

## **Memorial recognizes activists Evgeny Kurakin and Natalya Lutovinova as victims of politically-motivated persecution**

Two activists of the Parkovaya No.8 housing co-operative in the town of Reutov (Moscow region) are being prosecuted in connection with their activism to protect housing rights and the rights of their neighbours.

Evgeny Kurakin has been charged under Article 159, Part 4 (“especially large-scale fraud”) of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation, and is currently waiting for his case to have a repeat hearing in court. He was held in custody from 28 February 2014 until 9 July 2015, after which he was released on bail. On 16 March 2017 Natalia Lutovinova was sentenced to 302 hours of compulsory labour under Article 330, Part 1 (“taking the law into one’s own hands”). On 1 March 2017 she had been remanded in custody and was released, under travel restrictions, on 6 March.

Analysis of the course of the prosecution and the materials of the criminal case leads to the conclusion that the charges are politically motivated.

Everything suggests that Evgeny Kurakin is completely innocent of the crime with which he is charged. The fact that the court decided to send the case file back to the prosecutors after an unprecedentedly long consideration of the case can be practically seen as an acquittal of Kurakin. In effect, the court admitted that Kurakin was held in a pre-trial detention centre for 18 months, and that for 3½ years he was under investigation, even though the investigators were not able to define specifically which of his actions were fraudulent.

As for Natalia Lutovinova, the pre-trial detention imposed on her on 1 March 2017 was disproportionate to the danger to society represented by the crime of which she was accused. According to her defence lawyer, Lutovinova was remanded in custody for a short period for the sole purpose of obtaining evidence against Evgeny Kurakin, whose case had earlier been returned to the prosecutors. The fact that Lutovinova was remanded in custody for a minor offence, for which the punishment would not be incarceration, is outrageous. We note that Lutovinova did not attempt to hide from the court: she had answered telephone calls and provided medical certificates on occasions when she was unable to attend court sessions, which makes her detention absolutely unjustified. In our view, disputes over issues such as the procedure for payment of housing services, a housing co-operative's legal competence or the status of those persons who head the organization, should be decided without involving law enforcement agencies and the criminal law.

*Recognising a person as a political prisoner, or as someone prosecuted for political motives, does not signify that Memorial Human Rights Centre agrees with their views or statements, nor that it approves of their statements or actions.*

The Yandex-Wallet of the Fund to Assist All Political Prisoners of the Union of Solidarity with Political Prisoners is [410011205892134](https://yandex.ru/wallet/410011205892134/).

For more information about this case, see [here](#).