

Moldovan Journalist Jailed for Spying

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CHISINAU, Moldova — A Moldovan journalist has been sentenced to 15 years in prison in the separatist region of Transdnestr for spying, Moldovan authorities said Friday, despite international objections that the charges are unfounded.

Ernest Vardanean, 30, was arrested in April in the breakaway region and was charged with spying and high treason after television footage showed him saying he was forced to join Moldova's secret service in 2001, while he was studying in the capital, Chisinau.

Moldovan officials claim Vardanean, who worked for Novyi Region, a Russian news agency critical of Transdnestr authorities, had been coerced to make the statement.

Moldovan Deputy Prime Minister Viktor Osipov said his country called on the region to drop the "unfounded accusations" but Vardanean was sentenced Thursday.

Vardanean's lawyer Alexandru Postica said he would appeal the sentence but was not hopeful it would be overturned. He said a complaint about the case has been filed with the European Court for Human Rights.

Trans-Dniester news agency Lenta.pmr said Vardanean would be detained in prison under "a severe regime."

Political analyst Vlad Lupan said there were discrepancies in the TV recording, such as the sound and images being out of synch.

Vardanean was born in Armenia in 1980, and moved to Moldova with his family in 1988.

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