

Europe Solidaire Sans Frontières > English > Europe, Great Britain > Eastern Europe & Russian Federation > Russia > On the left (Russia) > **In Russia, the mathematician Azat Miftakhov released then immediately (...)**

In Russia, the mathematician Azat Miftakhov released then immediately targets new charges

Wednesday 20 September 2023, by [VITKINE Benoît](#) (Date first published: 6 September 2023).

Released from prison on Monday, the anarchist activist sentenced in 2021 for the attack on a premises in United Russia was arrested again. Investigators accuse him of remarks “justifying terrorism” made in detention.

Azat Miftakhov only tasted freedom for a handful of minutes, the time to cross the few meters separating the gates of the IK-17 penal colony, in the city of Kirov, from those of the police van waiting for him. outside. Released after four and a half years in prison, this young mathematician whose case is the subject of significant attention in Russia and abroad was immediately arrested on his release, Monday, September 4.

In 2019, the anarchist activist was arrested for having, according to the prosecution, broken a window of a premises of the ruling party, United Russia. The accusation today relates to acts which would have been committed in detention: during a television viewing session, Azat Miftakhov allegedly engaged in “a deliberate justification of terrorist acts in front of two convicts”.

“His mother was still hoping, but we, his friends, were expecting this scenario, testifies for Le Monde his wife, Elena Gorban, who came to wait for him in front of the prison. Investigators had warned him a week ago that he would be arrested. And they had prepared things beforehand. In recent weeks, Azat has been sent to solitary confinement for long periods. This has allowed investigators to pressure the inmates they need as witnesses.”

Miftakhov’s lawyer was only able to negotiate a five-minute meeting between the 30-year-old and his relatives – his wife, mother and stepfather. Supporters who came to welcome him were dismissed. “There was nothing happy and not much to say,” says Elena Gorban. We mostly spent this time hugging each other. Azat reassured his mother that he was holding on and would continue to hold on. The young man reappeared the next day, Tuesday, in a cage in the Kirov court, to be served with new charges and sent to pre-trial detention.

This common practice in Russia – a release immediately followed by an arrest – had already been used at the start of the case. At the time, the police suspected Azat Miftakhov, then a brilliant doctoral student in mathematics at Moscow University, of manufacturing explosives. In the absence of any incriminating evidence, the investigators had been forced to release him after a week of interrogations (and torture, according to him).

Azat Miftakhov was immediately arrested again, in the courtyard of the police station, this time on another charge: the mathematician allegedly broke the window of a United Russia office, before others threw a smoke bomb into the premises. During the trial, Miftakhov’s co-defendants cleared

him, while admitting the facts. From then on, the accusation rested entirely on an anonymous witness who claimed to have recognized the accused, despite his mask, by “his expressive eyebrows”. Azat Miftakhov had been sentenced to six years in prison.

During his detention, the mathematician was the subject of constant support abroad, coming both from left and extreme left groups and from the scientific community. He also continued his work, managing in particular to publish two articles. “He happened to scratch formulas with his fingernails on the walls of an isolation cell”, assures Ahmed Abbes, spokesperson for his French support committee and director of research at the CNRS.

The case opened at the beginning of September again involves “secret” witnesses. According to the first elements presented, they heard Azat Miftakhov comment favorably, in front of the prison television, on the attack committed in 2018 against a premises of the FSB, the security services, in the city of Arkhangelsk. During his short interview with his mother, the young man denied having made such comments.

Justice also claims that Miftakhov had informed fellow prisoners of his intention to leave Russia, or even to go and fight Russian forces in Ukraine to “avenge a friend”. It is not yet clear whether these charges will be used in a future trial or only serve to justify his remand.

The relentlessness of the authorities against this young man with a fragile physique is obvious. For months, as his release approached, increasingly persistent rumors spoke of the opening of new cases, on separate grounds. “At one time, his notoriety protected him, notes Ahmed Abbes, but he also became a symbol. His refusal to cooperate or confess also made him an enemy of the security services.”

Anarchists and anti-fascist activists in general are treated with extreme harshness by the Russian regime. In the case of Miftakhov, this relentlessness readily takes a sadistic turn. During the month of May, as they sought to put pressure on the detainee to open new investigations, the security services circulated intimate photos of the mathematician in his prison, and revealed to his fellow prisoners his bisexuality. In the Russian prison world, such facts are supposed to lead to the ostracization of the prisoner and above all expose him to various forms of violence.

These actions had been made public by his wife, Elena Gorban, at the request of Azat Miftakhov himself.

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The case of Azat Miftakhov

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English translation of an [article published in Le Monde](#) by Benoît Vitkine on September 6, 2023