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Jury Rules Death That Started Race Riots Was Murder

By Alexey Eremenko

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The death of a football fan that triggered nationalist rioting in Moscow in December was murder, not involuntary manslaughter, a jury ruled Thursday, Interfax reported.

Kabardino-Balkaria native Aslan Cherkesov admitted during the trial to shooting dead Yegor Sviridov in a brawl in the city's north, but he claimed he was defending friends from drunken football fans and had no intent to kill.

The brawl had unexpectedly far-reaching consequences. After police released five Dagestani participants, keeping only Cherkesov in detention, football fans and nationalists — two widely overlapping communities — took to the streets, accusing investigators of covering up for North Caucasus natives.

Rioting took place on Manezh Square on Dec. 11, when 5,500 fans and nationalists clashed with riot police, chanting racist slogans. City police chief Vladimir Kolokoltsev had

to personally convince masked protesters to leave the square.

The five previously released Dagestani natives were detained after the rioting, though only one of the six suspects, Cherkesov, 27, was charged in connection with Sviridov's death. The others, aged 19 to 21, were accused of hooliganism and inflicting minor injuries.

The jury at the Moscow City Court chose to support the prosecutors' version of events on Thursday, ruling the Dagestanis guilty of the charges.

The judge has now to decide on the punishment. Cherkesov faces up to life in prison, the others up to five years in prison. The sentencing is expected within the next several days.

The ruling comes weeks before the Russian March, an annual nationalist rally held on Nov. 4. A defense lawyer in a similar case, where Caucasus natives stabbed to death football fan Yury Volkov in Moscow last year, told Izvestia on Monday that both cases are being fast-tracked to placate nationalists ahead of Nov. 4.

A separate trial into the Manezh Square rioting is ongoing in Moscow. Curiously, two of the six defendants are members of the unregistered Other Russia party, and a third belongs to the Strategy-31 movement. Both groups are known for their anti-Kremlin stance, but not nationalism.

Editor's note: Due to an editing error, an earlier version of this story identified Aslan Cherkesov as a native of Dagestan. He is actually a native of Kabardino-Balkaria.

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