

# Russian Naval 'Spy' Released by Ukraine

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A ship near the port in Sevastopol, Ukraine. **Andrei Makhonin**

A court in Sevastopol, Ukraine has acquitted a Russian defense contractor on espionage charges after he spent two-and-a-half years in prison for buying a piece of outdated Soviet equipment from Ukrainian partners.

The court ruling was announced late Thursday, according to the defense team.

Artur Stepanyants, 53, whose saga was [reported](#) in The Moscow Times in March of last year, was arrested by Ukrainian law enforcement officers in 2010 while purchasing Soviet-made naval equipment he had been planning to use for spare parts for the ships of the Russian naval fleet in Sevastopol.

According to documents released during the trial, the seller of the equipment was an informant for the local security services.

Stepanyants — who was arrested during the tenure of Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko, who had a strained relationship with Russia — was accused of spying against Ukraine on the grounds that the equipment he bought contained secret components.

His defense team and independent experts said the equipment was produced during the Soviet period and was of no interest to Russia.

Stepanyants told The Moscow Times by phone from his home in St. Petersburg that Ukrainian prosecutors have 15 days to appeal the verdict. The Sevastopol prosecutor's office told the Unian Ukraina news agency that it would appeal the verdict.

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