

'Terrorist' Senator Gets Life Sentence

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The Moscow City Court on Tuesday sentenced Igor Izmestyev, a former Bashkortostan representative in the Federation Council, to life in prison in the toughest sentence ever for a former senator.

The court convicted Izmestyev of terrorism and multiple murders, saying he was an organizer of the so-called Kingisepp gang, a criminal group formed in 1992.

Most of his 12 co-defendants, some of whom are already serving sentences for various crimes as part of the gang, were also handed prison terms Tuesday, Gazeta.ru reported.

Izmestyev pleaded not guilty. His lawyer, Sergei Antonov, promised to appeal in the Supreme Court and linked the verdict to the recent dismissal of longtime Bashkortostan President Murtaza Rakhimov, who he said was also involved in the cases Izmestyev was jailed for.

"I have an impression that when Rakhimov honorably resigned, part of his deal with the Kremlin was that Rakhimov is completely cleared of [any connection] to the crimes that

Izmestyev was convicted of," Antonov told The Moscow Times by telephone Tuesday.

Rakhimov, 76, resigned under Kremlin pressure in July after 17 years in office. Shortly after, NTV television, controlled by Gazprom, accused him of criminal activity, though no probe followed.

"Behind the crimes that Izmestyev was convicted for, the ears of Rakhimov and his son Ural are clearly visible," Antonov said.

The Rakhimovs could not be immediately reached for comment.

Several human rights activists spoke about multiple legal [violations](#) during Izmestyev's trial, including ignoring evidence and pressuring witnesses, at a news conference in Moscow in November. Bashkortostan activist Ildar Isangulov said at the time that the Rakhimovs were the main beneficiaries of the crimes Izmestyev was charged for.

Criminal charges are widely believed to be used in Russia to bring down political opponents, but regional analysts said that while Izmestyev's case appeared somewhat politicized, he could still be guilty of the crimes he was convicted of committing.

Nikolai Petrov, an analyst with the Carnegie Moscow Center, said there could have been "politicized moments" in Izmestyev's trial "given that his business was connected to Rakhimovs."

The decision in May not to have a jury trial for Izmestyev also fed "doubt about the strength of the evidence" in the case, Petrov told The Moscow Times by telephone.

"But even if Izmestyev fell victim to political games, it is hard to judge whether he is guilty or not," Petrov said.

Alexei Titkov, an associate professor of public policy at the Higher School of Economics, said Izmestyev's case "could have been politicized at first, but then authorities worked on the principle that the case had to be followed through."

"There was no political use for such a ruling for the federal authorities or for the Bashkortostan authorities because to remove Izmestyev from business, it was enough to give him a prison term of several years," Titkov said.

"It was purely a legal ruling," he said of Izmestyev's sentencing.

In a 2007 interview with Kommersant, Izmestyev said his legal travails stemmed from his refusal to sell "for peanuts" a \$40 million mansion near Putin's Novo-Ogaryovo residence to unidentified people close to the Federal Guard Service. But his lawyer said Tuesday that the conflict was only a pretext for prosecution, not the cause.

Izmestyev, who served as a senator from 2001 to 2006, was arrested in January 2007 in Kyrgyzstan as he stepped off a private jet from Geneva. He has accused Russian security services of kidnapping him and forcing him to return to Russia.

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