and asked her to provide information to help carry it out. Netunaeva sent photographs and coordinates of the hydroelectric power station, which she had obtained after visiting the hydroelectric power station three times. Her actions during these trips were recorded by FSB officers. Netunaeva refused the reward offered by 'Yakov.' As Netunaeva stated at her trial, she suspected she was a victim of entrapment, but she was not sure and wanted to find out. According to her, the information she sent 'Yakov' was of no use and was publicly available.

Veronika Netunaeva was arrested on 14 July 2023 at her place of work. The arrest [took place](#) in a less brutal manner than in the case of Zotova.

On 13 February 2024, Veronika Netunaeva was found guilty of aiding and abetting preparation of a terrorist act and sentenced to six years in a general regime penal colony.

These two stories have a great deal in common. Both women lived in Yaroslavl region and expressed anti-war views on social media. In both cases an unknown person contacted them via WhatsApp, introducing himself in one case as a Ukrainian soldier and in the other as an officer of the Ukrainian Security Service [SBU]. At first, their interlocutors talked about war and politics, then asked for help in carrying out an attack on a certain target. Both women were under surveillance and detained before the ‘terrorist attack’ was carried out. In both cases, the investigation was conducted by the Yaroslavl branch of the FSB. Both indictments were signed by A. D. Popov, senior investigator of the FSB’s Yaroslavl branch. Zotova was charged with attempting to commit a terrorist act, and Netunaeva with preparing to commit a terrorist act.<sup>1</sup>

Finally, the most surprising similarity is that the materials of both criminal cases refer to a telephone number to which the accounts of ‘Andrei’ and ‘Iakov’ were linked. It is the same number: +380 66 233 57 39. The media outlet Mediazona, which [wrote](#) about the Zotova case, tried to find the owner of the telephone number: ‘*This number is registered to Lidiya Mikolaevna Kuznetsova, while on VKontakte it is linked to the account of a user with a different name — Olga Knyazeva, whose page has not been updated since the summer of 2018. Judging from her profile, Knyazeva sold shoes and clothing in Donetsk. The list of pages she followed includes local groups, a group with recipes, and a pro-Russian page with news from Makiivka. Mediazona was unable to find any other information related to this number.*’

It turns out it was the same people who communicated with both women. Possibly it was one person who specialised in a ‘female audience.’ In both cases, neither the investigative authorities nor the court attempted to find out who owned this telephone number. These cases (like most of the others discussed in this report) are described in more detail in our related publications ([Valeria Zotova](#), [Veronika Netunaeva](#)), where you can also find more information about why these cases were most likely examples of entrapment.<sup>2</sup>

It is difficult to say for certain why the security forces did not use a new SIM card in each new case. Perhaps the Yaroslavl FSB had a limited number of Ukrainian SIM cards in 2022-23. But probably the main reason was that there was no need to do so. Court decisions in such cases are predetermined, and such ‘trifles,’ even if they were to become known, would have no influence on them.

**At present, ‘Political Prisoners. Memorial’ database contains information about 15 prosecutions on charges under Article 205 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation [CC RF] (‘Terrorist Act’) in Yaroslavl region which show signs of political motivation.**

In all 15 cases, the defendants were arrested before the ‘terrorist acts’ were carried out. In three cases, we found signs of entrapment and have recognised those convicted as political prisoners. In addition to the cases of Zotova and Netunaeva, this includes that of [Denis Popov](#), a resident of the same town of Uglich who was going to set fire to a military enlistment office after communicating with an operative who used the pseudonym ‘Anriiko.’ The remaining 12 cases are those that we have either not yet fully investigated or ones where as yet we have insufficient evidence. How many of them also involved entrapment by the law enforcement agencies? Or perhaps it would be more accurate to ask: are there any cases where there was no entrapment?



## DENIS POPOV

### ARTICLES

Art. 280, Part 2  
— Public calls for extremist activity using the Internet  
Art. 30, Part 3  
Art. 205, Part 1  
— Attempted terrorist act

### SENTENCE

8 years' imprisonment

### DATE OF BIRTH

1 June 2001

<sup>1</sup> Netunaeva's charge was reclassified by the court as ‘aiding and abetting in preparation.’

<sup>2</sup> Information about some of the cases referred to in this review is still being collected and will be published shortly.

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## STAGES OF ENTRAPMENT

We examine cases involving entrapment in the order of the stages in which they unfold, starting with the search for a victim and ending with the trial.

### STAGE 1 THE MOST OPAQUE THE SEARCH FOR A VICTIM

#### WHERE DO THE SECURITY FORCES LOOK?

##### In informal groups

It all starts with choosing a victim. Before the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, it was common practice for law enforcement agencies to identify informal groups that aroused their suspicion, after which an agent would be infiltrated into the group to carry out the entrapment. This scenario was followed, for example, in the aforementioned cases of [New Greatness](#) and of [the Marxist circle in Ufa](#). Such cases have continued even after the start of the full-scale invasion. For example, FSB officers found [Nikolai Yuryev](#), a chef from Novouralsk in Sverdlovsk region, at a meeting of supporters of the Citizens of the USSR<sup>3</sup> movement and [Evgeny Mishchenko](#) among volunteers at the so-called Nemtsov Bridge in Moscow.

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3 An informal social movement of supporters of the theory that the Soviet Union continues to exist de jure as a sovereign state and subject to international relations. Its members are regularly subject to criminal prosecution.

##### Anti-war statements on the internet

However, since the start of the full-scale war, this scenario of searching for victims has become something of an exception. The scale of political repression has increased dramatically, entrapment has become much more common, and this method of finding a victim has been seen as too labour-intensive. Moreover, opponents of the war are not generally united in any groups. The main place to search for potential victims is the internet.

In many cases, there are grounds to argue that it was publications on the internet, primarily on social media, that attracted the interest of law enforcement to future defendants in criminal cases. Of the 33 cases we consider in this report, it is likely that in at least nine cases events unfolded in line with this scenario. In these cases it had no significance on which social media site or internet resource the statements were made. When contacting Veronika Netunaeva, the 'Ukrainian soldiers' referred to her posts on Instagram. The soldier [Anton Khozhaev](#) had left comments on the Telegram chat *Journalists from Ukraine* in which he spoke of his desire to travel to Ukraine. [Aleksei Giletin](#), a resident of Murmansk born in Luhansk, expressed his anti-war views on VK.

## Searching for information about the Free Russia Legion on the internet

A large number of instances of entrapment have been linked to the Free Russia Legion (FRL), a unit of the Ukrainian army. The FRL is mentioned in approximately half of the cases we examine in this report. Media and human rights organisations have repeatedly written about entrapment by Russian intelligence agencies related to the FRL. Russian intelligence agencies have deployed a wide network of fake internet resources, which they use in an effort to identify citizens with pro-Ukrainian views interested in the activities of the FRL.

In May 2023, the [SOTA project](#) studied numerous fake Telegram bots allegedly linked to the FRL and the Russian Volunteer Corps (RVC). The bots position themselves as official resources of these organisations and collect personal information about applicants to join them: passport details, military ID numbers, places of residence and work, national pension insurance number and taxpayer ID number. At that time, there were about ten fake bots claiming to be related to the FRL. They required candidates to fill out a questionnaire and provide information about themselves before contacting a recruiter. Investigative journalists entered into correspondence with these accounts, sent them completed questionnaires with an IP logger (a programme that records the IP address from which the document was opened) and found that the accounts were managed from St. Petersburg, Ekaterinburg or via an American VPN. At the same time, the FRL told the SOTA project that it only has one chatbot on Telegram, and that does not collect personal data.

The human rights project [First Department](#) reported that, in August 2024, civic activists and programmers Aleksandr Litreev and Artem Tamoyan [had spoken](#) about a phishing campaign targeting anti-war Russians. Clone sites of the FRL and the RVC collected data on people who had attempted to contact these formations. Yandex showed both of these fake websites at the top of its search results. According to Tamoyan, the only explanation for this behaviour by the search engine is that it was manually configured by Yandex employees. The information collected through the fake websites was then used as the basis for criminal prosecutions.

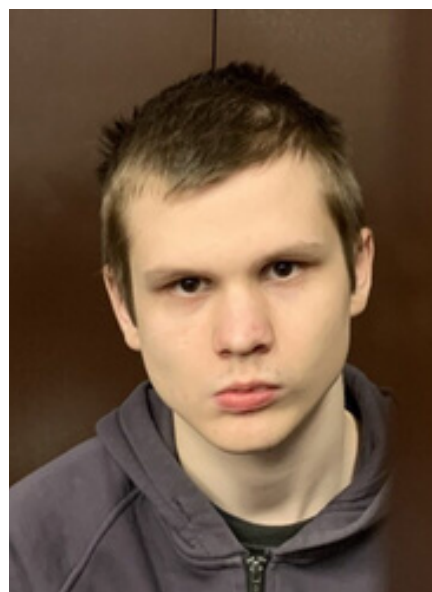
The scenario in which a pro-Ukrainian Russian believes they are communicating with the FRL, fills out a questionnaire, sends personal data, performs certain tasks (from putting up posters to preparing to set fire to a military enlistment office), makes plans to leave Russia to join the FRL, and as a result is detained, while all their communication with the 'FRL' was in fact with the FSB, is probably the most common scenario in the cases considered in this report.

## Interception of correspondence in Telegram

Another possible means to find a victim is to intercept messages in Telegram. Journalists and human rights activists have repeatedly suggested that correspondence with bots on Ukrainian channels may be accessible to Russian intelligence agencies. The media outlet *Vazhnye Istorii* (Important Stories) [has written about](#) this issue and First Department has directly [confirmed](#) the practice. While we cannot unequivocally confirm this based on an analysis of the cases at our disposal, it seems likely.

## Calls to Ukraine

Attempts to contact Ukrainian organisations by telephone are unsafe. Calls to certain numbers are likely to be recorded by Russian intelligence agencies, and Russians who make them are subject to operational surveillance. As in the case of internet resources, the use of fake telephone numbers cannot be ruled out.



## MIKHAIL BALABANOV

### ARTICLES

Art. 30, Part 1  
Art. 205, Part 1  
— Preparation  
for an Act of Terrorism

### DATE OF BIRTH

12 June 2002

### DEPRIVED OF LIBERTY

19 December 2022

### SENTENCE

4,5 years'  
imprisonment

According to the indictment in the case of 20-year-old Kazan resident [Mikhail Balabanov](#), this is how the defendant described his attempt to contact the Ukrainian 'I Want to Live' project:

*Around the end of November 2022, he was watching a video on YouTube linked to the Ukrainian side, which talked about Russian prisoners of war and how surrendering could help avoid participating in the war, and there was a foreign phone number starting with +380, but he doesn't remember the full number. Since he was afraid that he might be mobilised and sent to fight in a war with which he wholeheartedly disagreed, he called the number, but no one answered. Later that evening, a user named 'I Want to Live' wrote to him on Telegram, but there was no phone number in that account. The user 'I Want to Live' asked Balabanov if he wanted to surrender, to which he replied that he was against the war and did not want to be mobilised. He gave his personal details, expressed his negative views about the war and told his interlocutor he wanted to leave Russia. The user 'I Want to Live' told him he could help him leave Russia, but that in return for help, he would also have to assist them. He agreed, after which the user 'I Want to Live' introduced himself as an officer of the Main Intelligence Directorate of the Ukrainian Ministry of Defence and said that his name was "Ben".*

In September 2022, 21-year-old [Daniil Zinkovsky](#), according to the verdict, called a telephone number allegedly 'used as a contact number for persons wishing to join the International Legion for the Territorial Defence of Ukraine, and informed them of his intention to join one of the Ukrainian armed formations to participate in hostilities against the armed forces of the Russian Federation.' Following instructions he then received, Zinkovsky, 'travelling in the direction of Ukraine,' left the village of Leningradskaya in Krasnodar region, where he lived, for Rostov region, where he was detained. According to the verdict, all his actions were under the surveillance of Krasnodar region FSB officers.

## WAYS TO CARRY OUT ENTRAPMENT

### Online

As with finding victims, most entrapments are now carried out online. Law enforcement officers begin communicating with potential victims on the internet, and all further communication takes place there. The victim carries out various tasks, which law enforcement subsequently use as evidence against them in court. When the law enforcement officers consider enough has been done, or in other cases, as for example if a victim stops following their instructions, an arrest is made. In more than half the cases we examined, events unfolded in line with this scenario. A telling example of this practice is the case of Veronika Netunaeva described above.

### Agents provocateurs

However, there continue to be instances of entrapment carried out with the help of *agents provocateurs*. The cases of Yuryev and Mishchenko have already been mentioned. [Nikolai Yuryev](#) met the *agents provocateurs* at a meeting of the Citizens of the USSR movement. A supposed like-minded volunteer and fellow member of the Nemtsov Bridge movement gained the trust of volunteer [Evgeny Mishchenko](#). His new acquaintance turned out to be an *agent provocateur* used by the police anti-extremism department, Centre E. [Polina Evtushenko](#) went on friendly dates with a young man who started conversations with her about the war and recorded them on a dictaphone. However, these examples and most other similar offline entrapments relate to the years 2022–2023.

Those acting as *agents provocateurs* are often individuals with legal problems or a criminal past. As it later transpired, Polina Evtushenko had been dating Nikolai Komarov, who had previously been convicted of theft. [Ilya Baburin](#) was offered help in setting fire to a military enlistment office by a secret witness, ‘Dmitry Shorin,’ a person who was apparently at that time himself being criminally prosecuted.

The case of [Aleksandr Fomenko](#) involved Aleksandr Demyanenko, a previously convicted criminal who ‘accidentally’ served a short-term jail sentence for an administrative-law offence together with Fomenko. The men met, continued to communicate after their arrest, drank together, talked about the war, and wrote letters to the FRL. Demyanenko then testified against Fomenko in court. Later, when a large quantity of drugs was found in Demyanenko's possession, the investigative authorities and the court treated him leniently.

### Mixed option

Finally, there are cases in which both *agents provocateurs* and online correspondence are involved. One such case, that of Valeria Zotova, has already been described above. In this context, the case of [Gagik Grigoryan](#), a high school student from Kursk region, should be mentioned.

DATE OF BIRTH	ARTICLES	SENTENCE
19 August 2006	Art. 30, Part 1 Art. 30, Part 3 Art. 205, Part 2 Art. 205.4, Part 2 Art. 222.1, Part 4 Art. 275	7 years' imprisonment  40,000 rubles fine



During a lecture that was part of a preparatory course for going to university, a girl who claimed to be the same age as Grigoryan introduced herself to him. While she looked much older, she explained this was because of a rare genetic disease. They continued to keep in touch and the girl would start conversations about the war, politics, disagreement with the actions of the Russian Federation in Ukraine and the need for the war to stop. Later, this girl acted as a witness, ‘Shmykova,’ in Grigoryan's prosecution, giving testimony during the preliminary investigation that Grigoryan intended to commit a terrorist act and had urged her to do the same. At the same time, Grigoryan was chatting on a messenger service with unknown individuals who, according to the investigative authorities, told Grigoryan they were officers of the Main Intelligence Directorate of the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine. Again, according to the investigative authorities, the ‘officers of the Main Intelligence Directorate’ wanted Grigoryan to carry out a terrorist attack and blow up a Russian serviceman. We return to the case of Gagik Grigoryan below.

## STAGE 2

### THE DECISIVE MOMENT ESTABLISHING CONTACT AND OBTAINING AGREEMENT TO COOPERATE

Once a potential victim has been selected, a critical moment arrives: having established contact, consent needs to be obtained to ‘cooperate.’ In some cases, the person may be ready to act almost immediately, but often law enforcement needs to use various methods of persuasion.

#### INSTRUMENTS OF PRESSURE: HOW LAW ENFORCEMENT USES WAR, MONEY AND FEAR

##### Anti-war, pro-Ukrainian sentiments

It all begins with conversations on anti-war topics, politics, and the Russian invasion. Law enforcement uses concerns related to the war to exert pressure and propose the individuals help Ukraine repel Russian aggression. This is exactly how, for example, conversations with school student Gagik Grigoryan were conducted. In the case of Nikolai Yuryev, law enforcement officers convinced him he could save Russian boys from mobilisation and death if he set fire to a military enlistment office.

For some of those targeted, this proves sufficient. However, in other cases, for example when the victim is unsure whether to carry out a task, other proposals may follow, taking into account the specifics of the individual's situation.

##### Assistance with emigration

If the victim is looking for opportunities to emigrate from Russia, a promise to help them leave is made. This is what happened, for example, in the cases of [Anton Galeta](#) and [Mikhail Balabanov](#).

##### Money

Law enforcement agencies readily offer and pay money. Money may be offered even in situations where it is not the main motive. For example, money was offered to Veronika Netunaeva, but she refused. Money is probably also offered with the aim of discrediting the targets, so that they can later be portrayed as venal and acting out of self-interest.

Money is paid for the completion of specific tasks, as compensation for expenses related to assignments from the ‘SBU,’ and for the purchase of items that are subsequently used as evidence. Payments are usually transferred to the victims' bank cards. At the same time, during the investigation and trial, the obvious need to follow the financial trail leading to the identity of the person who paid the money is systematically ignored.

##### The SBU intimidates Ukrainians

Threats allegedly coming from the Ukrainian Security Service (SBU) are often used to persuade residents of the occupied territories. ‘Representatives of the SBU’ insist on cooperation, threatening that if the targeted individual refuses to cooperate, their relatives living in Ukraine will face serious problems. This is what happened, for example, to [Valentina Tagirova](#).



#### VALENTINA TAGIROVA

##### ARTICLES

Art. 30, Part 1  
Art. 205, Part 2  
— Preparation  
for the commission  
of a terrorist act  
by a group of persons  
by prior conspiracy

##### SENTENCE

8 years'  
imprisonment

Valentina Tagirova is a citizen of Ukraine who obtained Russian citizenship in 2021. Until 2022 she lived in Makiivka, in Ukraine's Donetsk region, when she was evacuated to Samara in February 2022. In Samara, she lived in a temporary accommodation centre with other people from Ukraine. Tagirova told [Kholod](#) that in February 2023 she received a message on Telegram from an unknown person whose name and phone number were hidden. The person introduced themselves as ‘an employee of the SBU and said I needed to cooperate, as they knew where I was now, that I was in Samara with my daughter, that my father lived in Donetsk, and that if I refused, they would do bad things to my father [...]. He knew everything about me: who I was, who my relatives were and where they lived, where my daughter and I were. I didn't understand how they knew all this [...]. He told me to photograph some objects, and then suggested I buy items needed to start a fire and leave them in an agreed place — supposedly he would pick them up later and start the fire. I refused, but he began threatening me, saying if I wanted my loved ones to stay alive and well, I had to do what he said. I was scared. I thought that if I followed his instructions, it would all be over.’

### And even more cynicism

In the case of [Konstantin Gladkov](#), law enforcement took advantage of the desperation of a man searching for a relative missing in the war. Gladkov's nephew, who had been mobilised, went missing. Konstantin Gladkov and his relatives tried to find him, contacting various Russian and then Ukrainian authorities. It was probably these searches that attracted the attention of the security forces. This is how Gladkov describes the subsequent events: *'Around December 2023, he received a call on his phone. The caller introduced himself as Fyodor and explained he was a representative of [...] a charitable foundation. He said that Maksim, his nephew, was a prisoner of war, that he had been wounded and needed to be hospitalised, and that 10,000,000 roubles was needed to transport him, as the foundation did not currently have such funds because of the large number of requests. Konstantin Gladkov explained that his family did not have that kind of money, to which Fyodor asked him to do him a favour, namely to make metal brackets and mix saltpetre with aluminium powder.'*



**DATE OF BIRTH**  
17 July 1980

**ARTICLES**  
Art. 275  
Art. 205.5, Part 2  
Art. 223.1, Part 3  
Art. 222.1, Part 4

**SENTENCE**  
18 years'  
imprisonment  
600,000 rubles fine

## VICTIMS OF ENTRAPMENT

A wide range of people become victims of entrapment, but some groups are more at risk.

First and foremost, these are very young people. Of the 33 cases we examine in this report, 11 of the defendants were no older than 21 at the time of entrapment. Young people are more impulsive and trusting, and the security forces are happy to take advantage of this.

Secondly, many victims of entrapment are described by their acquaintances as naive and guileless, or even as being borderline in terms of their mental health. On account of various circumstances in their lives and personal characteristics, such people are more vulnerable to the actions of security forces.

Former lawyer [Magomedgadzhi Rabadanov](#) was 69 years old at the time of his arrest. He had lost a court case with his ex-wife and two sons over living space in a communal apartment and tried various ways to get the decision reviewed. His ex-wife argued that his behaviour was at times strange, characterised by obsessive ideas. He was examined by a psychiatrist, but no diagnosis was confirmed. In his search for justice, Rabadanov became desperate. Perhaps at some point he decided that the Ukrainian authorities could help him, something the FSB officers took advantage of. Rabadanov himself explained the ensuing criminal prosecution as the actions of a gang of *'criminals from law enforcement agencies, the courts and persons living in his communal apartment, including his ex-wife and children, with the aim of taking possession of his two rooms'* - something which also confirms doubts about his perception of reality.

In the case of Valeria Zotova, a forensic medical examination revealed *'an emotionally unstable personality disorder.'* People with this diagnosis tend to *'act impulsively, without considering the consequences of their actions,'* and exhibit *'emotional instability, irritability, quick temper, and a lack of critical assessment of their condition and behaviour.'*

Law enforcement agencies do not shy away from using entrapment against people with obvious mental health problems. A glaring example is the case of Aleksandr Matkheev.

## ALEKSANDR MATKHEEV

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### ARTICLES

Art. 30, Part 1

Art. 275

— Preparation  
to commit high treason

Art. 205.2, Part 2

— Propaganda of terrorism  
committed using the Internet

Art. 30, Part 1

Art. 205.5, Part 2

— Preparation to participate  
in an organization recognized as terrorist  
on the territory of the Russian Federation




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### DATE OF BIRTH

11 October 1997

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### DEPRIVED OF LIBERTY

14 November 2023

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### SENTENCE

10 years'  
imprisonment

[Aleksandr Matkheev](#) lived in the village of Osa in the Ust-Ordynsky Buryat district of Irkutsk region.

Matkheev was registered at a psychiatric clinic and had mild mental retardation. This diagnosis was later confirmed by a psychiatric forensic examination appointed by the investigative authorities. Aleksandr's sister [called](#) him 'a child in an adult's body' and noted his naivety and suggestibility. 'He is calm, slow, very measured, friendly, very easy-going,' she said, describing her brother's character. 'He was raised, let's say, mostly by women, his grandmother and mother.'

It was difficult for Matkheev to find a permanent job. He could not obtain a driving licence and work as a driver, nor could he work for a security company because of his diagnosis and registration with the local psychiatric hospital. For that reason, Matkheev took on various temporary jobs.

In January 2023, Matheev made a new acquaintance on the VK social media site, with whom he discussed joining the FRL. At that time, Matkheev posted Ukrainian symbols on VK, including the flags of Ukraine and the FRL. He discussed joining the FRL with several other people online, but it is unclear whether they were all connected to the security services. However, it is obvious that at some point officers of the Kemerovo FSB began corresponding with him. They asked him to fill out a questionnaire, shoot several videos, and buy a set of items (see below). After that, the Kemerovo FSB officers, probably not wanting to hand over the case they had 'uncovered' to their colleagues or to travel to Irkutsk region, told Matkheev to buy a ticket to the Taiga station in Kemerovo region. There, he was to be met by a representative of the FRL and escorted to Kazakhstan. On 14 November 2023, Matkheev was arrested at the station in Taiga. Later, a [video](#) of Matkheev's arrest was posted in which Matkheev, clearly frightened, does not scream or moan, but rather whimpers in pain and for a long time cannot find the words to answer the law enforcement officer's questions.

During his time on remand, the trusting and impressionable Matkheev completely revised his views and began to support the war. This is an excerpt from a letter he wrote to his mother:

*Mum, I won't let you down. I will listen to everyone.  
And I won't let down the FSB and FSIN officers.  
And I don't want to let anyone down. [...]  
And don't worry, Mum. I'll come back to you.  
You'll be proud of me. Mum, I'll be a hero.  
And I love my homeland. I love my Russia.*

On 24 April 2024, Aleksandr Matkheev was sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment, the first three years of which he is to spend in a cell-type prison.

## NAMES AND NICKNAMES OF LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS

Russian law enforcement officers and the *agents provocateurs* collaborating with them disproportionately use rare names and strange nicknames.

It is difficult to say whether this is a manifestation of a peculiar sense of humour or whether, in their opinion, unusual names and pseudonyms are intended to inspire greater trust in their victims or to weed out people of a more critical nature.

For example, the following names and nicknames were encountered in the cases reviewed in this report:

- YAKOV
- VUGAR IBRAGIMOV
- BEN
- LANA
- PLATON
- SHOROH
- LOVERS
- CHANNEL 1
- CURATOR
- CRIMEA COORDINATOR
- RF COORDINATOR
- ZDRAVKO PUGI
- NADEZHNY (RELIABLE)
- REX
- ABRAMS LEOPARDOVICH

## CONSENT — THE POINT OF NO RETURN

The moment law enforcement officers establish contact with a victim and obtain some form of consent to cooperate is probably the key moment.

For law enforcement, consent to cooperate is a kind of Rubicon after which there is no turning back.

It does not matter if there is a degree of ambiguity in this consent, it does not matter whether the suspect will do something other than that intended or even completely abandon their plans, it does not matter whether law enforcement officers have other evidence of a victim's 'criminal' intentions and actions. The person targeted will not be left alone and, one way or another, the case will end up in court. A telling example is the case of Artem Basyrov.

# ARTYOM BASYROV

## ARTICLES

Art. 30, Part 1

Art. 208, Part 2

— Preparation to participate in an illegal armed group on the territory of a foreign state, not provided for by the legislation of that state, for purposes contrary to the interests of the Russian Federation

## DATE OF BIRTH

8 November 2001

## DEPRIVED OF LIBERTY

11 August 2022

## SENTENCE

3,5 years'  
imprisonment

[Artyom Basyrov](#) is a resident of Kemerovo who studied at a technical college. According to the investigative authorities, in April 2022 Basyrov contacted a representative of the FRL on Telegram who went by the nickname 'Oleg.' 'Oleg' instructed him that to join the FRL he needed to obtain a passport for foreign travel, go to Georgia, contact the Ukrainian embassy there and receive further instructions. On 5 April 2022, Basyrov applied for a passport, which he received on 22 April. 'Oleg' also sent Basyrov an application form to join the FRL. However, Basyrov neither filled out the form nor sent it. He took no further action. In his later testimony, he explained that he had abandoned his plans.

The FSB officers waited two weeks, probably trying to push Basyrov into acting. Apparently realising he was not going to do anything, on 5 May 2022 law enforcement officers went to his home. However, Basyrov was at college at the time. His mother told the officers that her son was at the college and they went there to pick him up. His mother then called Artyom and told him about the visit from the law enforcement officers. Basyrov asked her to remove the hard drive from his computer and throw it away, which she did. Basyrov was then questioned by officers from the Kemerovo FSB. It is likely that during this interrogation (referred to in the verdict as 'Questioning'), Basyrov testified against himself. However, apart from Basyrov's testimony, the FSB had no evidence, something which at that time law enforcement apparently considered insufficient to take the case further.

Basyrov was not detained. The FSB continued to search for other evidence of his guilt. For three months after the security forces visited Basyrov's home, FSB officers carried out various operational measures against him. Basyrov's conversations with acquaintances were recorded, and operational search measures were carried out, including 'Questioning,' 'Checking References,' 'Inspection of premises, buildings, structures, local areas and vehicles,' 'Operational experiment,' and 'Collection of samples for comparative study.' Basyrov was also formally confronted with his acquaintances, his personal belongings were examined, and a political science expert studied the tattoos on his body. Despite such active work by the Kemerovo FSB, no significant evidence was obtained in the course of these actions, and the case continued to be based mainly on Basyrov's testimony.

However, law enforcement did not close the case. Despite the fact that Basyrov remained at liberty all this time and did not try to hide, he was detained on 11 August 2022. In December 2022, Basyrov was sentenced to 3.5 years in prison.

In 2025, a new criminal charge was brought against Basyrov and, a few months before the end of his first sentence, he was convicted of several 'terrorism' offences. The details of his new sentence are not known.

## TELEGRAM, BUT NOT ONLY

There is a widespread belief that Russian intelligence agencies use Telegram almost exclusively for purposes of entrapment. Indeed, in most cases, Russian law enforcement pretended to be 'Ukrainian curators' in this particular messenger. However, as can be seen from the examples given, WhatsApp has also often been used.

Other communication channels may, however, also be used. For example, in the case of the entrapment of Gagik Grigoryan, the Signal messenger was used, and in the case of military serviceman **Anton Khozhaev**, the Session messenger was used.

## STAGE 3 OPTIONAL OBTAINING THE EVIDENCE

Once contact has been established with the target, the next step is to obtain evidence. Law enforcement's goal at this stage is to persuade the target into taking some kind of action. This task is made significantly easier by Russia's courts, which show surprising leniency in evaluating evidence provided by law enforcement and are willing to see proof of guilt in virtually anything.

In the cases considered in this report, charges were most often brought under the following articles of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation: Art. 275 CC RF ('Treason') appeared in about half the cases, Art. 205 CC RF ('Terrorist Act') and Art. 205.5 CC RF ('Organisation of and participation in activities of a terrorist organisation') each appeared in about a third of the cases. Art. 30 CC RF ('Preparation of and attempt at a crime') was often used (in approximately two out of three cases), which indicates FSB officers uncovered the crime before it was committed. This does not mean that in all other cases arson was committed or the Russians in question fought with weapons in their hands as part of the Ukrainian armed forces. Simply it means that the criteria for what should be considered a *completed* crime are often blurred. Similar actions in different cases can be interpreted, for example, as *participation* in the activities of a terrorist organisation or as *preparation* for such participation.

[Aleksandr Fomenko](#), encouraged by a new acquaintance he met during a short term in jail for an administrative-law offence, sent several messages by email and Telegram to the FRL. It would seem at least some of these messages were in fact addressed to FSB officers, while others did not reach their destination because of errors in the email address. Nevertheless, Fomenko was found guilty of treason and participation in a terrorist organisation. However, in other cases the investigative authorities and the court have interpreted similar actions as *preparation* for treason and *preparation* for participation in a terrorist organisation.

Among cases with signs of entrapment, depending on the charges, three general categories can be distinguished:

- joining the FRL or another Ukrainian armed formation
- collecting and transferring to Ukraine (or other unfriendly countries) information that constitutes a state or official secret, and more often than not was not such but 'could be used against the interests of Russia'
- preparation for the commission of any actions on the instructions of Ukrainian intelligence agencies (arson, explosions, etc.)

While this division is, of course, arbitrary, it allows us to describe the main strategies for gathering 'evidence' used by law enforcement.

### SCENARIO 1 JOINING THE FREE RUSSIA LEGION OR THE RUSSIAN VOLUNTEER CORPS

In cases where charges are brought for intent to join the FRL, the RVC or other armed groups, as well as in any interaction with these structures, the articles of the Criminal Code on treason (Art. 275 CC RF) and participation in the activities of a terrorist organisation (Art. 205.5 CC RF) are most often used, and sometimes contrary to logic both at the same time.

In the process of building evidence in such cases, law enforcement deliberately seek to obtain a range of 'evidence' from the targets. The main elements of this 'evidential base' are presented below.

#### Questionnaire

Candidates for membership of the FRL are asked to fill in a questionnaire with their personal details. In some cases, they are asked to carry the questionnaire with them.

For example, military serviceman [Anton Khozhaev](#) was planning to enter Ukraine across the border between the Belgorod and Kharkiv regions and carried, among other things, a completed questionnaire for joining the FRL.

#### Video

Victims of entrapment are often asked to send a video of them taking the oath to the FRL or some other confirmation of their intentions. However, these videos are probably made not so much as evidence for a trial, but rather to put pressure on a suspect after their arrest and to obtain a confession from them. Videos, for example, figured in the prosecutions of [Aleksandr Fomenko](#), [Aleksandr Matkheev](#), and [Sergei Mironov](#).

## The assigned role of ‘stormtrooper’

In the correspondence, a question separately discussed is that the candidate is joining the formation specifically as a ‘stormtrooper’ and will engage in armed combat. This predetermined role is then used against the detainee. The question of exactly what role they were going to take on in the FRL is asked directly at the time of arrest and recorded on video, which is subsequently used for propaganda purposes and as a means of putting pressure on the ‘suspect.’

## Equipment

Equipment has a special place in the evidence gathered by law enforcement. For some inexplicable reason, Russian security services and, probably, the courts believe that a candidate to join the FRL must cross the border having bought the maximum possible set of clothing and equipment while still in Russia. How this is supposed to be consistent with the principles of secrecy is unclear, but law enforcement officers continue to insist on the purchase of various items of equipment in Russia. At times, this can take on grotesque forms.

[Aleksandr Matkheev](#) discussed with a ‘representative of the FRL’ who went by the nickname ‘Nadezhny’ (Reliable) what he should purchase and take with him on the road. As a result, according to law enforcement, when he was arrested Matkheev was found to have in his backpack two bulletproof vests, army boots, balaclavas, a hydrator (a container for liquid with a tube and nipple), a night vision device, a tactical belt, a helmet with various attachments, elbow and knee pads, a first aid kit bag, insignia of the US, NATO and FRL, and a Ukrainian flag.

In the case of [Vyacheslav Lutor](#), Lowa boots were supposed to be important evidence. According to law enforcement, they served as a kind of ‘friend or foe’ recognition system. It is unclear why Lutor — who, according to the investigative authorities, corresponded with the FRL and filled out a questionnaire — was to be identified by his boots. However, these boots are mentioned more than 10 times in the verdict.



## VYACHESLAV LUTOR

### ARTICLES

Art. 30, Part 1  
Art. 205.5, Part 2  
Art. 275  
Art. 275.1

### SENTENCE

10 years'  
imprisonment

### DATE OF BIRTH

17 April 1990

## Interactions with the Free Russia Legion or Russian Volunteer Corps

Charges of participation in the activities of a terrorist organisation or treason are brought not only against those who allegedly intended to take up arms. They are also brought against Russians who had no plans to leave the Russian Federation or participate in any violent actions. The courts readily consider any interaction with unknown individuals that the investigative authorities identify as ‘Ukrainian terrorist structures’ as evidence of participation in the activities of a terrorist organisation. According to the indictment in the case of [Dmitry Levin](#), he was contacted by a person with the account name ‘Abrams Leopardovich’ who introduced himself as a former officer of the Main Directorate of Intelligence of Ukraine who still continues to do work for that organisation. ‘Abrams Leopardovich’ gave Levin the following task: ‘Abrams Leopardovich’ *‘sends satellite images of military facilities and a brief description, and he [Levin] has to compile a nice post from this with a description of these facilities as targets for attack, which he then sends to the Telegram chat of the RVC channel. In addition, the agent of the Main Directorate of Intelligence of Ukraine told Levin of the need to independently collect information about the location of military facilities, including military units, airfields, enterprises for the manufacture and repair of military equipment, the movement of troops, ships, and the delivery of military cargo to the port of Novorossiisk.’*



## DMITRY LEVIN

### ARTICLES

Art. 275  
— High treason  
Art. 205.5, Part 2  
— Participation in the activities of a terrorist organization

### SENTENCE

15 years'  
imprisonment

### DATE OF BIRTH

4 November 2003

### DEPRIVED OF LIBERTY

5 April 2024

It is difficult to understand why the Main Directorate of Intelligence of Ukraine would need Levin to write posts about satellite images sent to him and send them to the RVC chat. It is also unclear what valuable intelligence information a college graduate could have found on his own initiative. However, the court did not question the version of events presented by the investigative authorities. Levin was found guilty of treason and participation in the activities of a terrorist organisation and sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment.

## SCENARIO 2 COLLECTION AND TRANSFER OF INFORMATION

After the war began, numerous amendments were made to the Criminal Code to facilitate the prosecution of dissidents. In particular, Art. 275.1 CC RF ('Collusion with a foreign state, international or foreign organisation') was added to the Criminal Code, which provides for criminal prosecution for collusion with a representative of a foreign state for purposes of assisting 'in activities known to be directed against the security of the Russian Federation.' Vague wording and lack of scrutiny by Russian courts in assessing evidence have opened up major opportunities for law enforcement in terms of entrapment. Types of evidence used in such cases include the following.

### Photographs

Taking photographs of various objects and sending them to a given address is one of the most popular tasks in such cases. Photographs can be of government buildings, police stations, FSB offices, enterprises and even residential buildings. Photographs of these objects are easy to find on the internet, which makes the request seem harmless.

However, the courts never examine the question of what the value of the photos taken by the defendants is supposed to be, or how such photos differ from images that can be found, for example, on Yandex Maps or Google Maps. The very act of photographing and sending any photos taken on the instructions of a 'curator' is interpreted as treason.

For example, [Georgy Tabuev](#) was accused of taking photos of two apartment buildings in Donetsk. One of the buildings was allegedly home to a high-ranking officer of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR), while the other was allegedly 'sometimes used as a place to spend the night' by the head of the local government of a small town. Tabuev was unaware of this, but according to the prosecution, he 'should have guessed.'

### Coordinates

Another favourite task set by law enforcement is to obtain the coordinates of specific objects. The targeted individual must go to a location and use their phone to find the coordinates. In such cases, the courts do not consider the question of how these coordinates differ from those publicly available.

When 'Yakov' asked Veronika Netunaeva to send him the coordinates of the Uglich Hydroelectric Power Plant, she replied she could only obtain them by driving past the plant and, accordingly, they would be inaccurate. This did not bother 'Yakov' in the least and he asked her to send him the coordinates anyway.

### More exotic options

The imagination of the security forces is not limited to photographs and coordinates; sometimes it can take on more complex forms. A 'representative of the FRL' asked [Vyacheslav Lutor](#) to listen to sounds coming from factory workshops. A resident of Murmansk, [Alekssei Gilein](#), was accused of filming a rehearsal for a military parade in honour of Victory Day.

### Evidence of intent

To gather evidence for a case, law enforcement officers not only request information, but also provide it. For example, 'representatives of the Ukrainian special services' try to explain why they need certain information, even when they have not been asked that question. This is another action that would be pointless for 'Ukrainian intelligence officers' but quite understandable if we assume it is being done for purposes of entrapment. This is how evidence of criminal intent, a necessary condition for determining guilt, is gathered.

This is how it happened, for example, in the case of [Valentina Tagirova](#). 'Platon' asked her to take a photo of Kuibyshev Square. Tagirova did not ask any unnecessary questions and went to the square to take photos. Then 'Platon' began to probe further: 'You understand what this is for, don't you?' Tagirova asked: 'What for?' 'Platon' replied: 'According to our information, an anti-fascist rally will be held from 1 to 9 May.' Tagirova replied, 'Oh, I didn't know that,' and changed the subject. But after a few remarks unrelated to the previous dialogue, 'Platon' suddenly declared, 'Tomorrow morning, all our things, the whole package, will need to be put in a safe place, which we will tell you about, and then you can leave. Our guy will pick it up and on 1 May at 1 p.m. on Kuibyshev Square, he will start a fire to force Putin's regime to stop the war in our homeland of Ukraine. Thank you very much. You are very clever. With people like you, we will definitely put an end to this lawlessness.'

### SCENARIO 3 RADICAL ACTIONS

Another popular option for charges in cases based on entrapment is the intention to commit some kind of violent action. This could include arson or sabotage. In such cases, the charge as a rule is brought under Article 205 CC RF ('Terrorist Act').

The capture of a 'terrorist' is probably considered a particular success, which is why law enforcement make considerable efforts to organise entrapments of this kind. In such cases, external surveillance is often used, and the arrest may be preceded by an ambush. Law enforcement officers may provide various forms of assistance to suspects, such as driving them in a car to a location (see the cases of Valeria Zotova, [Denis Popov](#), and [Nikolai Yuryev](#)).

#### Fuel, explosives

In these cases, the most important evidence is an explosive device (usually a dummy) or a combustible mixture the accused allegedly planned to use. Law enforcement try by any means to link the target to the instrument of the crime.

To this end, an object for an attack may be suggested that appears as harmless as possible. [Mikhail Avdonin](#), in an [interview](#) with First Department, provided the following details about his case: *'Formally, the charge is correct; I was detained with a canister of petrol on the territory of a "military unit," but there is one detail — the military unit in question exists only on paper and has in fact been abandoned for decades. This so-called "military unit" is a cluttered wasteland surrounded by an old and partially dilapidated fence. Among other rubbish, there were a number of old, torn car tyres, which an unidentified person contacted me about online and asked me to burn, promising me 30,000 roubles for doing so. So when I went there with a canister, I had no idea that this unit was still on the books of the Russian Ministry of Defence (I didn't think about it) or that my actions could cause harm to anyone. I didn't think about why they needed to hire me to burn tyres.'*

In another variant, the targeted person may be used without their knowledge. [Georgy Tabuev](#) was asked to pick up a parcel for a reward. The fan heater in the box contained a dummy explosive device.

In other cases, the connection between the weapon and the accused is simply fabricated after the arrest.

#### There is no turning back

Since actions such as these can appear to be very dangerous, despite all the efforts of law enforcement it is not uncommon for the person targeted to refuse to carry out the actions proposed. However, this does not help the victim in any way.

This is how [Nikolai Yuryev](#) described the development of the entrapment in his case: *'Those carrying out the entrapment, whom I considered my friends, did their dirty work, hooking me by my weak spot... They said: "You will save thousands of guys from mobilisation by destroying their documents." Of course, I refused, immediately saying I was afraid.'* As a result, they insisted: *'The agreement was that I would make a Molotov cocktail, they would set fire to [the military enlistment office], and I would be sitting at home at that moment. After that conversation, they were provided with recording devices and [further] evidence was gathered, allegedly of my crime. In the end, he [one of my new acquaintances] convinced me to go to the military enlistment office. After getting into the car, I said that maybe we shouldn't be doing this... It was quiet, we just went to have a look, but he had been carrying the bottles in his car for several days and started persuading me: "Let's set it on fire now, come on, come on!" I didn't respond to that, saying instead: "Let's turn around, let's go, we're not going to do anything" - but at that point his old Lexus started to stall.'* Yuryev went on to say that he got out of the car to help push it. *'We got in to drive off, the car stalled again, and at that moment the door opened and I was thrown onto the snow.'*

The story of schoolboy Gagik Grigoryan unfolded in accordance with a similar, but more dramatic scenario, which we describe in the next section.

The stage of gathering evidence, despite its apparent importance in a criminal prosecution, plays an entirely secondary role. Any shortcomings are easily corrected by law enforcement in the next stage.

## STAGE 4 THE DARKEST STAGE ARREST AND OBTAINING A CONFESSION

The decision to arrest a suspect can be made by law enforcement agencies on various grounds:

- **the end of the entrapment**, when the arrest takes place during an attempt by the target to leave the country to allegedly join the FRL (Vyacheslav Lutor) or during an attempt to allegedly commit arson (Valeria Zotova, Mikhail Avdonin)
- **the end of the investigation**, when the investigative authorities believe there is no point in continuing the entrapment, as sufficient evidence has been gathered and no fundamentally new evidence can be obtained (Veronika Netunaeva)
- **the danger of exposure and failure of the entrapment**, when contact with the target is lost or he or she may destroy the evidence for some reason. For example, when [Anton Galeta](#), an employee of a municipal enterprise in Perm, noticed the FSB had placed him under surveillance, he managed to obtain photos of the FSB officers carrying out the surveillance from a CCTV camera, and sent them to the ‘representatives of Ukrainian intelligence’. That same evening he was arrested.

### Confession — ‘compensation’ for weak evidence

However, regardless of the reason for the arrest, it is the interrogation conducted immediately after the arrest that plays a key role in providing the evidence. Law enforcement agencies compensate for obviously weak evidence gathered during the process of entrapment by means of confessions obtained from suspects immediately following their arrest. The tactics of arrest and initial interrogation are based on the goal of obtaining such confessions.

Arrest is the first stage of the physical and psychological pressure exerted against the suspect and is carried out as brutally as possible. Law enforcement officers often do not identify themselves but suddenly grab the target, deliberately causing them pain, handcuff them and sometimes put a bag over their head.

### Torture — the FSB's calling card

In cases involving charges of preparing a terrorist attack or participation in terrorist organisations, beatings and torture of detained men are practically certain. They begin immediately after detention: in the apartment where the search is taking place, on the street where the detention took place, or in the car in which the detainee is being transported.

This is how [Mikhail Avdonin](#) described [his arrest](#): ‘People in plain clothes (who, as it turned out later, were officers of the regional FSB) jumped me without introducing themselves or showing any documents. They beat me with fists and a taser until I lost consciousness and fell down. After that, they revived me, handcuffed me, hands behind my back, and forced me to kneel on the cold ground. They kept me in this position for at least two hours, not allowing me to move. When the local police officer arrived to process my detention, I was unable to stand without help.’ Mikhail's father said: ‘They beat him up terribly. When they brought him [to their home for the search], his whole face was swollen, he couldn't even drink tea, he couldn't swallow.’

Evgeny Mishchenko, a volunteer at the Nemtsov Bridge, during his trial described his detention as follows: he was beaten in the police van after his arrest, ‘they pretended they would cut off my leg with bolt cutters, even started the instrument,’ and after the search of his apartment ‘they beat me on on the chest, back and head.’ After his arrest and interrogation, an emergency ambulance was called to take Mishchenko for treatment. He was diagnosed with three broken ribs.

The closer the events take place to the combat zone, the more brutally law enforcement acts.

Konstantin Gladkov, a resident of Belgorod region, was arrested at his home. In his testimony in court, he described what happened as follows: ‘I was at home alone. I can't say how many people came into my home, probably about ten. They immediately used a taser on me, then put me on the floor and tried to break my leg. During the torture, they started cutting off my ear. I didn't want to incriminate myself by saying I had conversations with the FRL or anything.’ At the end of the torture, I said I would sign anything.’ He was taken to be interrogated with a black bag over his head, with his hands behind his back and in a crouching position — he was not allowed to sit on the floor of the police van and spent several hours in this position. As his wife [recounted](#), when she arrived at the court for the hearing on pre-trial measures, she said ‘I did not recognise my husband: his cheek was cut and swollen, his ear was cut and detached from the back of his head along with the earlobe. He lifted his shirt — his lower back was completely black, as he said, from tasers. He did not roll up his trousers, but said his legs looked the same.’

**Gagik Grigoryan**, a school student from Kursk, corresponded with unknown individuals and may have carried out some of their orders. However, when asked to retrieve an explosive device from a hiding place, he refused. This turn of events did not fit with the FSB's scenario for the entrapment. On 4 October 2023, as Grioryan was returning from school, he was seized near his home. Law enforcement officers took the young man's phone, beat him, put him in the boot of a car, and later, when they took him out of the car boot, attached a device to his legs which they told him was an explosive device and threatened to detonate it if he refused to comply with their demand to retrieve the IED from the hiding place.

When the location of the attempted entrapment is in the occupied territories, the level of lawlessness and arbitrariness is higher. At his trial Donetsk resident **Georgy Tabuev**, who was paid to carry out seemingly harmless tasks (taking photographs of residential buildings, receiving parcels), claimed he had been seized and held for about a month without any procedural status in secret apartments. All that time, FSB officers were able to torture him at will to extract the necessary confessions. At one point, Tabuev became so ill that the security forces, fearing for his life, were forced to take him to hospital. After receiving emergency treatment, Tabuev was returned to the apartment.

### **Intimidation and threats**

In addition to torture, law enforcement officers actively intimidate detainees, including by means of threats of reprisal against friends and relatives.

- Vyacheslav Lutor was threatened that, if he did not cooperate, two female colleagues with whom he had been corresponding would be imprisoned, but first they would be 'taken to the forest.'
- Aleksandr Fomenko says he gave his initial testimony after his arrest under pressure: he was blackmailed with threats to arrest his relatives.
- School student Gagik Grigoryan was threatened that his younger brother and sister of primary school age would be harmed.

Nikolai Yuryev explained his initial confession by saying he was afraid that his friends, who, as it later turned out, were *agent provocateurs*, would suffer.

### **Video of the arrest — evidence and a tool for propaganda**

The FSB attaches particular importance to filming the moment of arrest. Such videos are used for propaganda purposes and as evidence in court when the arrest is directly preceded by actions of the accused the investigative authorities interpret as 'criminal.'

In cases where, for some reason, it is not possible to film the arrest, it may be restaged specifically for this purpose.

After Gagik Grigoryan was seized, the security forces used threats and beatings to force him into a taxi to go to a cemetery. After that, a video was staged in which the boy gets out of a taxi with a bag and takes an explosive device out of a hiding place, after which he is detained.

Georgy Tabuev said that the moment he received a parcel was filmed several times over. Each time, the law enforcement officers were dissatisfied with something.

### **Illogical arrests: how the FSB repeatedly misses the organisers**

In cases of entrapment, arrests sometimes appear to be completely unprofessional from the point of view of solving the crime. The 'perpetrator' is detained and the thread leading to the organisers is broken, thereby losing the opportunity to obtain other valuable information.

**Valentina Tagirova**, according to the investigative authorities, was part of a group planning a terrorist attack and was supposed to play the simple role of buying household cleaning products and foam plastic used in construction. Another member of the group was supposed to pick up the purchased components, make an incendiary mixture out of them, and carry out a terrorist attack on a public gathering.

At the same time, the coordinator of the entire operation, nicknamed 'Platon,' said in correspondence that he had already entered Russian territory and was travelling to Samara. Instead of tracking down the place where Tagirova tried to hide the acetone and foam and attempting to apprehend the dangerous terrorist who would come to collect these items, the investigative authorities limited themselves to arresting Valentina Tagirova and simply forgot about the other members of the group.

**Veronika Netunaeva** was arrested, even though 'Yakov' had promised to inform her when the attack on the Uglich hydroelectric power station was to take place. This information would undoubtedly have been of great importance in preventing the attack. However, instead of waiting to receive this information, the FSB detained Netunaeva and thereby lost the opportunity to find out the date of the attack. There is no information in the indictment about any further contact with 'Yakov' after Netunaeva's detention. Needless to say, no attack on the Uglich hydroelectric power station took place, nor was there any report of such an attack being prevented. No information could be found to indicate that additional measures were taken in the summer of 2023 to protect the hydroelectric power station from a possible drone attack.

## STAGE 5 THE MOST MEANINGLESS THE TRIAL

The trial is the most meaningless and entirely decorative stage of these criminal prosecutions. Judges diligently pretend not to notice inconsistencies in the prosecution's case or violations of the law committed by law enforcement officers. There are no acquittals in such cases.

### Confession is the queen of evidence

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The vast majority of verdicts in cases of entrapment are based on confessions made during the first interrogations. Many defendants change their testimony during the investigative stage. In court, defendants often state that the initial interrogations were accompanied by threats and torture, and that for that reason they incriminated themselves.

However, we are not aware of any cases where the court decided not to accept confessions obtained immediately after the arrest as evidence. In all cases, the verdict contains standard wording that *'the testimony of [name], given during the preliminary investigation, forms the basis of the verdict as they are consistent with the other evidence'*, and *'the court considers the statements by [name] that the testimony was given under pressure to be an attempt, within the framework of the right to defence, to avoid criminal responsibility for the crime committed, and dismisses them.'*

### Courts encourage torture

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Defendants in court often describe in detail the torture to which they were subjected and even name their torturers. FSB officers who used violence and torture were named in court, for example, by [Georgy Tabuev](#), [Aleksei Grigoryev](#), and [Anton Galeta](#). Such statements can be corroborated by the results of medical examinations. In such cases, the Investigative Committee may launch an investigation, and the law enforcement officers accused of torture may be summoned to court.

However, we are not aware of any politically motivated cases of entrapment in which the Investigative Committee has confirmed the use of torture. Law enforcement officers themselves state in court that they acted in strict accordance with the law and that the injuries sustained by the accused were caused, for example, during their arrest by their active resistance. The court accepts these explanations as exhaustive.

Sometimes statements by the accused about violence and torture to which they were subjected are simply ignored. This is how [Ilya Baburin](#) described the situation in his final speech at his trial: *'Regarding the violations committed at the pre-trial detention centre, the prosecutor's office at least wrote a response and even confirmed, surprisingly, the illegality of their actions. But as for the fact that I was handcuffed, beaten and dragged like a dog around the FSB minibus when I refused to cooperate, the prosecutor's office remains silent. They didn't even bother to send a formal rejection of my complaint.'*

The courts diligently ignore crimes committed by law enforcement officers. For example, during the trial of [Georgy Tabuev](#), information about Tabuev's phone connections to mobile phone towers was examined. An expert was questioned who helped to interpret them. As a result, the court concluded that Tabuev's phone was relatively close to specific addresses in Donetsk at the time when, according to the prosecution, Tabuev was there carrying out tasks for the SBU. The verdict explicitly states that the court was provided with billing data covering the entire month of March 2023, i.e. the period when Tabuev was illegally detained and tortured in apartments without any procedural status. However, no attempts were made in court to establish the location of Tabuev's phone during March 2023.

### Allegations of entrapment are ignored

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Furthermore, courts do not consider or examine defendants' allegations that they were victims of entrapment. Contradictions in testimony that directly point to entrapment are simply ignored.

For example, in the case of [Valentina Tagirova](#), prosecution witness Egor Kazakov told the court that on the evening of 17 April, FSB officer Elistratov informed him that the arrest would take place the next day and asked him to come to the FSB building in the Samara region in the morning. The second witness received a similar instruction. At the same time, the 'Ukrainian curator' 'Platon' wrote to Tagirova that the acetone and other items should be left in the courtyard of an abandoned building after the FSB officer had already contacted the witnesses. The court chose not to investigate how the FSB officer knew what instructions Tagirova would receive before the 'Ukrainian curator' had given them.

Both the investigative authorities and the courts show a surprising lack of interest in establishing the identities of the representatives of the 'Ukrainian intelligence agencies.' In many cases, to prove that telephone numbers and messenger accounts belonged to representatives of the FRL or 'Ukrainian intelligence agencies,' the prosecution provided the court with FSB reports, without the court verifying the accuracy of the information contained therein. The court accepted the reports at face value, without summoning their authors to testify. Moreover, sometimes courts did not even attempt to establish the ownership of the IP addresses, messenger accounts and telephone numbers allegedly used by the Ukrainian intelligence agencies. [Vyacheslav Lutor](#)'s request to establish the owner of the phone number of 'Lana,' linked to a Telegram account, was denied by both the investigative authorities and the court. In the case of [Valeria Zotova](#), the FSB was unable to trace who exactly sent her 7,000 roubles for the photographs of two local government buildings she had sent to 'Andrei.'

Even in cases where the FSB does not hide that it has carried out entrapment, courts rule as if no such thing had happened. First Department [examined](#) the verdict against Orel resident [Ivan Tolpygin](#), which explicitly states that the defendant communicated on the internet exclusively with FSB officers posing as 'representatives of Ukraine.' Nevertheless, the court found Tolpygin's actions constituted a completed crime, noting that the defendant '*established and continued collusion with a representative of a foreign state in order to assist him in activities known to be directed against the security of the Russian Federation.*' How correspondence with FSB officers could be interpreted as collusion with representatives of a foreign state is mystifying.

### **Punishment for a phantom threat**

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Another obvious flaw in the trials of cases based on entrapment is the unwillingness of the courts to examine the actual circumstances of what happened, including whether a defendant's actions caused any damage. The court makes no attempt to understand what happened, but seeks to confirm the picture of a certain ideal crime, which in fact has little to do with reality. In particular, no expert analysis is ever conducted to establish how information transmitted by an accused to 'Ukrainian intelligence' differs from information that is publicly available.

### **Predetermination of the verdict**

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We began our report with the stories of two residents of Yaroslavl region, [Valeria Zotova](#) and [Veronika Netunaeva](#), who fell victim to entrapment by the FSB in Yaroslavl region. The trials of both women took place in the 2nd Western District Military Court.

[Valeria Zotova](#) was found guilty of attempting to commit a terrorist act and sentenced to six years' imprisonment in a general regime penal colony. She did not appeal the verdict.

[Veronika Netunaeva](#), a lawyer, resolutely defended herself in court. At the court of first instance, she succeeded in having an episode concerning preparation of an explosion at Uglich town hall excluded from the charges, which, according to the prosecution, 'was included by mistake.' The court also excluded from the charges the aim of destabilising the activities of the authorities and the danger of other serious consequences, and in this connection the charges were reclassified from 'preparation to commit a terrorist act by a group of persons' to 'aiding and abetting preparation to commit a terrorist act.' Netunaeva disagreed with the verdict and appealed, first to a court of appeal and then to the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation. Netunaeva also unsuccessfully attempted to obtain a postponement of the sentence. Despite all her efforts, she is also serving a sentence of six years' imprisonment in a general regime penal colony.

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## CONCLUSION

The war has changed a great deal. The law enforcement system has reached a new level of cynicism and lawlessness. The use of entrapment is a striking example of this. Whereas previously there were isolated instances in politically motivated prosecutions, entrapment has now become a widespread practice.

[Valentina Tagirova](#)'s 'Ukrainian curator' showed a strong interest in persuading evacuees who lived in the same temporary accommodation centre as Tagirova (it is known he contacted two of them at about the same time as he contacted her) to cooperate, as well as other people Valentina knew.

[Ilya Baburin](#) said in his final speech at his appeal hearing:

*The sentence I received is absurd.  
Double murder carries a sentence of 18 years.  
Rape of a child carries a sentence of 12 to 14 years.  
And I was sentenced to 25 years for an attempted  
arson attack on a military enlistment office.  
No one was hurt [...] no military enlistment office  
was damaged. So who cares about this situation?  
The most important thing is that FSB officers  
and their henchmen received 'stars'  
and bonuses thanks to me.  
An FSB operative is currently in the detention  
centre where I am being held on remand.  
Recently, we were both locked up in solitary  
confinement on the same day.  
He told me that FSB operatives themselves  
are on social media, persuading young Russian  
people to set fire to some place or other on the  
railways for money.  
They make work for themselves in this way —  
recruiting children for their own benefit  
and then putting them behind bars for 10-20 years.*

The FSB plays a leading role in politically motivated prosecutions based on entrapment. These cases involve serious criminal charges: treason (Art. 275 CC RF), terrorism (Art. 205 CC RF), and organisation of and participation in the activities of a terrorist organisation (Art. 205.5 CC RF). Punishments for 'crimes' committed thanks to the actions of law enforcement often exceed 10 years' imprisonment and can reach 20 years or more. Of the 33 cases considered in this report, at the time of writing trials had taken place in 29 instances. In almost half of these trials (involving 13 defendants), sentences of 10 or more years' imprisonment were handed down.

Since the beginning of the war, there has not only been an increase in the number of cases of entrapment, but the practice itself has been transformed. Now it is a technological and efficient conveyor belt that uses various IT solutions, in which the laborious and lengthy process of infiltrating agents has been replaced by searching for and working with victims on the internet. The efficiency of this process has increased significantly, i.e. the cost of resources spent on one case of entrapment has become much lower, thereby allowing the number of cases to be increased.

FSB officers continue to look for ways to further simplify their work. In the aforementioned case of Valentina Tagirova, 'Platon' asked not just that she take photographs of certain buildings, but that she take them at a specific time when it would be more convenient for him to 'accept' the photos. This removed the need for constant surveillance: it was enough for FSB officers to arrive at the specified place and time and record the victim's actions.

It is difficult to assess the true scale of the use of entrapment. This would require access to law enforcement case files, and even that may not be enough.

We provide the following calculations, which are approximate but indicative. In all the cases considered in this report in which Article 205 CC RF ('Terrorist act') was used, it was applied in conjunction with Article 30 CC RF ('Preparation for and attempt to commit a crime'). Law enforcement oversaw the actions of the victim of entrapment and carried out the arrest before the 'terrorist act' was carried out. In our database of politically motivated criminal cases for the period since 2022, Article 205 CC RF has been applied in more than 1,000 cases. In 40% of these cases, the crime had not been committed and the offence was classified under Article 30 CC RF. While it would probably be incorrect to claim that every 'prevented terrorist attack' was the result of entrapment, in most cases, in our opinion, this is indeed the case.

The total number of politically motivated criminal cases in which entrapment has been used evidently runs into the hundreds. The FSB has become a kind of fraudulent call centre which searches daily for the most vulnerable — teenagers, the gullible, the mentally unstable or ill. Only here, the price for one's imprudence is paid not in money but in freedom.

Entrapment has become an easy and reliable way to 'solve' serious crimes. This has led to a rapid increase in its use. In the absence of any external oversight and with the Russian courts willingly turning a blind eye to this practice, there is no reason to hope that its usage will decrease. On the contrary, we should expect to see a further expansion of the use of entrapment in politically motivated criminal cases.

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## HOW NOT TO BECOME A VICTIM OF ENTRAPMENT

These recommendations have been formulated on the basis of an analysis of the cases. They certainly do not take into account many details of these cases which remain unknown to us, and do not claim to be exhaustive.

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### What not to do

- Do not contact the FRL, the RVC, or other Ukrainian organisations via Telegram;
- Do not call the FRL, the 'I Want to Live' project, or other such telephone numbers from Russia;
- Do not use the Yandex browser to search for any information, especially contact information, about Ukrainian organisations;
- If you are in Russia and are considering providing some form of assistance to Ukraine, do not draw attention to yourself by making public statements that are anti-war or pro-Ukrainian in nature;
- Do not discuss your intentions to help Ukraine on Telegram, or on any Russian messengers, social networks, or using Russian email services;
- Do not share your plans to help Ukraine with people you do not know well; the fewer people who know, the better.

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### Signs of entrapment

- You started communicating with a previously unknown person who actively brings up the topic of war, expresses pro-Ukrainian views, and tries to push you to take certain actions or make certain statements;
- A 'representative' of the Ukrainian intelligence agencies, the FRL, the RVC or the Ukrainian armed forces, etc. wrote to you first;
- You are asked if you have any acquaintances who are ready to carry out any radical actions (arson, planting mines, etc.);
- You communicate with a number of different people who introduce themselves as officers of Ukrainian intelligence and who then 'pass you on' from one to the other;
- You are asked to fill out a questionnaire to join the FRL, the RVC, or other such organisations, giving personal data and photographs of documents, or sending a video of you taking the oath, etc.;
- A 'representative' of the FRL specifically stipulates that you will be a 'stormtrooper';
- Your interlocutor willingly offers you money for completing a task that seems relatively harmless;
- A stranger asks you to do something simple: deliver a 'package', pick up a bag, buy flammable liquids, etc.;
- Your interlocutor asks you to send a photograph or coordinates of a particular object;
- They ask you to buy military equipment or gear;
- They persistently seek to persuade you to do something, even though you do not agree to do it;
- They give you information about planned attacks or terrorist acts, even though you expressed no interest in this;
- They begin to threaten you or your relatives if you do not do what they are asking you to do.

## THE DEFENDANTS IN THE CRIMINAL CASES CONSIDERED

This report uses information about the politically motivated criminal prosecutions of the following individuals:

[Mikhail Avdonin](#)

[Ilya Baburin](#)

[Mikhail Balabanov](#)

[Artem Basyrov](#)

[Anton Galeta](#)

[Aleksei Giletin](#)

[Konstantin Gladkov](#)

[Aleksei Grigoryev](#)

[Gagik Grigoryan](#)

[Pavel Evtushenko](#)

[Polina Evtushenko](#)

[Dmitry Zimin](#)

[Daniil Zinkovsky](#)

[Valeria Zotova](#)

[Ivan Kartashov](#)

[Sergei Kolin](#)

[Vsevolod Kulikov](#)

[Dmitry Levin](#)

[Vyacheslav Lutor](#)

[Nikolai Malkerov](#)

[Aleksandr Matkheev](#)

[Sergei Mironov](#)

[Evgeny Mishchenko](#)

[Veronika Netunaeva](#)

[Denis Popov](#)

[Magomedgadzhi Rabadanov](#)

[Georgy Tabuev](#)

[Valentina Tagirova](#)

[Ivan Tolpygin](#)

[Aleksandr Fomenko](#)

[Maksim Kharitonov](#)

[Anton Khozhaev](#)

[Nikolai Yuryev](#)



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