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Ukrainian nationalist leader Yuri Syrotiuk to remain free, though under partial house arrest

Kyiv Court of Appeal upheld a decision made by Pechersk Court of Appeal earlier last week. Syrotiuk was arrested in September for alleged "use of violence" while at a mass protest in Kiev.



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Yuri Syrotyuk did in fact take part in a protest on August 31, organized chiefly by nationalist movement Svoboda (*Liberty*). Ukrainian nationalists protested against decentralization amendments to the country's constitution, which in their mind would lead to officially recognizing the occupation of parts of Eastern Ukraine. During the protest, one Svoboda activist allegedly threw a grenade in the crowd, which killed four National Guard soldiers.

In the aftermath of these events, Ukraine's security forces arrested several dozen protesters, mainly members of Svoboda. Among them was Yuri Syrotyuk, vice-president of the nationalist political party. He was accused of hitting a police shield with a stick and hurting a policeman's hand in the process. His party colleagues believed these decisions to be politically motivated.

Nevertheless, Kyiv's District Pechersk Court refused to prolong his arrest for another two months. The court motivated this decision by what it considered a "lack of convincing proof" of Syrotyuk's fault from Ukraine's Prosecutor's Office.

Ukraine's Prosecutor General Office decided to appeal from this decision. This was justified by mistakes in Syrotyuk's indictment, which the Prosecutor's Office noticed and wished to fix. Both attorneys and judges were nevertheless unconvinced by this argument:

"What do you mean you forgot to add something to your indictment? You cannot just add new materials to the case between the first instance and the appeal. I cannot in any case accept your request", declared Justice Romaniuk.

Syrotyuk's attorneys reacted with even more emotion:

"What are we even discussing? The Prosecutor's Office is asking the Court for five to thirteen years of imprisonment for hitting a police shield with a stick? These accusations aren't nearly serious enough to justify such a punishment!", declared an outraged Oleksandr Svyridovski.

Syrotyuk also defended his name himself, using the occasion to accuse Ukraine's political system of fabricating his case:

"I don't even know what to expect from the Prosecutor's Office, from this corrupt organization which simply implements the government's will and takes orders from it. What we need is a truly European justice system, not the Soviet one we still have in Ukraine," he declared in court.

After the Court of Appeal decided not to change the trial judge's verdict, members of Svoboda present in the courtroom rose to applaud their friend.

Oleksandr Svyridovsky commented this decision in an exclusive commentary to Hromadske Radio:

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“They decided to free him, yes. And this was a political decision, yes. Many Svoboda members remain under arrest and I it is probably not a coincidence that the highest ranking member of Svoboda was the only one to be freed,” he declared. He added that this might be linked to Syrotiuk’s recent election to Kyiv’s City Council.

“I’m happy to have been freed, but I don’t want Ukraine to forget the dozens of other political prisoners we have today in Ukraine who cannot expect a fair trial,” declared Syrotiuk after the verdict was announced.



Several dozens of protesters remain under arrest for different violent acts they allegedly committed last August. Yuri Syrotiuk was the only one to have been freed from custody. Under the terms of the Pechersk Court’s decision, he must remain home from 8 p.m. to 7 p.m. and remain on the territory of Ukraine, which should nevertheless not impede him from remaining active on Ukraine’s political scene.



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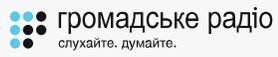
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