

Supreme Court Finds Violations in Pussy Riot Prison Sentences

By [Vladimir Goryachev](#)

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Maria Alyokhina and Nadezhda Tolokonnikova at a hearing at the Moscow City Court in 2012. **M. Stulov / Vedomosti**

The Supreme Court has found violations in the sentence handed down to members of the feminist punk collective Pussy Riot and ordered a review of their case.

The evidence against group members Nadezhda Tolokonnikova and Maria Alyokhina presented during their trial does not support the charges brought against them, the Court said in an explanation for the ruling, Interfax reported.

In particular, the Court said the evidence did not prove that the punk rockers showed religious enmity or "had been driven by hatred against a social group" during their February 2012 anti-Putin performance at Moscow's Christ the Savior Cathedral, for which they were charged with hooliganism and inciting hatred.

The Supreme Court also said that Moscow's Khamovnichesky District Court, which made the ruling in the Pussy Riot case last year, had not considered the possibility of suspended sentences for the defendants, who have young children and were therefore eligible for their sentences to be commuted.

The mistakes made during the trial present grounds for either canceling or reviewing the original sentence, the Court said.

On Dec. 10 the Supreme Court took up the defendants' appeal and initiated a review procedure of the case against Tolokonnikova and Alyokhina. Their case will now be sent for a review in the Moscow City Court.

The two Pussy Riot members were sentenced to two years in prison for their anti-Putin performance and are due to be released in March 2014.

However, media reported earlier this week that the pair may be released as part of an amnesty in honor of the 20th anniversary of the Russian Constitution, which will take effect by the end of the year.

Alyokhina said she may refuse to take advantage of the amnesty, though, citing "many things still to do for her at the colony", Pyotr Verzilov, Tolokonnikova's husband, wrote on his Twitter account Thursday.

"Alyokhina is worried that because of the amnesty she will be released earlier and will not be able to finish the analysis of industrial relations at the camp," Verzilov wrote.

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