

4 Jailed for Governor's Murder, But Masterminds Remain Free

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Four people convicted of killing Magadan Governor Valentin Tsvetkov in 2002 were handed lengthy prison terms on Monday — though masterminds of the contract hit remain unidentified.

Tsvetkov was gunned down in broad daylight as he stepped out of his car on Moscow's downtown Novy Arbat to head into his government's office in the capital.

The jury in the trial, ongoing in the Moscow City Court since 2009, convicted four people for Tsvetkov's murder last week.

Two suspects, Martin Babakehyan and Artur Anisimov, both Armenian natives, were each sentenced to 19 years in a maximum-security prison, while Russian citizen Alexander Zakharov got 17 years and Azeri native Masis Ahunts 13 1/2 years, Interfax reported.

Babakehyan, Anisimov and Zakharov were also convicted on two cases of fraud worth a combined 30 million rubles (\$1 million).

Babakehyan will appeal the sentence, his lawyer Murad Musayev told Interfax. It was not immediately clear whether the other convicts would appeal.

Investigators have failed to identify the masterminds of the attack, establishing only that they have allegedly paid \$100,000 for Tsvetkov's murder. An investigation is ongoing, an Investigative Committee spokeswoman said Monday.

In 2003, then-Interior Minister Boris Gryzlov said the killing may be linked to Tsvetkov's operation in the lucrative but criminalized Pacific fishing industry. The governor owned a Magadan company that was alleged to have a monopoly on fishing quotas.

Tsvetkov had declared a crackdown on rampant crime in gold and fishing industries in his region.

Three suspects in the case, earlier identified as Sergei Filipenko, Yury Rashkin and Konstantin Korshunov, remain on a wanted list.

Anisimov and Ahunts were arrested in Russia in 2003 and 2004, respectively, but Babakehyan and Zakharov were only found in 2006 in Spain, where they lived under fake passports.

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