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Europe/Ex-USSR - Russia

Justice sabotaged

Truth still elusive as another Politkovskaya trial ends

14 December 2012

Paris, 1 p.m.: A Moscow court today sentenced retired Moscow police officer Dmitry Pavlyuchenkov to 11 years in prison for his role in *Novaya Gazeta* reporter **Anna Politkovskaya**'s murder in 2006. The court also ordered him to pay the victim's family 3 million roubles (74,500 euros) in compensation.

"This rapid trial's disappointing outcome has failed to reveal the full truth," Reporters Without Borders secretary-general Christophe Deloire said. "Pavlyuchenkov manipulated the trial or the judicial system let it be manipulated. A guilty person has been punished but the verdict does not reflect the real role that this former police officer played in Politkovskaya's murder."

"Key questions remain unanswered, including the mastermind's identity, which Pavlyuchenkov had promised to reveal, and the part played by his former Moscow police colleagues, especially in the elaborate tailing of Politkovskaya before her murder. We hope the appeal hearings will be conducted in a more satisfactory manner, or else the judicial system will give the clear impression of covering up those responsible."

Paris, 10 a.m.: After just two days of hearings, judges are due to issue a verdict today in the trial of retired Moscow police lieutenant colonel Dmitry Pavlyuchenkov, one of the leading suspects in *Novaya Gazeta* reporter **Anna Politkovskaya**'s 2006 murder. Because Pavlyuchenkov cooperated with the prosecutors, the trial has been conducted in a very unusual manner – no witnesses have testified, no evidence has been examined and journalists have been barred from most of the hearings.

"We are outraged by way this trial is being held," Reporters Without Borders said. "Six years have passed since Anna Politkovskaya's murder but it continues to have a major impact on freedom of information in Russia. Pavlyuchenkov's arrest was seen as a major advance in the investigation but hopes have been dashed by this guilty-plea deal and the decision to stick to it at all cost. The sudden trial with no witnesses and with the press mostly excluded casts doubt on the existence of any desire to establish the truth and identify all of the perpetrators and instigators."

Charged under criminal code articles [105](#) (murder) and [222](#) (illegal carriage of a firearm), Pavlyuchenkov has admitted to arranging for Politkovskaya to be followed and providing the hitman with the murder weapon. The prosecutor has requested a sentence of 12 years in a prison camp, while the defence has requested a suspended sentence. Anna Stavitskaya, who represents the Politkovskaya family, has said she will appeal against the verdict if Pavlyuchenkov is not given the maximum sentence.

[Pavlyuchenkov was arrested on 23 August 2011 on suspicion of having organized the murder.](#) Under a deal reached in May between Pavlyuchenkov and deputy prosecutor-general Viktor Grin, his case was isolated from the rest of the investigation and given special treatment, including an understanding that he would get no more than two-thirds of the maximum sentence. In return, Pavlyuchenkov agreed to plead guilty, testify against the other defendants and, above all, name the person who masterminded the murder.

But, as the victim's children, Vera Politkovskaya and Ilya Politkovsky, insist, Pavlyuchenkov "has not kept his side of the bargain." [On 8 October, they petitioned the Federal Committee of](#)

[Investigation and the prosecutor-general's office](#) calling for the deal with Pavlyuchenkov to be rescinded. They said they have testimony proving that he has been minimizing his role in the murder and that in fact he played a key role. His various reported claims that the London-based oligarch Boris Berezovsky or the Chechen separatist leader Ahmed Zakayev were the mastermind were "politically motivated," they said.

The deal has also been challenged by the lawyer who represents one of the other suspects, former interior ministry official Sergey Khadzhikurbanov. He said "Pavlyuchenkov's testimony constitutes the basis of the charges against the other defendants." The presiding judge has rejected these petitions.

[In a Moscow news conference on the eve of the trial](#), *Novaya Gazeta* editor **Dmitry Muratov** said there was still a "political taboo" about the real mastermind's identity. "Six years have gone by – it is time to ask difficult questions," he said.

Aside from Pavlyuchenkov and Khadzhikurbanov, four other people are accused in connection with the murder: Lom-Ali Gaitukayev, a Chechen organized crime leader who allegedly recruited Pavlyuchenkov, Rustam Makhmudov, the alleged hitman, and Makhmudov's two brothers. According to the investigation, Gaitukayev received orders to murder Politkovskaya from an unknown mastermind and passed the job on to Khadzhikurbanov after being arrested in connection with another case.

Politkovskaya, who was well known in both Russia and abroad for her outspoken coverage of the Caucasus and her criticism of the Kremlin, was gunned down in her Lesnaya Street apartment building in Moscow on 7 October 2006.

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