

2nd Spy Trial Starts for Defense Worker

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A Russian defense company employee accused of espionage went on trial for a second time Wednesday in Sevastopol in a contentious case that could affect Russia's military presence in the Black Sea port.

Artur Stepanyants was arrested in a sting operation in 2010 as he and a Ukrainian associate tried to buy outdated Soviet-era military parts in Sevastopol.

Stepanyants said during his first trial that he intended to use the parts to repair similar equipment in Russia's Black Sea Fleet, which is stationed in Sevastopol.

The court sided with his lawyers arguments that the parts on their own could not be classified as secret and freed him in May. Defense experts have noted that one of the parts was manufactured in Rostov-on-Don and called the case absurd.

Prosecutors appealed the acquittal to a higher court, which started hearing the case Wednesday.

"The prosecutors are seeking revenge because they think I will sue them" for false arrest, Stepanyants said by telephone Tuesday as he prepared to leave Moscow for Sevastopol.

Stepanyants said he wanted to travel to Ukraine to learn more about the charges.

He earlier promised to take his case to the human rights court in Strasbourg if necessary.

Sevastopol prosecutors were not available for comment Wednesday. They earlier complained in a statement that the lower court's decision to dismiss the case was "one sided."

If convicted, Stepanyants faces up to 15 years in prison.

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