

Putin rival held in psychiatric ward 'to prevent him protesting against government'

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Artem Basyrov's detention is the latest incident suggesting a punitive Soviet-era practice is being revived under Putin (Pictured)



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A Russian opposition activist has been sent to a psychiatric hospital by authorities a day before a planned demonstration.

Artem Basyrov's detention is the latest in a series of incidents suggesting a punitive Soviet-era practice is being revived under president Vladimir Putin.

Mr Basyrov, 20, was ordered to be held at a hospital in the central region of Mari El on November 23, a day before planned demonstrations, said Alexander Averin of the opposition National Bolshevik Party.

The party is part of the Other Russia coalition which organised the so-called Dissenters' Marches across the country this year.

Mr Basyrov ran for the local legislature as an Other Russia candidate.

Police who originally detained him claimed he had assaulted a girl.

A local psychiatric board agreed, deciding the activist suffered from a mental illness and he was committed to the psychiatric hospital three weeks ago.

He was only transferred from an isolation ward and allowed to have visitors on

Thursday, said Mikhail Klyuzhev, a National Bolshevik member from the city of Yoshkar-Ola.

The allegations against Mr Basyrov were "idiocy" and were "part of the hysteria" before Russia's parliamentary elections which were held on December 2, Mr Klyuzhev added.

Supporters said Mr Basyrov did not appear to have been mistreated. A psychiatric board is due to review his case at the end of the month.

His case is the latest example of journalists or opposition activists being involuntarily committed to psychiatric hospitals in Russia. During the Soviet era, dissidents were frequently committed for protesting against Soviet policies.

Last week, Reporters Without Borders said Andrei Novikov, a reporter for a news service connected with Chechen separatist government, was released after nine months in a psychiatric hospital.

Earlier this year Larisa Arap, an Other Russia activist and journalist, spent six weeks in a psychiatric clinic.

Supporters said this was punishment for her critical reporting.

The Global Initiative on Psychiatry, a Dutch watchdog, says psychiatry continues to be used for punitive, political purposes in Russia.

Prosecutors in Mari El were not available for comment last night.

And now that punitive practice is being used in New Hampshire where it is strictly against the law.