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Prison Blogger Wins Appeal in Top Court

By Alexandra Odynova

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A businessman who blogs about his prison experiences from behind bars may walk free after the Supreme Court unexpectedly backed his appeal.

This week's ruling marks the first major legal victory for Alexei Kozlov, who is serving a seven-year sentence for fraud and embezzlement charges that he insists were fabricated by his former business partner, former Federation Council Senator Vladimir Slutsker. Just last year, the Supreme Court rejected another appeal by Kozlov.

But on Wednesday, the court decided that "there's every reason to cancel the verdict," according to a copy of the 15-page ruling by Judge Anatoly Petrochenkov, available on Pravo.ru. The document cites as proof numerous legal violations during Kozlov's trial in 2008.

The Moscow City Court will consider the Supreme Court's ruling on July 22.

"I understand that now it's up to [Moscow City Court chairwoman Olga] Yegorova to decide,"

Kozlov's wife, prominent journalist Olga Romanova, wrote on her Facebook page Thursday.

Yegorova did not comment on the case, and Romanova could not be reached by telephone Thursday.

Kozlov was convicted of machinations with shares of a company he controlled together with Slutsker, but he says the then-senator fabricated the case as revenge for his plans to leave the company. Slutsker, who was removed from his post last year, has denied wrongdoing.

Kozlov, 37, who is serving his prison sentence in the Tambov region, has become one of the country's most well-known prisoners thanks to a blog on Slon.ru where he details his life in prison.

The publication, called Butyrka Blog after the notorious Moscow pretrial detention center, won an award at the international Best of the Blogs competition held by German broadcaster Deutsche Welle last year.

Romanova, formerly an anchorwoman at opposition-minded Ren-TV, has also campaigned for her husband's release, publishing a number of articles in national media, including Gazeta.ru.

Curiously, the 2007 investigation into Kozlov's case was handled by Interior Ministry official Natalya Vinogradova, who was later involved in the inquiry into Hermitage Capital lawyer Sergei Magnitsky, who was detained on tax fraud charges in 2008 and died in pretrial detention a year later.

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