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# Tambov Gang Boss Jailed for 15 Years

By Alexandra Odynova

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A Moscow court ruled Tuesday that notorious St. Petersburg gangster Vladimir Barsukov will spend the next 15 years behind bars.

Barsukov, who had already been sentenced to 14 years in prison on fraud and money laundering in 2009, was found guilty of extortion in a new case and sentenced to 11 years, Interfax reported. The combined sentences were recalculated to stretch over 15 years.

His accomplice in the case, Orenburg lawyer Dmitry Rafalovich, was sentenced to 10 years. The two men are also obliged to pay a fine of 1.9 million rubles ($64,300).

According to prosecutors, in 2005 and 2006 the two men extorted monthly payments from the owner of the Yelizarovsky shopping center in St. Petersburg. They threatened to take over the building and hinder his business in the city if he didn't pay, the Rapsi news agency reported.

For the trial, prosecutors from a St. Petersburg court were moved to the Moscow City Court

out of  fear for their safety.

Barsukov, who has maintained his innocence, is believed to have led the powerful Tambov crime group in St. Petersburg in the 1990s. He was arrested at his country home outside St. Petersburg in August 2007 in a sting operation involving dozens of OMON riot police officers brought in from Moscow.

A native of Tambov, Barsukov changed his last name from Kumarin several years ago. He is thought to have assembled the infamous Tambov gang along with natives from his hometown in the 1990s.

In the past, several publications have speculated that Barsukov might have had ties to President-elect Vladimir Putin in the 1990s, when Putin worked in the St. Petersburg city government.

The reports said Barsukov was a board member of a Russian subsidiary of the German firm SPAG, where Putin once worked as a consultant. Barsukov has repeatedly denied any links with Putin, and Putin's spokespeople have declined to comment about Putin's ties to SPAG.

Barsukov's defense lawyer pledged to appeal the verdict, Interfax reported.

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