

Witness in Trial Against Former Makhachkala Mayor Alleges Torture

By [Matthew Bodner](#)

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The key witness in the trial against former Makhachkala mayor Said Amirov says he was coerced in to giving false testimony by the Federal Security Service, one of Amirov's defense lawyers told Ekho Moskvu.

Statements made by the witness, Magomed Abdulgalimov, in which he claims to have been subjected to electroshock torture by FSB officers were provided to Amirov's former defense attorney, Vladimir Postanyuk said.

"These documents can change the entire course of the Amirov case," he said.

This is the latest twist in a case that many observers have said was politically motivated and hints at the Kremlin seeking tighter control over Dagestan. Many have said that the downfall of Amirov, once considered the most powerful man in all of the North Caucasus, could trigger instability in the region.

Amirov and his cousin, the former deputy head of Kaspiysk, Yusup Dzhaparov, were both charged with illegal arms trafficking and planning to commit an act of terrorism in October 2013.

The two were arrested in September 2013, after allegedly planning a spectacular assassination plot in which they sought to shoot down an aircraft transporting political rival Sagid Murtazeliyev, a Dagestani People's Assembly Deputy, using an illegally obtained Strela-2M surface-to-air missile.

Abdulgalimov, a former aide to the prosecutor general of Khasavyurt, told investigators that he had acquired the launcher using his own funds in March 2012, and then later stored it in a cache in the Karabudakhkentsky region.

This was the second time that criminal charges were filed against Amirov. In June 2013, he was indicted for allegedly organizing the 2011 assassination of Makhachkala chief investigator Arsen Gadzhibekov.

Investigators said that the evidence for this case was discovered while investigating Gadzhibekov's death.

Amirov has denied all charges and said he has never had any contact with Abdulgamilov. Dzhaparov admitted to knowing Abdulgamilov through work, but said that they had since fallen out of touch.

Amirov was elected four consecutive times as the mayor of Makhachkala, Dagestan's capital. During this time, he is said to have survived more than 15 assassination attempts, one of which left him paralyzed from the waist down.

Contact the author at m.bodner@imedia.ru

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