

Moscow Accuses U.S. of Kidnapping Pilot

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The  **Moscow Times**

The Foreign Ministry has accused the United States of "kidnapping" a Russian pilot suspected of drug smuggling in the West African country of Liberia several weeks ago.

Konstantin Yaroshenko, 41, was arrested in Monrovia, Liberia's capital, in late May — by U.S. agents, Russian officials said — and then extradited to New York.

He was charged with smuggling "thousand-kilogram quantities of cocaine" throughout South America, Africa and Europe, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration said in a statement Wednesday.

DEA spokeswoman Dawn Dearden said Yaroshenko was apprehended May 28 by Liberian authorities, who turned him over to the DEA two days later under an arrest warrant issued by the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York.

"While he was in DEA custody, the DEA followed the rules of law and the Geneva Convention regulations regarding treatment of a defendant," the DEA's statement said.

The Foreign Ministry sharply condemned Yaroshenko's arrest and extradition.

"We're talking about a kidnapping of a Russian national from a third country," the ministry said in a statement on its web site. "The actions of U.S. special services in the forcible and secret relocation of our national from Monrovia to New York could only be seen as open lawlessness."

Asked about the case at a news briefing, U.S. State Department spokesman P.J. Crowley said that, with regard to specifics, he would defer to the Justice Department or the DEA.

Crowley said that, upon his arrival in New York, Yaroshenko was given access to a Russian consulate official.

Yaroshenko's lawyer, Alexander Bozhenko, said the way Yaroshenko was arrested violated the law, and that Yaroshenko was kept tied up in a hotel room, naked and without water, for two days before his extradition, RIA-Novosti reported.

Yaroshenko's U.S. lawyer, Sam Schmidt, said his "understanding was he was not treated well" in Liberia after his arrest. His client is "doing OK" physically now that he is in the U.S. prison system, he added.

He said Yaroshenko was not extradited but instead was expelled by the Liberian government just before he was taken into custody by Liberian authorities and the DEA and brought to New York.

"Somehow from this existing expulsion order, the DEA took custody of him without notifying the Russian Embassy or consulate or anyone else," Schmidt said.

Charges filed by the U.S. Attorney's office in Manhattan say Yaroshenko was "an aircraft pilot and aviation transport expert" who transported thousands of kilograms of cocaine throughout South America, Africa and Europe. Prosecutors declined comment Wednesday.

Schmidt said, "Obviously, nothing was actually done by my client."

Yaroshenko's wife, Viktoria, told RIA-Novosti that her husband had been working as a pilot in various African countries for 10 years. She said he visited Liberia in May for talks with potential employers.

A Russian diplomat accused U.S. agents of "framing" Yaroshenko.

"They needed any pilot, any airline to frame," Russia's general consul in New York, Andrei Yushmanov, said in televised remarks.

NTV television played a telephone interview with a man who identified himself as Yaroshenko and claimed that he had been arrested illegally and tortured.

In recent years, drug cartels have used West Africa as a major transit point for shipment of vast quantities of cocaine to Europe and the United States.

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