

Trial Over for 'Patriotic Bonnie and Clyde'

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A young mourner laying flowers at a memorial for rights lawyer Stanislav Markelov and Novaya Gazeta freelance reporter Anastasia Baburova after they were murdered in 2009. **Igor Tabakov**

An ultranationalist couple was convicted Thursday of gunning down a rights lawyer and a journalist, the verdict ending a court process fraught with accusations of publicity manipulations.

Nationalist sympathizers presented the couple as a patriotic version of Bonnie and Clyde, but the two pleaded not guilty of gunning down rights lawyer Stanislav Markelov and Novaya Gazeta freelance reporter Anastasia Baburova in downtown Moscow in January 2009.

The prosecution said the murders were carried out by Nikita Tikhonov, 30 — Markelov was killed for representing victims of nationalists, while Baburova was shot dead when she tried to stop the killer.

Tikhonov's girlfriend Yevgenia Khasis, 25, was accused of aiding Markelov's murder. The couple, which had been on the run until their arrest in November 2009, was also charged with

illegal firearms possession and document forgery.

The first version of the verdict was rejected by the judge as “unclear,” with the jury ordered late Thursday to rewrite it, Interfax reported. The second version, announced later Thursday, convicted Tikhonov of both murders and Khasis of aiding the killing, and added, without elaborating, that they could have had “unidentified accomplices.”

Tikhonov and Khasis have repeatedly pleaded not guilty to murder — and have even attempted suicide to prove their integrity, slashing their veins before the Wednesday hearing.

Doctors found their injuries not life-threatening, and the two were brought to deliver their last statement before the Moscow City Court sporting bandages on their forearms and, in Tikhonov's case, neck. A lawyer for the victims' families, Vladimir Zherebenkov, told RPSI that the suspects only intended to impress the jury, not to take their lives.

This is not the first time they are accused of publicity stunts. The couple requested a license to marry in prison ahead of the trial's start last year, but were refused, with media saying the investigator saw it as an attempt to get on the jury's soft side.

"I'm no innocent sheep," Tikhonov said Wednesday, Interfax reported. "I was selling weapons and used forged documents, but I didn't kill Markelov and Baburova."

Khasis also said in her final statement that she and Tikhonov were innocent and called the case against them fabrication by law enforcement agencies who went looking for scapegoats after failing to find the real murderers in a high-profile case.

At the same time she implicated security services in Markelov's murder, saying he often confronted law enforcement officers in the North Caucasus, defending victims of their abuse.

The couple never denied nationalist views, with Khasis maintaining in her brief autobiography that she was an ethnic Russian despite her unusual-sounding name. But both said they did not support patriotic violence.

In her [biography](#), written in detention and released online, Khasis said she never managed to get into college because she had to cater to her gravely ill mother since the age of 14. She was a sales manager at the time of arrest.

Tikhonov, son of a former intelligence officer, is a graduate of the prestigious Moscow State University. He has worked as a journalist and political speechwriter, but was unemployed at the time of arrest, which he claimed was the sole reason he dabbled in illegal weapons trading.

The charges against the two were based on testimonies from their friends from nationalist groups, including Blood and Honor and Russky Obraz. The head of Russky Obraz, Ilya Goryachev, a key witness for the prosecution, fled to Germany during the trial and attempted to retract his testimony, saying he was pressured into it, but his claims were dismissed by the judge on the grounds that he was not present in the courtroom to voice his stance.

Khasis was not the only one to speak of meddling with the trial. A former juror in the process [told](#) Moskovsky Komsomolets earlier this month that the jury faced pressure to convict

Tikhonov and Khasis.

At least two jurors have been constantly smearing the suspects and insisting that they are guilty, and attempted to impose this stance on the rest of the jury, Anna Dobrachyova, who voluntarily resigned from the case, told the daily.

She did not identify them by full names, but said one of the two, a professional psychologist, has been "deliberately brainwashing" the jurors.

The other juror regularly read out to them media reports on the trial, which was a direct violation of trial procedures, but went ignored by the judge.

Court officials have not commented on the accusations.

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