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First of 'Bolotnaya 17' Protesters Jailed for 4 1/2 Years

By The Moscow Times

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Maxim Luzyanin standing trial at Moscow's Zamoskvoretsky District Court on Friday, when he was convicted of taking part in "mass disorder" and sentenced to 4 1/2 years in prison. **Yevgeny Feldman**

A Moscow court has convicted the first of 17 people detained during a May 6 protest against Vladimir Putin, sentencing the only member of the group to plead guilty to 4 1/2 years in jail.

The protesters have gained notoriety as the "Bolotnaya 17," after the square where they protested on the eve of Putin's inauguration, and have been held up by opposition leaders as a symbol of resistance to a Kremlin crackdown on dissent.

Fitness club manager Maxim Luzyanin was accused of taking part in "mass disorder" and of beating up police officers and trying to strangle one.

"I genuinely regret what I did, and if I had another chance I would not have done it," Luzyanin said from behind metal bars at the Zamoskvoretsky District Court on Friday.

Activists say the violence was exaggerated by the police and prosecution and fear Luzyanin's guilty plea could now be used as a precedent to prove there was mass disorder and make for heavier sentences for the rest of the accused.

"This is either a sign that they will give long sentences to those who will not agree to a deal with investigators, or a sign of the widespread Russian and worldwide practice when the first to confess and cooperate immediately gets a long sentence, to scare the rest to death," opposition leader Alexei Navalny told the OpenSpace.ru portal on Saturday.

Luzyanin's lawyer Sergei Shushpanov denied that the case could be used as a precedent. "We have no case law. When passing a sentence, a judge cannot cite any other verdict in any other case," he said Friday.

Navalny said in court Friday that the case against Luzyanin had been concocted. "Virtual charges and virtual complainants. It's absolute fiction," he said. "The police are pushed 10 times harder at any concert than at the May 6 demonstration."

The May 6 rally across the Moscow River from the Kremlin, where Putin was inaugurated the following day, cost 29 million rubles ($917,700), according to prosecutors. Most of that was damage to asphalt, which the demonstrators hacked from the ground to throw at police, they said.

(Reuters, MT)

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