

SHOULD I STAY OR SHOULD I GO (BACK)? — 2

ANOTHER 24 STORIES OF RUSSIANS
WHO RETURNED TO THEIR HOMELAND
AND ENDED UP BEHIND BARS





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KEY FINDINGS

A year ago, in our report, [‘Should I stay or should I go \(back\)? 16 stories of Russians who returned to their homeland and ended up behind bars.’](#) we told the stories of Russians and Ukrainians who had managed to leave the Russian Federation or the occupied territories but later returned and became victims of politically motivated criminal prosecutions. We urged people considering travelling to Russia to think carefully and weigh up the risks. We now find ourselves having to return to this issue, as time and again similar incidents keep happening. This time, we are sharing a further **24 stories** of those who returned only to face prosecution.

In comparison with the previous report, there has been a striking increase in prosecutions for treason (Article 275 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation) and associated severe penalties, and the consequent increase in the prison sentences imposed. Of the **16 defendants** in politically motivated cases described in our previous report, only **7** were prosecuted for treason. In this report treason charges have already been brought against **16 out of 22** individuals (two other returnees are currently subject to ‘carousel’ jail terms as yet without criminal charge). The more frequent application of treason charges has also led to harsher sentences. **11** of the individuals discussed in this report have already been convicted, receiving an average sentence of imprisonment of **11 years and 6 months**. The average sentence handed down at the time of our previous report was just under **9 years**.

The use of the charge of treason accounts for the lack of information about a number of the prosecutions. Treason trials are almost always heard in camera, lawyers are required to sign non-disclosure agreements, defendants are anonymised in the case files on court websites, and sometimes these files are missing altogether. In some cases, defendants’ relatives are not keen to publicise information about a case and hope that the charges were brought by mistake and that this ‘mistake’ will be resolved satisfactorily, as the investigating authorities sometimes assure them.

- In addition to the **16 cases** involving a charge of treason (Art. 275 CC RF),
- in **3 cases** returnees were charged with public incitement of terrorism (Art. 205.2 CC RF),
- in **2 cases** with aiding and abetting terrorist activities (Art. 205.1 CC RF),
- in **3 cases** with participation in the activities of a terrorist organisation (Art. 205.5 CC RF),
- in **1 case** with financing extremism (Art. 282.3 CC RF),
- in **1 case** with participation in an illegal armed group (Art. 208 CC RF).

Some of those prosecuted were charged with several offences at the same time.



In our previous report, we pointed out that law enforcement authorities often deliberately monitor the blogs of Russians who express opposition views, particularly anti-war views, even when they have left the Russian Federation.

However, the main sources of ‘evidence’ against the majority of those detained mentioned in this report were mobile phones which were examined during ‘screening’ — **11 people** (45.8%) were detained as they crossed the border at airports or at land checkpoints

First and foremost, the security forces check a person’s contacts, and if they find any ‘Ukrainian’ contacts among them they carry out a more thorough investigation, examining online posts and financial transactions, as well as consulting their own databases. To facilitate a thorough investigation and the subsequent fabrication of criminal cases (including, at the least, psychological pressure against those detained), the practice of imposing a series of short-term jail terms on trumped-up administrative-law charges is employed. Such charges include allegations of using foul language, refusal to undergo drug tests, or attempting to flee from police officers. In such cases, judges impose sentences of 10–15 days’ jail; however, having served one sentence, those involved are not released but immediately detained again and sentenced to another.

A series of administrative-law jail terms of this kind was applied in at least ten of the cases of returnees (41.7% of the total) considered in this report, and in at least seven of these cases such jail terms were applied repeatedly over a period of two or even three months. The time gained in this unlawful manner is sufficient for the security forces to find or fabricate the evidence they require. Furthermore, they use the information obtained to put pressure on those jailed, coercing them into making spurious confessions through threats, blackmail or deception. In such a situation, even relatively insignificant ‘compromising’ information found on a mobile phone may serve as a pretext to force a person, isolated and deprived of a legal representative, to incriminate themselves.

In the case of many of the detained returnees, the reasons that prompted them to travel to Russia or the occupied territories are not known. In some cases, however, this information is available. The need to replace or renew documents forced at least five people to travel to the Russian Federation; a further two had to resolve administrative or financial matters. At least seven travelled to see their loved ones or to care for sick relatives. It would appear the individuals concerned did not consider the possibility they might be of interest to the Russian security services and as a result, when travelling to Russia, were somewhat careless. They carried ‘unwiped’ mobile phones containing contacts of Ukrainians, a history of money transfers via foreign banks, or archives of correspondence on messaging apps.



However, in the fifth year of the full-scale war and with internal repression significantly intensified and at an unprecedented level, Russia's security services face a shortage of potential targets for prosecution given that most individuals of opposition views known to them have already either been detained or have left the country. At the same time, neither central nor regional law enforcement agencies can afford to lower their performance targets, as this would indicate a decline in the quality of their work and deprive them of bonuses and promotions. In this situation, they are forced to seek ever new sources to replenish their 'catch' at the borders. And, of course, regional law enforcement officers are always delighted to see 'untrustworthy' compatriots returning from abroad, as this promises them a new criminal case they can bring to court.

At the same time, people continue to travel to the Russian Federation and the occupied territories of Ukraine, either temporarily or permanently, without fully assessing the risks involved. Of the individuals featured in this report, one is believed to have returned to the Russian Federation before the start of the full-scale invasion, one in 2023, four in 2024, and at least six in 2025. In 2026 to date, six individuals who returned to Russia were immediately detained at the border, while three others were detained shortly after their return.

It is particularly risky for those with **Ukrainian citizenship** or who have lived in Ukraine for a prolonged period to travel to the Russian Federation: such information is a red flag to *FSB* officers, putting them on 'high alert'



Svetlana Golovatenko



[Svetlana Golovatenko](#), aged 46, who was born in Arkhangelsk Oblast, had lived in Kyiv for more than ten years where she worked as a manicurist and pedicurist and held a Ukrainian residence permit. Her mother, father and younger brother were still living in Russia. She travelled to Russia to renew her expired internal passport and re-register her flat in Donetsk.

Golovatenko flew to Russia via Georgia. On 23 April 2026 she was detained on arrival at Moscow's Vnukovo airport and jailed for 15 days on a charge of alleged petty hooliganism.

Svetlana was subsequently jailed consecutively on similar charges seven more times, after which a criminal case of treason was brought against her.

The basis for the charge remains unknown.

A Moscow court remanded Svetlana Golovatenko in custody. She faces **up to 20 years'** imprisonment if convicted.

Aleksandr Lunev



[Aleksandr Lunev](#), a radio presenter and IT specialist from Tomsk, is known for having [purchased](#) an abandoned water tower from the city in 2012 and converting it into a residential property. In 2022, he moved to the Czech Republic. In February 2026, a daughter was born to him in Prague.

Lunev is believed to have travelled to Russia in the summer of 2026. On 3 August 2026, he was detained and the following day a court in Tomsk remanded him in custody on charges of financing the activities of an extremist organisation.

According to the investigative authorities, from August 2021 onwards Lunev made seven donations totalling 7,000 roubles to the *Anti-Corruption Foundation*, that is, after the *Anti-Corruption Foundation* had been declared an extremist organisation in Russia.

Now 43-year-old Aleksandr Lunev faces **up to eight years'** imprisonment if convicted.

His wife has set up a [fundraiser](#) to support their family.



Maksim Artemov



[Maksim Artemov](#), a native of Moscow, was released in 2002 from a Russian penal colony, where he had been serving a sentence for robbery, and moved to Sweden, where he obtained citizenship. In 2021, he moved to Odesa in Ukraine. On 18 December 2024, Artemov flew from Moldova to Sochi, where he was detained at the airport.

According to the *FSB*, in 2024 Artemov transferred money from his *Revolut* account to ‘a member of the Ukrainian Armed Forces,’ a transfer which investigators classified as financial support for Ukrainian military units. In a video filmed by the security services, Artemov stated that the money was intended for an acquaintance serving in the *Ukrainian Armed Forces* to buy a new uniform.

It can be assumed that the security services found this information on Artemov’s mobile phone. The day of his detention, Artemov was charged with disobeying police officers and jailed for 10 days. As this period drew to a close, a court in Sochi sentenced him to a further jail term on the basis of similar charges. Altogether, he was sentenced at least eight times to terms in jail, and Artemov spent about three months in temporary detention centres. The last time he was jailed was for 15 days at the end of March 2025. Following this, a criminal charge was brought against him and he was remanded in custody.

Maksim Artemov, aged 48, was sentenced to **14 years**’ imprisonment on a charge of treason.

His case only came to light in September 2026, when the *FSB* announced that the sentence had entered into force.

Anastasiya Ronzhina



[Anastasiya Ronzhina](#), aged 33, lived in Buenos Aires in Argentina. In the summer of 2026, she returned to Russia to visit her mother, who had cancer. On 19 June 2026, Anastasiya was detained at the airport. She was remanded in custody and charged with incitement to terrorism. The basis for the charge is not known.

However, according to some reports, it relates to a comment on Telegram containing the words ‘*fuck the State Duma.*’

Anastasiya Ronzhina faces **up to seven years**’ imprisonment if convicted.



Aleksandra Aleksandrova



[Aleksandra Aleksandrova](#), a journalist from Yakutsk, left Russia following the start of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. While in Kazakhstan, she criticised the actions of the Russian authorities in a number of articles. *'Hardly anyone, I suppose, wanted their homeland to turn into "Z Country",'* Aleksandrova wrote. She condemned the authorities' actions and claimed that the profession of journalism in Russia had *'finally died.'*

In 2022, Ekaterina Mizulina [filed a complaint](#) against Aleksandrova. Mizulina claimed Aleksandrova was *'actively stirring up the Yakut Telegram community from Kazakhstan'* and was working *'for a Yakut foundation.'*

In 2024, Aleksandrova returned to Russia while continuing to criticise the Russian authorities and local officials on her Telegram channel. On 20 March 2025, FSB officers detained her in Yakutsk on charges of public incitement of terrorism and justification of terrorism. She was remanded in custody.

On 28 November 2025, Aleksandrova was sentenced to **three years'** imprisonment. The grounds for the charges remain unknown. Aleksandra Aleksandrova is 50 years old.

Maksim Nekrasov



[Maksim Nekrasov](#), head of the analytics team at the Avito company, was born in Kyiv but studied at the *Moscow Institute of Physics and Technology* and the *Higher School of Economics*. As *Mediazona* discovered using a leaked database, following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, in March 2022 Nekrasov left Russia for Armenia. It is not known when or why he returned, but on 13 November 2024, in Krasnogorsk outside Moscow, Nekrasov was detained by police on the pretext that he had allegedly been swearing loudly in the street (a standard justification for administrative-law jail terms that precede a criminal charge). Thirteen days later, he was remanded in custody on a criminal charge of treason.

On 29 October 2025, 37-year-old Maksim Nekrasov was sentenced to **nine years'** imprisonment.

The basis for the treason charge is not known.



Aleksandr Kondratov



[Aleksandr Kondratov](#) worked for many years in the Russian and Ukrainian film industries as a production designer, [winning](#) the *Golden Eagle* and *TEFI* awards for his work on the 2007 TV series *Liquidation*. At some point in 2012 he moved with his family to live in Kyiv. In the spring of 2026, *‘despite everyone’s attempts to dissuade him,’* he travelled to Russia to renew his international passport.

On 5 May 2026, Kondratov flew into Moscow’s Vnukovo airport where he was detained at passport control. It is not known what prompted the security services’ interest in him. Kondratov was then jailed on administrative-law charges of petty hooliganism. He subsequently spent at least 70 days in a series of repeated jail terms until, in August 2026, he was remanded in custody on a criminal charge of treason. His lawyer stated that the charge was based on ‘at least six online posts.’ The content of these posts has not been made public.

Aleksandr Kondratov, who is 52 years old, faces **up to life imprisonment** if convicted.

Evgeny Kolody



[Evgeny Kolody](#), who is 31 years old, has also been charged with treason. He was born in Ukraine but lived in Russia in recent years, most likely holding citizenship of both countries. Before the full-scale invasion, he regularly travelled to Ukraine. After the announcement of mobilisation, he left Russia and lived in Central Asian countries. When he attempted to travel from Belarus to Poland, for lack of documents he was forced to return to Moscow no later than April 2025 and took a job as a manager at the warehouse of the *Zolotoe Yabloko [Golden Apple]* cosmetic retail chain.

The police detained Kolody allegedly because, like many others subjected to a series of jail terms on administrative-law charges, he *‘was swearing in the street, waving his arms about and failing to respond to instructions.’*

He was subsequently jailed on multiple occasions for petty hooliganism, including *‘using foul language in the car park of the Multifunctional Migration Centre.’* Kolody spent at least 97 days in a series of administrative-law jail terms, after which he was remanded on a criminal charge of treason.

If convicted, he faces **up to life imprisonment**. The basis for the treason charge remains unknown.



Oleg Variukhin



[Oleg Variukhin](#), aged 60, a native of Norilsk and a former pilot and entrepreneur, lived in Ukraine from 1999. In early May 2026, he travelled to Russia to visit relatives and was detained on arrival at the airport.

Since 4 May 2026, the courts have three times sentenced Variukhin to consecutive 15-day administrative-law jail terms on charges of petty hooliganism.

On 22 July 2026, Variukhin was remanded in custody and charged with treason.

According to the available information, Oleg Variukhin stands accused of paying taxes to the Ukrainian state as a sole trader. He faces **up to life imprisonment** if convicted.

Roman Zavodovsky

[Roman Zavodovsky](#), aged 33 years, was detained at his home in Novosibirsk on 10 February 2026 shortly after returning to Russia from abroad. According to the investigative authorities, Zavodovsky, who is opposed to Russia's war against Ukraine, left a comment on a Telegram channel in support of the *Russian Volunteer Corps*, which is a unit of the Ukrainian army.

In a press release the *FSB* described Zavodovsky as a member of *Memorial*:



The citizen was a member of the Memorial organisation, which is designated as a foreign agent. From 2022 to 2025, he went into hiding abroad to evade mobilisation.

We are unaware of any such involvement, although his name [is mentioned](#) on the website of Krasnoyarsk *Memorial*. Furthermore, in 2019 Zavodovsky [registered](#) on the *Immortal Barracks* project website in search of information about his repressed grandfather.

The court remanded Zavodovsky in custody. If convicted on a charge of public justification of terrorism, he faces **up to seven years'** imprisonment.



Mikhail Loshchinin



[Mikhail Loshchinin](#) was born in Moscow, spent his childhood and youth in Ukraine, and has lived in Europe since 1999, obtaining Belgian citizenship in approximately 2008. Mikhail is an IT specialist who worked as a database administrator for a Luxembourg-based company. He enjoyed motorcycling and playing the guitar, and, as a lighting and sound technician, took part in theatre productions organised by the Russian diaspora in Europe.

In the summer of 2025, he travelled to Russia by motorbike to visit his father in St. Petersburg who had suffered a heart attack.

On 1 July 2025, while crossing the Latvian-Russian border at the Ubylinka checkpoint, Russian border guards took Loshchinin's phone for inspection. Most likely, they then discovered that Mikhail had numerous contacts with friends and relatives in Ukraine dating back to his childhood. Loshchinin had not 'wiped' the data from his mobile phone before crossing the border, presumably because he did not consider such contacts criminal. He was detained and subsequently charged with treason. The basis for the charge was that, in 2022, Loshchinin had allegedly sent €30 to an ex-girlfriend in Ukraine.

On 2 June 2026, 48-year-old Mikhail Loshchinin was sentenced to **16 years'** imprisonment.

Evgeny Kalganov



[Evgeny Kalganov](#), a native of Novorossiisk, took a flight out of Russia at the end of October 2021. Journalists from *Mediazona* have established that Kalganov, a builder by profession, had been living and working in Poland for a construction company. It is not known when or why he returned to Russia.

According to the prosecution, between 2022 and 2023, Kalganov, while in Poland, *'made fifteen money transfers to the bank accounts of representatives of the banned terrorist organisation, the Free Russia Legion.'*

For this, he was charged with treason and financing terrorist activities. It is reported that the total amount of donations was 3,648 zlotys (approximately 51,000 roubles). We do not know how this information came to the attention of the Russian security services.

On 4 August 2026, Evgeny Kalganov, aged 34 years, was sentenced to **16 years'** imprisonment.



Pavel Vladimirov



In August 2024 [Pavel Vladimirov](#), an anarchist from Voronezh then aged 18, left Russia. In September he was detained in Kazakhstan at the request of the Russian authorities. Vladimirov spent 12 months in custody in Kazakhstan, the maximum possible under that country's legislation. Human rights activists reported that, by the time Vladimirov was released from detention, his father had arrived and persuaded him to return to Russia with him. There has been no contact with either of them since. At the time, Vladimirov's father justified his decision to persuade his son to return by saying, *'Let him at least be near us, even if they put him in prison.'*

In Russia, Vladimirov was charged with preparing to commit treason and with participating in a terrorist organisation. According to the security services, he had sent application forms to 'Ukrainian armed groups' to fight alongside them.

In June 2026, Pavel Vladimirov was sentenced to **nine years'** imprisonment.

Grigory Bilenko



[Grigory Bilenko](#), a 55-year-old Russian, worked for *OkeanRybFlot* in Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky until retirement. In 2019 he moved to the town of Zviahel in Ukraine's Zhytomyr Oblast. He had previously regularly visited relatives in Ukraine and was a citizen of both countries. In June 2023, Bilenko travelled to Russia to collect his pension and renew his international passport.

On his return, he allegedly told an acquaintance, a former officer of the Ukrainian intelligence agency, about a relative of his who worked for the *FSB Border Guard Service*, as well as details of the questioning he had undergone at Russian border control.

Subsequently, according to the prosecution, he was *'instructed and sent to Russia to gather further information.'* While in Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky, Bilenko allegedly rang acquaintances with links to the military and questioned them about the numbers of Russian ships and possible losses.

On 1 January 2024, Grigory Bilenko was remanded in custody on a charge of treason.

On 18 September 2024, he was sentenced to **14 years'** imprisonment.



Maksim Grigoryev



[Maksim Grigoryev](#), a Muscovite and entrepreneur in the field of radio engineering, lived in China for many years, as he recounted on social media. He travelled to the Russian Federation, presumably during the pandemic, to renew his passport. For unknown reasons, Grigoryev remained in the Russian Federation. On 19 July 2024 he was remanded in custody. Law enforcement officers allegedly discovered correspondence on Grigoryev's mobile phone with a representative of the *Free Russia Legion*, as well as a completed application form to join the *Legion* dated October 2022.

Since the *Free Russia Legion* was designated a terrorist organisation after Grigoryev's 'enrolment,' he was charged with both participation in an illegal armed group for purposes contrary to the interests of the Russian Federation, and involvement in the activities of a terrorist organisation. According to the prosecution, Grigoryev passed on information to the *Free Russia Legion* regarding the 'movements of law enforcement officers,' and in 2023–2024 had attempted to organise the development of software for drones.

Maksim Grigoryev, aged 56, was sentenced to **13 years'** imprisonment.

Semen Kravchenko



Russian national [Semen Kravchenko](#) lived in Ukraine for many years; a child was born to him there shortly before the start of the full-scale invasion. On 24 February 2022, he was wounded by the Russian military while attempting to leave a village in Sumy Oblast and hid in a cellar. He subsequently managed to flee to Slovakia and from there to Norway. In November 2024, he decided to return to his sister and parents in Sevastopol, but was detained at a border crossing as he was attempting to enter Russia from Norway.

Kravchenko was charged with treason and financing terrorist activities for making 13 money transfers totalling approximately 5,600 roubles in support of the *Ukrainian Armed Forces* and the *Azov Battalion*.

Kravchenko maintained his innocence of the charges, insisting that the transfers had been made by other people who had access to his bank account. He also stated that he had made his initial confession as a result of physical and psychological coercion by the *FSB* officers who had detained him.

On 5 August 2025, a military court sentenced 37-year-old Semen Kravchenko to **14 years'** imprisonment.



Nikolay Zyuzev



[Nikolay Zyuzev](#), a senior Russian scholar and renowned expert on the legacy and biography of the philosopher Pitirim Sorokin, taught at Russian universities, as well as in the US and Canada.

He lived in Canada from 2009, where he obtained citizenship in 2015, but returned to Russia that same year to head a research centre at *Syktyvkar State University*. Following the start of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, he left for Canada again, though he still occasionally visited his home village in Komi.

During his last visit to Russia in June 2025, Zyuzev stopped answering calls and letters. It later emerged he had been remanded in custody, initially on a charge of collusion with foreign nationals, but the case was subsequently reclassified as treason. Zyuzev was charged with *'preparing, with the aid of foreign grants, a project directed against the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Russia.'*

On 16 September 2026, Nikolay Zyuzev, 70 years old, was sentenced to **seven years'** imprisonment.

Maksim Podterebkov



[Maksim Podterebkov](#), a resident of Khakassia who opposed the war, left Russia for Turkey after mobilisation began in September 2022. He returned to the Russian Federation in 2024.

In Russia, he was detained and remanded in custody on a charge of treason. According to the prosecution, in Turkey Maksim Podterebkov had *'taken part in fundraising'* and donated money to purchase a minibus for the *Ukrainian Armed Forces*. The amount of the donation is not known.

On 5 March 2025, the Supreme Court of Khakassia sentenced 30-year-old Maksim Podterebkov to **12 years'** imprisonment.



A resident of Rostov Oblast

We know of the fate of one more returnee exclusively from a statement by the *FSB*.

A resident of Rostov Oblast, who had moved to Georgia and then returned to the Russian Federation, was charged with treason. Without giving his name, the *FSB*'s Rostov Oblast Directorate reported in February 2025 that



the suspect, while living in Georgia, made repeated money transfers between February and August 2023 to a Ukrainian citizen who actively collaborates with the commanders of Ukrainian military formations, with the aim of supporting the Ukrainian Armed Forces

It appears that the accused sent money to the Ukrainian blogger Evgeny Volnov, who in 2023 appealed via his Telegram channel for funds to support Ukrainian military personnel.

The returnee faces **up to life imprisonment** if convicted.

Elizaveta Ostroukhova



[Elizaveta Ostroukhova](#), a resident of Kurgan, flew to Sochi from Istanbul on 17 July 2025. All contact with her ceased the same day. It later emerged that she had been subjected to at least eight consecutive administrative-law jail terms, allegedly for disobeying law enforcement officers and using obscene language.

Following a prolonged period of isolation, Ostroukhova was charged with treason and remanded in custody on the pretext that she '*expressed a certain interest and committed certain actions aimed at joining the ranks of the Ukrainian Armed Forces*'.

Elizaveta Ostroukhova's son said that his mother may have fallen victim to an *FSB* provocation because of correspondence with a fake social media account. He believes her admission of guilt was the result of pressure and exhaustion.

She faces **up to 20 years'** imprisonment if convicted.



Viktoriya Sergeeva



[Viktoriya Sergeeva](#), a 55-year-old woman from Crimea and a citizen of both the Russian Federation and Ukraine, was detained a few days later at the same Sochi airport, also upon arrival from Istanbul. Border guards checked her Ukrainian passport and discovered she had spent the whole summer in Ukraine. Sergeeva's mobile phone was seized by *FSB* officers, who allegedly found money transfers to Ukraine in her banking apps.

She was then subjected to a series of administrative-law jail terms over a period of several months. Upon the expiry of each new jail term she was released, only to be met by law enforcement officers outside the gates of the detention centre, who then drew up new charges against her.

On 28 January 2026, Sergeeva was remanded in custody in Krasnodar on a charge of treason. As a result of threats and pressure by law enforcement officers, she then signed a statement giving the testimony the officers demanded. She subsequently retracted this testimony and was held for almost five months in complete isolation.

She faces **up to 20 years'** imprisonment if convicted.

Oleg Stepanov



[Oleg Stepanov](#) is a lawyer from Chelyabinsk Oblast who represented political activists in court. Following the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, he staged a solo protest in the centre of Chelyabinsk holding a placard reading, '*No to the criminal war.*'

He was fined under an administrative-law charge for discrediting the Russian army, and the authorities also attempted to accuse him of collaborating with the Ukrainian security services. Stepanov was forced to leave Russia for Serbia, where he worked as a courier while waiting for a humanitarian visa. On 31 January 2026, he returned to the Russian Federation for family reasons and was detained at the airport.

He was charged under an administrative-law article with disobeying a police officer and placed in administrative detention. Following his release, Stepanov was detained again, this time in connection with a criminal case. He was remanded in custody on charges of participating in the activities of a terrorist organisation. It is not known which specific organisation the authorities allege the lawyer was involved with.

Oleg Stepanov, 52, faces **up to 20 years'** imprisonment.



At the time of writing, two other individuals are being subjected to a series of administrative-law jail terms. We very much hope that their times in detention will end there. However, we also want to tell their stories.

Dmitry Drig



Dmitry Drig, aged 65, worked in Russia for many years before moving to a village in Ukraine's Chernihiv Oblast. He holds a Ukrainian residence permit. Drig travelled to the Russian Federation twice to collect his pension and apply for an international passport. On a visit in 2024, he was questioned by *FSB* officers, who also searched the room where he was staying in a hostel and subjected him to a polygraph test. He was subsequently able to leave Russia.

In the summer of 2026, Drig again travelled to the Russian Federation to collect his pension. On 1 July, he was detained in Moscow, presumably at the airport. He has since been subjected to a series of five (at the time of writing) consecutive jail terms on administrative-law charges of disobeying the police or petty hooliganism.

Elena Morgunova



Elena Morgunova is the 34-year-old wife of former political prisoner and performance artist Pavel Krisevich who served a five-year term of imprisonment.

In 2025, she travelled with Krisevich to France, where he sought political asylum. However, in August 2026 she returned to the Russian Federation to visit relatives. A few days later, on 28 August, Morgunova was detained in Skopin in Ryazan Oblast. Law enforcement officers removed Morgunova, her mother and their dog from the bus on which they were travelling. The same day, Morgunova was jailed for 10 days on an administrative-law charge of disobeying police officers (according to the court, she had refused to unlock her mobile phone). On 7 September, after she had served her 10-day jail term, an investigator stated that Morgunova's pupils were dilated and demanded she undergo a drug test. Morgunova asked that the test be conducted in the presence of her solicitor. The investigator interpreted this as a refusal and charged her with the administrative-law offence of refusing to undergo a medical examination.

Morgunova was then sentenced to a further 14 days in jail.



CONCLUSION

It is not for us to pass judgement on the many reasons that motivate individuals who have left the Russian Federation or the occupied territories to return. Each person makes their own subjective assessment of the risks. However, we strongly urge that these risks be assessed in a realistic and appropriate manner, particularly in light of the increasing repressive tendencies within the Russian Federation and the occupied territories. Individuals who, until recently, might not have attracted the attention of the security services, may now become their targets.

We recommend that you **do not return** to Russia or the occupied territories, even for a short period of time or for the most urgent matters, if:

- You made donations, either in Russia or abroad, to any Ukrainian funds or initiatives, even for purely humanitarian purposes, or to funds supporting Ukraine or Ukrainian refugees;
- You made donations in the Russian Federation or abroad to the *Anti-Corruption Foundation*, or to other organisations designated as [extremist](#), [terrorist](#) or [undesirable](#) in Russia;
- You previously interacted with such organisations, even before they were designated as extremist, terrorist or undesirable in the Russian Federation;
- You participated in opposition or anti-war protests in the Russian Federation, were detained and subjected to administrative-law proceedings, were summoned for questioning at police stations, or had a local police officer visit you to warn against taking part in unauthorised demonstrations;
- You posted anti-war or strongly oppositional posts or comments on any social media, including before February 2022 or in the first few days following the start of the full-scale invasion (even if you subsequently deleted them, as it seems to you);
- You posted, while abroad, photos or videos of yourself taking part in protests there, or photos of Ukrainian symbols;
- You have not checked your status against the [wanted persons database](#), or obtained a certificate of having no criminal record via the government's *Gosuslugi* website, in order to ensure that no criminal proceedings have been brought against you;
- You live in Ukraine or have lived there for a significant period of time, have spent time there during the full-scale invasion (and this is recorded in your international passport or in databases of Russian border control authorities), and you are a citizen of Ukraine.



As our report shows, if any of the above apply to you, should you travel to Russia there is a significant likelihood you could face criminal prosecution, be remanded in custody and be given a lengthy prison sentence

We ask that you share this information, and warn family and friends who may be affected, about the risks involved.

POLITICAL PRISONERS MEMORIAL

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If you know of any cases of illegal politically motivated prosecution, please contact us through our [CHATBOT](#) or at HELP.POLITICAL.PRISONERS@MEMOHRC.ORG

