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Europe/Ex-USSR - Russia

Guilty verdict

Justice still awaits in Politkovskaya murder

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Reporters Without Borders takes note of the sentences that a Moscow court passed yesterday on five men for their roles in leading investigative journalist **Anna Politkovskaya's** October 2006 murder. The five were convicted on 22 May (see below).

Hitman Rustam Makhmudov and his uncle, uncle, Lom-Ali Gaitukayev, who helped arrange the murder, were given life sentences. Sergei Khadzhikurbanov and Makhmudov's brothers, Dzhabrail and Ibragim, were sentenced to 20, 14 and 12 years in prison respectively as accomplices. Retired police officer Dmitry Pavlyuchenkov [received an 11-year sentence](#) in a separate trial in December 2012.

"These sentences represent a long-awaited first step on the road to justice for a murder that had big implications for all the Russian media," said Johann Bihl, the head of the Reporters Without Borders Eastern Europe and Central Asia desk.

"The judicial system should nonetheless ask itself why it took eight years. What's more, those who ordered this murder are still at large. Justice has not yet been done. The investigation must press on with all the required determination."

22.05.2014 - Five convicted of Politkovskaya murder but instigators still free

A Moscow court has finally found [five men guilty](#) of planning and executing Russian investigative journalist **Anna Politkovskaya's** October 2006 murder but the instigators are still at large.

The five men that a jury convicted on 20 May are three Chechen brothers – Rustam, Ibragim and Dzhabrail Makhmudov – their uncle, Lom-Ali Gaitukayev (an alleged member of the criminal underworld), and a former interior ministry employee, Sergei Khadzhikurbanov.

The court did not identify either a motive or a mastermind, and the Investigative Committee (the Russian federal investigating authority) said it is continuing its investigation into the murder.

A sentencing hearing for the five newly convicted men began yesterday, but was [adjourned](#) until 27 May.

A reporter for the independent newspaper *Novaya Gazeta*, Politkovskaya was gunned down in the stairwell of her Moscow apartment building on 7 October 2006. She was famous for her hard-hitting coverage of the Caucasus and her criticism of the Kremlin, and her murder has become a symbol of the threats to freedom of information in Russia and impunity for crimes of violence against journalists.

"We are relieved to learn of this guilty verdict but it represents just a very small stage in the process of solving of Anna Politkovskaya's murder," said Reporters Without Borders research director Lucie Morillon.

"All of the defendants in this trial were convicted but not all of those involved in this crime have so far been tried. Eight years after Politkovskaya's murder, it is essential that the Investigative Committee should continue its investigation in an independent manner so that the instigators can be brought to justice."

The jury convicted Gaitukayev and Khadzhikurbanov of planning the murder, Rustam Makhmudov of personally carrying it out, and his two brothers of being accomplices. The

Investigating Committee said all five could receive life sentences. The prosecutor [urged](#) the jury to show no clemency.

During the trial, the prosecutor [disputed](#) defence claims that three inconclusive DNA tests proved that Rustam Makhmudov was not the hitman, arguing that the traces of DNA found on the murder weapon were just insufficient to convict him without other supporting evidence.

The prosecutor also argued that the constant phone calls between the five defendants that ended after the murder could not be explained by the family ties between four of the five.

After the verdict, the Politkovskaya family [voiced their disappointment](#) that the instigators had not been among those on trial, and that little progress had been made in shedding light on the murder. Her children said they would seek [5 million rubles](#) (105,000 euros) in compensation.

Three of the five defendants – Ibragim and Dzhabrail Makhmudov and Khadzhiburbanov – were previously acquitted but the supreme court ordered a retrial, which it then interrupted, ordering further investigation.

As a result of the reopening of the investigation, a retired police lieutenant-colonel, Dmitry Pavlyuchenkov, [was sentenced](#) in December 2012 to 11 years in prison and 3 million rubles (74,500 euros) in compensation for arranging for Politkovskaya to be followed and for providing the hitman with the murder weapon.

He was tried separately under a May 2012 agreement between him and the prosecutor's office.

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(Photo : Natalia Kolesnikova / AFP)
