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‘You could call me a partisan’

Ruslan Siddiqi recounts his anti-war actions

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6 February 2025

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you-could-call-me-a-partisan-ruslan-siddiqi-recounts-his-
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Considering all these charges, Siddiqi faces between 15- and 30-years' imprisonment, or even a life sentence. The investigation into his case is completed and now the accused and his lawyer are studying the case materials.

How you can help Ruslan Siddiqi: send letters and donations (note by *Mediazona*)

Address for letters: 125130 Moscow, ulitsa Vyborgskaya 20, SIZO-5, Siddiqi Ruslan Kasemovich (d.o.b. 1988).

You can send letters by "F-Pismo" or PrisonMail.

[Note to non-Russian speakers. Letters written in languages other than Russian are very unlikely to reach prisoners in Russia. Please refer to Solidarity Zone's advice on this. If in doubt, please email [peoplenature\[at\]protonmail.com](mailto:peoplenature[at]protonmail.com) and I will try to help.]

Support the fundraiser for Ruslan's lawyer: You can send donations via PayPal or cryptocurrencies to Solidarity Zone.

[That link gives details about how to send money. And there is more from Solidarity Zone about Siddiqi's case, and about why it is important to fund legal defence in Russia.]

More on Russian anti-war prisoners

- Aleksandr Skobov tells Russian court: Putin's dictatorship must be routed militarily (January 2025)
- Russian anti-war prisoner Igor Paskar: 'I acted according to my conscience' (November 2024)
- 'It's time to start, or we'll die as slaves.' Supporting Russia's anti-war prisoners (June 2024)

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I think I can be classified as a prisoner of war, as my actions were within the framework of the war between Russia and Ukraine. I would be a political prisoner if I were locked up for a peaceful anti-war rally or putting up stickers that “discredit” the armed forces of the Russian Federation.

My actions fall under the category of “sabotage”, but not “terrorism”, since I had no aim to frighten the civilian population. The goal was to destroy planes so that they would not be able to bomb, and to destroy railway tracks so that it would be impossible to get military equipment through.

Despite the fact that the war is over for me, and I have been caught, I am sincerely grateful to the guys from Ukraine for their trust. I’m the only one to blame for being behind bars.

I hope that Ukrainians will endure all their trials with dignity. I wish everyone a peaceful sky above their heads. *19 February 2025*

The charges against Ruslan Siddiqi (note by *Mediazona*)

Investigators have defined both attacks as acts of terrorism (Article 205.2 of the Criminal Code, sub-sections a and b). Siddiqi is also accused of the preparation of another act of terrorism – an explosion on a railway that was allegedly planned for January 2024. Furthermore, the whole process of preparing for his actions has been defined as “training, with the purpose of carrying out acts of terrorism” (Article 205.3).

Siddiqi is also charged with preparation and handling of explosive substances by an organised group (Articles 222.4 and 223.3).

Ruslan Siddiqi says that he does not consider his actions to have been terrorist. He denies that he was preparing a third explosion. He also emphasises that he prepared explosive materials and undertook his actions by himself.

[Ukrainian] citizens in prisons in Ukraine. Most of them ask to exchange them, but the Russian side is against such a deal.

I received my first letters from people I didn't know in January, a little over a month after my arrest. The investigating officer and the chekists told me that everyone would turn away from me, and those who help run the risk of being called in for "sponsoring terrorists".

It is certainly pleasant to receive letters from people I don't know with words of support. All in all, letters have a special value because you are cut off from the world.

If you want to brighten up the life of prisoners in some way, write letters, send postcards, it makes them smile, despite all the hardships. Unfortunately, letters in envelopes take a very long time to be delivered, and sometimes they are "lost". For this reason, I have not been able to establish normal contact with some people. I suspect that someone is deliberately obstructing this. I reply to everyone without exception, and I also pack all the letters and postcards in my bag.

There aren't many ways to spend time in prison. From what I see, most people watch TV, some play board games, some read.

Some of those who write to me provided me with books on topics of interest to me. These are books on programming, foreign language textbooks, and some fiction books. I am currently updating my knowledge of Italian, and I would also like to learn Ukrainian. One kind girl signed me up for scientific journals where I can read news about space exploration, animals, physics, etc – everything that I love. Of the board games, I sometimes play chess.

Now I have more books, and people to correspond with, and I spend less time playing games. My priority is answering emails. I don't watch TV very often and, when I do, I mostly watch channels about science, travel and animals, especially if they are about hamsters or rats.

A Russian and Italian citizen, an electrician from [the Russian city of] Ryazan, an industrial tourist, a bike traveller, an anarchist and a partisan – all this can be said about 36-year-old Ruslan Siddiqi. In the summer of 2023, he dispatched four drones with explosives to attack the Diaghilev military airfield near Ryazan, and in the autumn, he decided to act "from the ground" – damaging railway lines with two bombs and derailing 19 freight train wagons. Siddiqi is currently awaiting trial in a Moscow pre-trial detention centre, with the prospect of a life sentence hanging over him. In these letters to Mediazona, he explained why he decided to "take up explosives", how a fox spoiled his first sabotage, and how torture by field telephones (known as "tapiki" in slang) differs from torture by tasers. (The security forces used both against him.)

The letters were published by Mediazona in Russian, and translated by Giuliano Vivaldi. Please copy and re-post.

Attacking a military airfield: "I took four drones with explosives to the field on a bicycle"

The hum of the Tupolev Tu-22 and Tu-95 aircraft outside my window coincided with the strikes on Ukraine, and this determined my choice of target: Diaghilev military airfield, just ten kilometres from home. I lived with my 80-year-old grandmother and understood how hard it was for the elderly and sick without heat and light in winter. As I filled a tub with hot water, I thought about those deprived of basic amenities a thousand kilometres away, because of someone's geopolitical ambitions. Yet at the same time they talk about "fraternal nations" and say that "Russia is not at war with civilians".

I've been interested in explosives for a long time. When I was living in Italy, I came across an article in a newspaper about an explosion used to disrupt a festival. A rough diagram



Ruslan Siddiqi in court. Photo: Solidarity Zone

of the bomb was drawn in some detail. The simplicity and accessibility of this description grabbed my attention, and I made the IEDs [improvised explosive devices] for the sabotage that I carried out from this model.

I learned how to make high-power explosive fillings around the age of 18 by simply downloading formulae on the internet. But apart from a few tests in the open, I didn't pursue it until 2023. I also had a homemade quadcopter with a camera, as one of my hobbies is aerial devices.

I shared my plans about the attack on the airport with a Ukrainian friend, and he put me in touch with a person who knows what's what in this field. We quickly connected, and I was invited to Latvia to test my skills. If successful, they promised to help with the purchase of a drone. I didn't mind travelling for a good cause.

They checked that I had no links with the Russian security services and the sincerity of my intentions. There were no salary agreements, the relationship was friendly, no one gave me orders. After purchasing parts for drones, I conducted experiments with carrying capacity and range.

came to me and asked with a grin: "Do you really think he's going to set you free?" He was also very interested in who he was and where he was from.

On the same day, I had a conflict in my cell, and I was transferred to another one, and the person with whom the conflict occurred had been sent somewhere a couple of hours before.

Later, at various times, there were times when temporary cellmates were obsessively interested in things that the investigating officer also wanted to find out.

Among the positive moments of life behind bars has been meeting decent people with whom I would be glad to stay in touch if I am ever free again. Although I'm an atheist, the thought sometimes occurs to me that everything which has happened to me since I was caught is punishment for how frivolously I regarded my life and failed to value it. And it is an admonition that I come to love life again and learn to enjoy each day.

On support and his hopes: "Letters have a special value when you are imprisoned"

Already in Detention Centre No.5, security officers came to me and persistently suggested that I dismiss my lawyer. They probably don't like him. If nothing depended on him, they wouldn't give a damn about him.

They were very worried about who was paying for it, what we were talking about, and why, in their opinion, he came to me too often. The lawyer's visits did not allow them to isolate me completely, and his active approach has given me a ray of hope.

I realise that they will nail me with a long prison sentence, and I don't particularly indulge any hopes for a favourable outcome. I suppose that exchange options may be possible in the future. There are a considerable number of pro-Russian

FSB, because it is much more difficult to identify a person's involvement by using violence. And with the help of the *tapik*, they could have framed me for the Crimean Bridge if innocent collective farmers had not already been (falsely) imprisoned in this case.

Behind bars: “It was hard waking up to the national anthem”

For the first two weeks, I was in Detention Centre No.7 in Moscow, in a cell with “extremists” and “terrorists”. It was hard to wake up to the national anthem and the song “Where the Motherland begins” and realize where you are. Especially if you had a dream about walking outside in freedom....

At first, I suffered greatly from bruised kidneys, it was painful to lie on my back, the cuts festered, my right arm could not move properly, and it hurt to lift my legs when walking. In this condition, it was difficult for me to climb onto the only available upper bunk.

And for the first six months, when I went to bed, I constantly had flashbacks of being electrocuted, and so vividly that I still seemed to feel the passage of electric current through me. I went to a psychiatrist in jail with this problem, and she prescribed me a course of pills.

A week after my detention, people who had been involved in the torture came to me and tried in every possible way to morally crush me by describing my further prospects. Clearly in this state of mind you can hardly have an optimistic outlook. I constantly thought that to avoid such situations, it was possible to sew an ampoule with a strong poison under the skin, which could be broken when captured.... Well, I got this idea from films about intelligence agents.

When I was transferred to Detention Centre No.1, there was a strange incident. After I got a lawyer, an investigating officer

Eventually, for safety reasons, I chose an automatic GPS flight with a delayed launch. [On 20 July 2023] I rode on my bike with four drones with explosives to the field, trying to drive carefully because of its shock sensitivity. I calmed myself with the thought that, if it detonated by accident, I would not have time to understand anything, and they could hardly identify me.

After setting up the drones with a three-hour take-off delay, and setting the coordinates of the areas where the aircraft are parked, I left. Before that, I noticed that a fox was running around, but I didn't think anything of it. Later, I learned from the news that only one drone had struck: the fox probably turned over the others.

To be honest, I was afraid I would be tracked down somehow, but I chose my route with care, alternating between blind spots and areas with cameras, and the gap between the moment I left the launch site, and the launch of the drones was three hours. If it hadn't been for the incident with the drones remaining there, they wouldn't have been able to figure out the launch site either.

All the same, for a whole month I listened anxiously when someone was walking near my door. A month later, my anxiety lifted: if they had figured it out, they would have caught me within a couple of weeks.

I was rather annoyed that the action did not go according to plan. I periodically launched my homemade drone and, at some point in August, I discovered that the GPS signal disappeared at an altitude of more than 30 meters. I concluded that an electronic warfare station was operating somewhere nearby and decided to abandon further drone launches.

Did I feel like a partisan? I think you can call me that. If, during the Second World War, people who opposed the Third Reich on its territory were called partisans, then you could see me in a similar way.

Italian childhood with Molotov cocktails: “I taught them to prank around, like we used to in Russia”

I was born in Ryazan, where I lived with my mother and grandmother. It was a typical 1990s childhood for young people from an industrial area. I spent a lot of time outside, since there was nothing to do at home. It was much more fun to run from construction site guards, throw gas canisters into a fire and wait for the explosion, sneak into cellars, and build hovels.

Since early childhood, I had been interested in various types of machinery and electronics. Sensing this interest of mine, my parents bought me science books and construction kits. I think it contributed to my later hobbies.

When I was 11 or 12 years old, I went to Italy to visit my mother for a summer vacation. She'd been living there for a couple of years. Towards the beginning of the school year, my mother confronted me with the fact that I would now live and study in Italy. From that moment on, I came to Ryazan only during the summer. I missed my grandmother and my friends. It was difficult at first, as learning in a non-native language is not easy. By the end of the school year, it was much easier for me to hold a conversation and learn, thanks to my classmates.

I taught them how to prank around, just like we used to in Russia. We had to run away from the police many times. Sometimes we were caught. There was even a time when they caught us with Molotov cocktails we had thrown against the walls of an abandoned school. But they released us with the words: “Don't play with petrol, guys.”

After I finished my studies, I tried to join the Italian armed forces, the *alpini* (mountain infantry corps). I needed to channel my energy somewhere. Unfortunately, I didn't pass the selection the first time round.

At the same time, they stole my watch, which slipped off my hand.

In the morning, I was taken to the police station next to the train station, where I lay on the floor for a long time, strapped up. Later, they made a fake video of my detention and confession. In the evening, I was taken to temporary holding facilities.

The next morning, masked men took me away and immediately began beating and torturing me with a taser. The officer from the Investigative Committee³ rode in another car. Compared to the *tapik*, the taser is pale by comparison, but it burns through clothes and leaves burns on the body. Even a part of the tattoo on my shoulder was burned off. I still keep the underpants that were full of holes burnt into them by the taser....

In the evening, on my ride to the detention centre, the man who tortured me called someone to give him a fully charged taser so as to arrange, as he put it, a “farewell roast”. But the person he called didn't bring it along with him for some reason.

The next morning, I thought they would torture me again, but they just laid me on the floor in the car, strapped me to the leg of a seat, and drove me to Moscow. The medic in the detention centre was stunned by the sight of me, she asked the police escort why my whole body was bruised. They didn't say anything. I replied briefly that I had fallen....

Here I have briefly described the events related to torture. Unfortunately, this method of interrogation is still widely used in Russia. During my year behind bars, I met about five people who were tortured with electricity and other savage methods. Let's hope that those who gave their consent to using such methods will be punished. The use of such interrogation methods and techniques with the falsification of evidence show the lack of professionalism of the Investigative Committee and the

³ Lieutenant V. V. Osipov, high-priority cases investigator in the first section for the investigation of high-priority cases of the Western Inter-Regional Investigative Department for Transport of the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation.

filtrating various underground facilities and abandoned buildings and collecting civil defence items. Shortly before my arrest, I decided to sell off part of my collection, including a pair of TP-57 field phones (popularly called “*tapiks*” because of the abbreviation TP).

When my apartment was searched, one of the security officers asked: “I saw you selling *tapiki* on Avito [a kind of equivalent to Craigslist classified online ads site], don’t you have any left?” It’s good that I had sold them all by then, or else these freaks may have caused unbearable pain to other people with my own devices. There’s no doubt why they were asking – they didn’t really look like collectors.

After they turned on the *tapik*, one of the security officers ordered the other: “Put a rag in his mouth so that he doesn’t bite his tongue and scream.” When they asked questions, they took out the cloth and turned the *tapik*’s handle more slowly, but it was impossible to say anything when it was being twisted. One of them was standing and filming on his phone.

When they finished torturing me with the *tapik*, someone told them to carry me to the car. The masked man asked the other how hard I could be beaten, to which they replied: “So that there are no visible marks on him.”

When they carried me, my legs just hung down and wouldn’t obey me, which caused the handcuffs to dig into my skin, cutting it, and some of my fingers went numb. They drove me around in a car with a bag over my head all night and beat me, pinning me down between the seats.

When searching the apartment, one of the chekists saw the medals of my grandparents and insistently wanted to know if there were any valuable ones among them that could be sold. I wouldn’t be surprised if they stole some things....

At the place where I showed where I had thrown out the reagents, I was beaten again and then dragged along the road by handcuffs strapped to my arms, injuring my shoulder joint.

I don’t see any major contradiction between anarchism and joining the army of a non-belligerent country for a year without commitments. I would not join the army to fight an aggressive war. In the Italian army, I saw the opportunity to acquire skills in handling weapons, munitions and equipment. In any case, when self-governing territories emerge, the ability to protect communities and their way of life from attacks will be needed.

I lived and worked in Italy, but when I came back to Russia, I decided to stay when I was offered a job as an electrician. Life was good here until 2008. I also missed my grandmother and friends, and life in Europe seemed too boring back then. At the same time, I warmly remember Sicily – five minutes to the sea, such beautiful nature, and a quiet life for those who love warm weather.

Before the events of 2014, I travelled to Ukraine once a year for trips to the Chernobyl zone. I became interested in this place when I was still young, long before the well-known [Ukrainian] video game *S.T.A.L.K.E.R* [which is set at the Chernobyl site]. The very fact that unauthorised trips to the exclusion zone were forbidden only increased my attraction towards this place. I like to make my way through difficult terrain, hide from patrols, and use military equipment. I have made friends with those who shared my interests, including in Ukraine, and some of them, unfortunately, will never again go hiking....

My journey towards anarchism: “My rejection of totalitarianism and fascism remains steadfast”

I didn’t become an anarchist overnight. Even before I knew of the word “anarchism”, I already had my own idea of a just

world: without a state, with self-governing communities. Then a friend said that this was what anarchism is like.

But I don't like to limit myself to any ideology, I find affinities with the ideas of various currents of thought. The world is changing, and what was relevant a hundred years ago may no longer fit our world. I don't like the rigidity in the ideas of some anarchists and communists, who sometimes resemble religious fanatics. One thing I can say for sure is that my rejection of totalitarianism and fascism remains steadfast. One fascist cellmate even called me a liberal because I praised [Yuval Noah] Harari's work.

Most people are conservative and not ready for drastic changes, while some simply have no need for it – as though their slave nature was some kind of default mode. In Russia, I have met many people who dream of Stalin's "iron hand" or the tsar's firm schlong up their backside: "So that there is order and everyone knows their place."

Maybe there will be a transition, perhaps even a violent one, from a totalitarian state to other forms of government with greater freedoms and further evolution into communities with self-government. For this to be possible, people need to change. Over the past ten years in Russia, I have become very disappointed in people, and I would not be surprised that in the foreseeable future the country will continue to sink to the level of North Korea and Iran.

In my understanding, being an anarchist means helping or participating in projects close to the movement whenever possible. Participating in actions aimed at protecting the rights and freedoms of working people. If circumstances permit, communicate your ideas to the right people. Acquire new knowledge and skills that allow you to do all this more effectively.

At the age of 16, I was interested in the idea of autonomous agricultural communes, I had read an article about such communities in the west. In Russia, apart from religious communes,

ing how they work, would not have hurt either. When they extracted a confession out of me, one of the chekists said: "I already wanted to pulverise all the cyclists in Ryazan."

Detention and torture: "With the help of a field telephone (tapik), it would have been possible to frame me for the Crimean Bridge attack"

It had been almost twenty days since the explosion. I'd let my guard down and didn't pay attention to the fact that there was a cop at the entrance. He compared me with the photo from that surveillance camera and instructed me to go with him to police station No. 4 in Ryazan. They took a saliva sample for DNA testing. Then people in civilian clothes arrived and called me into the office. They started asking various questions about what I was doing on 11 November 2023. I made a couple of blunders in my answers, and the "person" who asked the questions realised that I was hiding something.

He threatened that they would get a confession out of me anyway: they would take me into the open countryside, torture me, and then shoot me, staging an escape attempt. Then they asked me questions: "Do you have any chronic diseases?" After I answered "no", they hit me on the head, which knocked me on to the floor, and then started kicking me mercilessly. They tied wires to my legs and after the command "Call!" they begin to torture me with an electric current.

When they electrocuted me, they shouted at me to sing the national anthem of Ukraine, but because of my mental confusion, I could not remember it. I couldn't even remember the pattern lock to unlock my second phone.

The instrument of torture was the TP-57 field telephone or its equivalent. I am familiar with this device. I was fond of in-



A repair team at the site of the explosion on the Ryazan railway, November 2023. Photo from the Moscow Railways telegram channel

And I had to walk along minor footpaths that I knew very well, but because I was tired, I walked the last kilometre on tarmac, thinking that the danger was over.

The security camera, whose image was used for the search, recorded me at about 11–12 o'clock, that is, five hours after the explosion. It was necessary to find some clothes which would help hide my identity to return home.

The chekists [i.e. security services] said they couldn't track where I came from to the site of the explosion. The explosion occurred on 11 November, and I was detained on the 29th. I made them sweat a little, and they were in a dead-end situation, just like in the case with the drones. Even when they caught me, they weren't sure if I was involved in any way.

Having seized my phone, they saw who I subscribed to on Telegram and concluded that I was, at the very least, no supporter of the so-called Special Military Operation. This is another mistake I made: I needed to look like some ordinary ultra-patriot online. Knowing your rights when detained, and know-



Ruslan Siddiqi on a hiking trip, perhaps at the Chernobyl site that he visited regularly. Photo: Solidarity Zone

I had never encountered anything like this, and any ambitious projects often did not even survive for a couple of years.

I learned about the “New Way”¹ in 2010 through samizdat, which talked about the need for workers to help develop it. In spite of the fact that it was very different there from what I read, I continued to go there for six months every year. I worked in Ryazan² and devoted the rest of my time to life in “New Way”, doing gardening and building. Every year, I hoped to be able to create a self-sufficient production facility that would allow the commune to exist independently of any outside help.

But over several years, practically nothing changed there, people came there and then left disenchanted. I stayed because of my love of nature and my desire for new knowledge. I think the project died because of the founder’s intransigence in financial matters: it was impossible to organize production without selling goods. Despite our differences, I appreciate the experience I gained there, and I hope that the house I built will still be useful to someone.

¹ A farming commune in Leningrad region, constituted in 1990 as a kolkhoz (Soviet collective farm). Its founders said that on the commune’s territories “soviet power and communistic relationships are maintained”. In the 1990s there were no more than ten people permanently resident at “New Way”.

² “I come here on a motorbike from Ryazan, via Vladimir – about 1100 kilometres”, Ruslan Siddiqi said of the “New Way” commune, in the journal Open University, at that time. “I am here in the summer, and the rest of the time I am at work. During the winters I put some money aside, and then come here for the [summer] season, when there is not much work to be had. Last time I worked in the sweet store. I am a very frugal person.”

returned home through another path, without my bike and in a change of clothes.

I saw the results of the train bombing on the news. I sent this news to a Ukrainian friend. A few days later, he informed me that his management had decided to allocate me 15,000 dollars. I was surprised, because I had never possessed more than a thousand euros in my life. I told him that I have no problems with money at the moment and asked him to postpone this issue until better times. He was a little indignant at first but agreed that now was not the best time.

Back in the summer, when he found out that my grandmother was in the hospital, he wanted to pay for her treatment. I said that I had money, that I had saved the required amount. But I am still heartily grateful that he decided somehow to help an elderly woman from the country that attacked his country. I hope he reads these words someday.

Security cameras and suspicious dacha owners: “Even when they caught me, they weren’t sure if I was involved in anything”

When I was conducting reconnaissance of the area near the railway, I came across some dacha owners a couple of kilometres from the site of the future explosion. These owners will often cast suspicious gazes upon any strangers in their territory, and they might have remembered me. If they were questioned, all those fitting my description could have been rounded up.

They may have searched for security camera images within a radius of several kilometres in a given period of time. They could also track all the people who came out of the blind zone where I hid.

I had to change the location of the explosion after I ran into the dacha owners a week earlier. It was necessary to return to the city not immediately, but to stay in the forest until nightfall.

The second explosion: “The railway infrastructure is the circulatory system of a belligerent country”

The war continued, and I decided that since it hadn't worked from the air, I would launch an attack from the ground. The railway infrastructure is the circulatory system of a belligerent country. I shared my thoughts with my Ukrainian friend and asked him to blow up some rail tracks somewhere to calculate the capacity charge, since conducting these experiments in Russia during wartime was unwise.

From my reconnaissance, I discovered the movement of trains with military equipment along one of the tracks which bypasses Ryazan and moves towards the south of Russia. After observing it, I established how frequently trains run and worked out that this track is used only for freight transportation. I came to the conclusion that this was a good target, because even if the track itself was hit, then their logistics as a whole was disrupted.

This sabotage cost me less than 10 thousand rubles. In a few days, I made two powerful bombs and a video transmitter with a self-destruct mechanism. I devised my escape route. I had a night vision device with me, and in my pockets were bags of pepper to set the dogs off my track.

I rode my bike to the site at midnight, set the charges under the tracks, fixed the camera on a tree so that it recorded the moment of detonation, and scattered pepper in the sites I was hiding out in. Having found a location with a good video signal, I got some sleep and waited for dawn. When it got lighter and the camera image was already visible, I waited for the right moment, made sure that the train was not a passenger train, and activated the charge.

After fleeing the scene, I hid my bike, shoes, and the clothes I was wearing in the woods ten kilometres from the blast site. I

24 February 2022: “In desperation, I wanted to gnaw through the barrels of a gun”

I had been following the situation in Ukraine since the end of 2013. I thought about taking part in protest actions then, but I didn't have an opportunity to take unpaid leave. I did not expect Russia to take such a despicable step, taking advantage of the transition period in the country. I think it's no secret now who the people who seized Crimea were, who shot down the Malaysian Airlines plane with passengers on board, and who fought in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions under the guise of “angry Donbas miners”.

In 2021–22, it was already obvious that things were heading towards an invasion. The propaganda machine produced more and more aggressive stories. Shortly before 24 February, I had a recurring dream: there was a field full of dark green military equipment, a grey sky, black trees without leaves, I was on the sidelines, having something like a grenade launcher in my hands, but some force held me back from aiming and shooting.

Early in the morning on 24 February 2022 I was riding the Ryazan-Moscow local train. I dozed off and heard snatches of phrases in my sleep: “We'll be in Kiev in the evening”, “we're only shooting at NATO bases”, “they wanted to attack us”, “the Ukies are really gagging for a good beating”. When I woke up, I started monitoring the news and saw that a large-scale invasion had begun. A month earlier, the news feed was filled with obviously fake reports of shelling and other provocations by the Ukrainian armed forces. Here we can draw a historical parallel with fake provocations before the invasion of Poland by Nazi Germany or the Soviet invasion of Finland.

It was a very unpleasant feeling not being able to do anything about it. I saw trains with military equipment passing

by, and I desperately wanted to bite through the barrels of the weapons.

In early March, I contacted a comrade from Ukraine, now deceased, asking if he was taking part in the defence. He wrote to me: "We burn their equipment by the hundreds, and they wipe out our cities." He died when they drove out the Russian armed forces from the Kharkiv region, in the summer of 2022.

The Russian government has cut off all opportunities to influence the situation peacefully: anyone who opposes the war is declared a traitor and subjected to repression. In such a situation, it is not surprising that some would prefer to leave the country, whereas others would take up explosives.

Realising that the war was going to be a long one, at the end of 2022 I decided to act militarily. The Russian army deliberately attacked Ukraine's energy infrastructure, leaving civilians without water, heat and light so that they could put pressure on their leadership.

According to Article 205 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation, "the commission of an explosion or other actions that frighten the population in order to influence decision-making by government authorities" falls under the definition of terrorism. The actions of the Russian side correspond to this definition.

Moreover, they adopted a "double strike" tactic: after the first strike on a site, a second strike was launched when the rescue service turned up so as eliminate the rescuers. The Russian side simply gloated, showing stories about the suffering of the civilian population.

The death of my grandmother: "My state of mind had a negative effect on my lucidity, and I abandoned my sense of caution"

At the end of September 2023 [two months after the unsuccessful attack on Diaghilev airfield] I went on another bike tour from Ryazan to St Petersburg. On the second day, when I was already approaching Vladimir, my grandmother called me: "Ruslan, come back, my legs are numb." I heard something very different in her voice. I turned around and rushed back. A little later, the medic from the ambulance called me saying that my grandmother had a suspected stroke, and she was already in hospital.

That day, I rode a record number of kilometres and ran out of energy when entering Ryazan. There I slept under a tree, and in the morning, I rode the rest of the distance. The first thing I did was visit my grandmother in the hospital. She recognised me, but she couldn't speak. Unfortunately, that was the last time I saw her. On 1 October, the phone rang at night: "Ruslan, come to the morgue tomorrow."

I'm very affected by death, I couldn't stand it even when my hamster was dying.... I knew that sooner or later this would happen, but I still suffered a lot, I was troubled with gloomy thoughts, my mind was foggy, even now, as I write these lines, my eyes are watering... I think this condition negatively affected my lucidity and I abandoned my sense of caution. I should have given myself a couple of months to recover, but I didn't.