

Russians Convicted as Mercenaries in Libya

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An oil refinery in Libya. A group of Russians, Ukrainians and Belorussians given 10-year prison sentences for serving as mercenaries for Moammar Gadhafi claimed they were in Libya to work in its oil industry as civilians.

A Libyan military court sentenced two Russians, 19 Ukrainians and three Belarussians to long prison terms Monday for serving as mercenaries for Moammar Gadhafi during the conflict that led to his overthrow last year, Interfax reported.

One Russian defendant was sentenced to life in prison for having been the group's organizer. The other 23 defendants each received 10-year sentences, the report [said](#).

Envoys from Ukraine and Belarus who attended the trial said Monday that they don't consider the judgment fair. No representative from Russia attended the hearing, the report said.

The 24 men were accused of having repaired surface-to-air missile batteries used to target NATO warplanes supporting the revolt against Gadhafi.

The whole group had pleaded not guilty, insisting they were in Libya to work in its oil industry as civilians.

The Foreign Ministry made no comment Monday on the Russians' stiff sentences. In March, Russia's Foreign Ministry ombudsman Konstantin Dolgov criticized the men's prolonged detention as illegal.

Gadhafi had held power for 42 years, before being overthrown by rebels and killed late last year.

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