

Environmental Activist Seeks Asylum in Europe Amid Criminal Charges

By [The Moscow Times](#)

December 20, 2012

The  **Moscow Times**

A well-known environmental activist from the Krasnodar region, Suren Gazaryan, told Human Rights Watch that he has fled Russia and is seeking asylum in Europe, a statement on the organization's [website](#) said Friday.

Gazaryan spoke with a Human Rights Watch representative over the phone on Dec. 19 and said he had fled to avoid criminal charges against him.

He said he no longer has any faith in Russian courts after being convicted in what he says was an unfair trial in June.

Gazaryan is currently on a federal wanted listed for allegedly threatening murder.

Krasnodar police opened a criminal case against him over an incident that occurred on Aug. 2 at a Black Sea resort in Gelendzhik that many believe belongs to President Vladimir Putin,

RIA–Novosti reported.

Gazaryan says the charges stem from a minor conflict he was involved in with one of the resort's security guards. He maintains that he and other activists were walking along a public road near the resort when he was grabbed by a security guard.

An altercation ensued, but ultimately Gazaryan says he simply walked away. In November, however, he was summoned to a police station in Gelendzhik and informed of criminal charges against him.

The charges are punishable by up to two years in prison or up to 240 hours of compulsory labor.

In the June trial, Gazaryan and another activist received three years' probation for damaging private property in the Krasnodar region. Activists believe the property belongs to Krasnodar region Governor Alexander Tkachyov, an allegation denied by the regional administration.

Gazaryan has been highly critical of authorities in Sochi and made several accusations of corruption by state officials. He holds a degree in biology and belongs to the Russian Geographic Society.

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