

No other language but the language of pain

A monologue of a man from Moscow oblast, who was tortured because his brother is an anarchist

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Pyotr Ivko's brother Ivan left Russia in summer 2022, after he had noticed the close attention from the law enforcers. It all began with an attempt to hack Ivan and his wife's Google accounts. Ten days later, Ivan saw through a peephole a «well-knit man», who was standing and filming his front door for a long time. Ivan realized that these were preparations for an upcoming assault. The police had followed Ivan in 2011. They came to his house, questioned his neighbors, then searched his place and brought him to the police station for questioning. The reason for such attention was the recent explosion of a police station on the 22d kilometer of the Moscow beltway. This time Ivan decided not to wait for searches and he departed Russia.

Ivan doesn't know what became a reason for the police's attention this time. He believes that the reason for the oppression was his long years of open anarchist position shared by his wife.

The search warrant given to Pyotr Ivko claimed Ivan to be a suspect in dismantling of rails (article 267 of the Criminal Code) in Vladimir Oblast. Ivan says that he has nothing to do with this incident. He believes that enforcers could have come to his family because anarchists had taken the responsibility for these actions.

We publish Pyotr Ivko's story about things that happened with him in the Moscow Butyrsky district police department.

I was detained on the 10th of August, but it all had begun a month before that. I had just returned from my holidays, where I had no Internet access. I found my brother's note at home – from this note I learned of his and his wife's departure from Russia. My brother supports the opposition, but he never participated in any activities. Nevertheless, I understood that if they left, they had their reasons.

Next day, I noticed that I had been followed by some people. They were usually men around 30 years old with headsets. I had no doubts that it was a surveillance. I usually walk a long way from work to home, no one else does it.

To check if I was followed, I turned my head left and right on one of the pedestrian crossings and I noticed a guy in a bright t-shirt, then I did the same thing on the next crossing and I noticed the same t-shirt once again. I did it several times more and then suddenly I changed my way and oved deep into yards between houses. The man followed me and when he noticed that I looked directly at him, he hid behind one of the houses and looked at me from there.

I had been followed like this for some time and I noticed later that there were two followers. They were following me wherever I went. They were following me even to the grocery store and when I was in a cafe they were sitting in the corner looking at me. Sometimes I was late for a train and I had to use an electric scooter. They realized that they couldn't catch up with me and they started to ride on scooters after me. I tried to diversify my way home, sometimes I turned and walked through the forest and when I returned back to the road I saw them running after me panicking.

I rode to the Botanical Garden to meet with my friends and play the guitar and they were riding after me. One of them was hiding in bushes 50 meters away from me, the other was walking in circles for several hours.

I started to recognize them in time – saw familiar faces when getting on a train, for example.

I was followed by at least 11 different people. One man was waiting for me next to my home and followed me up to the train, another one was driving with me on the train and followed up to my work, the third one was waiting for me there. Then they started to wait for me on my waypoints, they were waiting for me next to the doorway on the bench or in the train, sometimes they took photos of me. I realized that they had figured out my route and schedule.

Honestly speaking, I had an impression that they were clumsy on purpose, so I could notice them. I am not a very attentive man, but it was impossible not to notice them – they knew that I did. I was scared because I had no idea what they wanted from me. To bring them to my brother? But he had already left the country.

Some boxes with holes for cameras appeared on the poles next to my parents' house (in Moscow oblast) around the same time. One box was looking at the gates, so it could see everyone leaving or entering, the other was looking at the yard. Sometime later drones started to fly over my parents property.

Suddenly they started to appear seldom and a week before detention they disappeared. I calmed down and went to hike for the weekend. I was arrested right after that.

It was morning and I was going to work. I saw a girl wearing jeans, a blue shirt and glasses on my way out of the house. She followed me right to the train, then she changed the train for a metro with me. When I walked through wagons from the last to the first so it would be easier to get out of the train at my station, she followed me further.

I exited at Dmitrovskaya metro station and stopped in the ticket hall to finish the page of the book I was reading. That time I saw that girl again. She also stalled in the hall, seemingly asking something from the passers-by.

Having finished the book, I exited the metro station. A very strange thing happened, I was approached by a non-slavic looking male who started asking my name and also asking for money to buy beer. I denied his requests, but he continued to walk after me, saying «Wait, I want to talk to you». I threatened to call the police, but he kept on following me.

I could walk straight to the office, but I didn't want this strange man following me there, so I decided to take a detour: if he wanted to tag along, I would give him some exercise. I mapped a route on my phone and decided to run.

I couldn't run far, though. In about 100 meters I saw a police patrol car. Two policemen stepped out of it and asked to present my documents. They told me I was accused of allegedly using obscene language in a public place.

«Do you have any witnesses for me using obscene language?», I asked.

«If we had witnesses you wouldn't be hopping around here»

Then we were approached by the man who bugged me earlier. They decided to check his documents, too. After that we were both taken to Butyrsky police department for processing. None of the policemen showed me any IDs.

On our way, I managed to message my parents that I was being detained. After that I notified OVD Info. They assigned me a lawyer, Julia Kuznetsova.

In the police department me and the other detainee were led to separate rooms, for us «not to quarrel yet again». The other detainee wasn't processed after all, as I haven't seen him later anywhere on the premises. I was told to submit my belongings into storage, they also took away my phone while I was trying to call my mom. After that, they locked me up in a cell.

After a while, a policeman on duty came and told me they needed to check if my cellphone was a stolen one, and requested that I unlock it. They asked me to do it twice – I suppose they tried to figure out my passcode.

After that, they took me to the office to process. The atmosphere was really weird there: there were two policewomen who constantly complained about everything. They told us they didn't want to fill in detention reports, that policemen dragged people from the streets at random, and it was their duty to make up grounds for detention afterwards. When they found out I was a programmer, they asked me if I could help them with setting up something on their PC.

After that, one of the policewomen received an SMS which she read out loud. It contained something about extremism check-ups. From what I understood, it referred to me.

They wrote the following in the detention report: «Used strong language in the presence of police officers, waved his hands, behaved inappropriately. When asked to desist, hasn't responded or reacted to requests in any way». I was surprised by the wording, because I didn't remember doing any of that. Policewomen had explained that this was just an «edited criminal law article», and that I didn't need to pay attention to the wording.

At first they treated me very politely, told me I was «a good boy» and that they were going to process me quickly, drive me to the court and then let go. But shortly after it turned out they didn't have a free vehicle to drive me to the court. I was left overnight in the cell, after being told that the court hearing would take place tomorrow. I was also offered a phone call to parents, for them to bring me some food and clothes.

My dad brought a parcel with my things to the police department and asked the officers to let me go home. Suddenly, police officers decided that the court hearing would take place tonight, and they managed to find a free vehicle and a judge in a matter of minutes. The court has sentenced me to three days of arrest under the Administrative Violations Code article on disorderly conduct (article 20.1 of the Administrative Violations Code – *OVD-Info*).

After the hearing, I was brought back to the police department, decently fed, and then summoned for an «interview».

The interview took place in a tiny room. There were five people present: two with their faces open, one in a balaclava, one in a medical mask, and one with his face covered by a scarf.

One of those with their faces covered started the dialogue: «Hello, tell us why you were detained. Nobody here wishes you any harm». I responded with «I was detained for allegedly using obscene language in a public place».

After that I was asked about my political views. I said I had no particular opinion on politics. Then they asked me about my family, I told them I had parents and a brother. They expressed particular interest in my brother, asked me where he was and how long ago did I last talk to him. I told them my brother left Russia and that we haven't talked ever since. He only reached out to me with some day-to-day information: on how to pay for utilities, for instance, or on cats trips to the vet.

That is when their kind treatment suddenly stopped. People standing behind me started kicking my chair from under me. They made a point that they studied my message history and told me they knew about me being assigned a lawyer, but they warned me it won't do me any good.

They didn't like me telling them that my brother went abroad at all. They began digging for details: «What do you mean, he went abroad, he has no foreign passport. He must be somewhere in the Moscow region». Then they started to tell me my brother was a terrorist, and that there was a terroract recently that I surely knew about, and that I was undoubtedly an accessory to terrorism.

Then they started moralizing. They told me that terrorism was bad, and that being an accessory to terrorism left me no options in further career. They threatened me that 3 days of arrest were just a start, that they could arrange it so I would receive a harsher sentence.

I stated again I didn't know anything about my brother apart from the fact that he left the country.

Then the man in balaclava said «You apparently don't want it the easy way» and produced a box with two wires attached to it. They made me hold the wires, told me «Hold this, try this». The man in balaclava fiddled with the box, and I was hit by electric shock. Police officers told me that if my brother came to the police department right away, I would be ok. I however continued to insist I knew nothing.

Then the man in balaclava told me that I understood no other language but the language of pain. The policemen turned my chair around, made me stick my hands through the back of the chair and fastened them there with a scotch tape, then attached wires to my thumbs. After that, I was electrocuted again.

Then they put a gag in my mouth. At that time the police officers were describing to me in detail what was about to happen to me: that I would not lose consciousness, but there was a risk of breaking my teeth, so they put in a gag to prevent this from happening. To prevent the gag from falling out of my mouth, they taped it to my face with duct tape. After that they gave me a stronger electric shock. I screamed out — it was very painful. The same procedure was repeated several times, and they also hit me on the body. They asked me where my brother was. I tried to logically convince them that I couldn't give them any information if I didn't have it myself.

They asked me how I was communicating with my brother, and I offered to call the number he had left. I knew it would buy me time and I could tell I was being molested. They suggested I rehearse the conversation, apparently so I wouldn't say anything unnecessary: here I was calling my brother and I had to think of what to ask him. My voice was shaking and I couldn't find the words, so I asked them to write the text down on paper.

Then we called my brother — he picked up the phone and I started to read out what the police had written: «Hi. I'm with the police. I'm talking without pressure. Everybody knows about you. I need you to come. It will be better for me, for Dad, for Mom, for you and for your wife». My brother hung up the phone.

The policemen were recording the entire conversation on camera. They probably wanted to send it to my brother later. After the connection was cut off, they started supporting me, com-

plaining that they couldn't imagine my brother being such a scumbag. Then they asked me to call again. My brother picked up the phone. The cops wrote me questions on a piece of paper, and I read them out. I asked where he was — he said he was overseas.

- But how? You don't have foreign passports.
- Illegally.
- Why did you leave?
- Since the cops are there, they know.

After that my brother hung up again and blocked my contact so that I couldn't reach him again.

They then decided to go in from the other side: "You're an anarchist. Tell us who you know from the community. You have a lot of pictures with anarchists on VKontakte". I answered that I didn't participate in any anarchist movement and I didn't know where anyone was. I suggested that they show me a picture. Then maybe I could name some people. But no pictures were shown to me in the end.

In between questions, they kept electrocuting me. They asked which of my brother's friends I knew. Then they started threatening to torture my parents the same way they were torturing me now. They forced me to give the names of my brother's classmates — the policemen wrote them down and said: "Yes, yes, we know them. They are all anarchists".

After that they showed me a video on their phone, probably from a gas station or a store. The only thing that was happening there was a man walking away from the car. The quality of the video was low. I honestly rewound it several times, trying to figure out who it could be, but I didn't recognize anyone. I informed the cops about it. Two of them stood to the side of me and watched the video again, talking amongst themselves:

- Does he look like him?
- Yeah, he does.

I asked: "Are you telling me that's me in this video?". They said, "Well, since you don't recognize anybody, it must be you".

After that the police officers started whispering and discussing whether they were going to charge me with an administrative or criminal offense. They said they weren't going to cancel the administrative report at that time, but warned me that we'd have to meet again. Then they took me back to the cell and in the morning they took me to the detention center. Nothing special happened to me there. When I got out I was no longer under surveillance and I was able to breathe freely again. Together with my lawyer I filed complaints about my illegal detention, torture and surveillance to the prosecutor's office and the Investigative Committee.

Of course, after everything that happened to me I wanted to leave Russia. But I can't leave my parents, and they are also stressed out because of my detention. And, in general, I have nothing to hide, so it seems there is nothing to be afraid of, too.

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