

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/russia-five-convicted-of-politkovskaya-22-05-2014,46333.html>

Europe/Ex-USSR - Russia

Guilty verdict

Five convicted of Politkovskaya murder but instigators still free

22 May 2014

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 Khadzhikurbanov – 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.

Russia is ranked 148th out of 180 countries in the [2014 Reporters Without Borders press freedom index](#).

(Photo : Natalia Kolesnikova / AFP)
