

Strasbourg Court Fines Russia for Tajik Extradition

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DUSHANBE, Tajikistan — The European Court of Human Rights has fined Russia 33,000 euros (\$44,400) for sending a Tajik opposition activist home where he was jailed and beaten, the court said in a statement on its web site.

Mukhamadruzi Iskandarov, a rebel leader in a 1990s civil war who also ran the state gas firm, has been serving a 23-year prison sentence in Tajikistan since 2005.

Iskandarov criticized Tajik President Emomali Rakhmon before moving to Russia in December 2004. Tajik authorities sought his extradition on terrorism and embezzlement charges.

The Russian Prosecutor General's Office rejected the extradition request in April 2005. But shortly afterward, Iskandarov was beaten, blindfolded and flown to the Tajik capital, Dushanbe, the court said.

"Mr. Iskandarov claimed that he was regularly beaten, kept in a tiny dirty cell, not allowed to

go for walks or to wash, and was hardly fed at all. He made a self-incriminating statement under threat of losing his life," the Strasbourg court said in its ruling Thursday.

The European court ruled that Iskandarov "had been unlawfully removed in order to circumvent the Russian Prosecutor General's Office dismissal of the extradition request."

Neither Russia's Foreign Ministry nor Tajik officials have commented on the ruling.

Activists say this was not the first time Russia deported people wanted in Central Asia and the Caucasus in secret.

Svetlana Gannushkina, chairwoman of the Moscow-based Citizens Aid Foundation, said rights groups know of about 10 cases of illegal deportation from Russia in recent years, and that there may have been others that have gone undocumented.

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