

Bolotnaya Protester Ordered to Undergo Psychiatric Treatment

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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A Moscow court Tuesday ordered a man previously diagnosed with a mental illness to undergo mandatory psychiatric treatment for attacking policemen at an opposition rally last year.

The trial has been overshadowed by accusations that the case is politically motivated and by complaints about the allegedly brutal nature of Soviet-style punitive psychiatry.

Mikhail Kosenko, 38, was convicted of taking part in a "riot," referring to his participation in clashes with police on Bolotnaya Ploshchad in May 2012, and also of using dangerous force against a member of the authorities, Zamoskvoretsky District Court ruled.

The court did not set a time frame for Kosenko's treatment. The website Ovdinfo.org, which monitors alleged rights abuses by Russian law enforcement agencies, said the sentence amounted to de facto indefinite confinement to a mental hospital.

About 650 people were briefly detained and more than 25 later faced criminal charges over the clashes, all of them protesters accused of attacking riot police. The police say the violence was instigated by a group of leftist leaders, while organizers of the rally — the only one of a string of mass opposition protests in Moscow in the past two years to turn so violent — accuse the authorities of provoking the unrest by mishandling the crowd.

Kosenko's lawyer said after the verdict that he would appeal the sentence.

About 300 people gathered outside the courtroom for an unsanctioned protest Tuesday, at least eight of them eventually detained by police, according to Ovdinfo.org.

"The authorities are breaking the law and pretending to be men of law when facing resistance," Kosenko said last Wednesday in his final address, cited by the website Bolotnoedelo.info.

Kosenko also requested the court to consider him as sane, although he was formally diagnosed in 2003 with a mental illness, blamed on a trauma he sustained while serving in the army. Medics said he posed no threat to society and did not require hospitalization after that injury, but he was given a disability pension.

Kosenko's lawyer identified his client's official diagnosis as "sluggish schizophrenia," Radio Liberty's Russian service said last fall. The term, denoting a form of mild schizophrenia, is not recognized by the World Health Organization, but is used by the Russian medical community.

The term dates back to late Soviet times, when it was used in punitive psychiatry. Dissidents were often slapped with the diagnosis and sent to secure mental hospitals, where they would be drugged and abused.

Kosenko's 2003 diagnosis was revised by a new examination ordered by a court that argued for his placement in a mental hospital, Radio Liberty said.

His supporters challenged the new diagnosis and unsuccessfully requested another examination by the World Psychiatric Association. Opposition media said his treatment amounted to a return to Soviet-era punitive psychiatry.

Kosenko's trial saw more than one dramatic turn, including when a riot police officer who was allegedly attacked by him actually spoke up in his defense, despite being a prosecution witness.

"I am not Russian trash," policeman Alexander Kazmin told the courtroom in July after refusing to identify Kosenko as his attacker and saying he did not want to see the activist jailed.

Kazmin's statement prompted allegations by opposition activists that other police witnesses in the Bolotnaya case had been coerced into testifying.

Kosenko's request to attend the funeral of his mother, who died last month, was also refused during the trial.

Twelve more people are currently being tried in another trial in Moscow over the violence

at the Bolotnaya rally. One of them, prominent antifascist activist Alexei Gaskarov, appealed his pretrial detention in the European Court of Human Rights on Tuesday, his lawyer said.

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