

Roizman Ally Given Suspended Sentence, Banned From Journalism

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A Yekaterinburg court on Thursday handed down a two year suspended sentence to independent journalist Aksana Panova, a close ally of the city's mayor, Yevgeny Roizman, after she was found guilty of extortion.

Panova, former editor-in-chief of Ura.ru news agency and a romantic interest of Roizman, will be kept on probation for three years and won't be allowed to work in media for two years. She was also fined 300,000 rubles (\$9,000).

Panova intends to appeal the sentence and denies all of the charges brought against her, believing them to have been fabricated by the Sverdlovsk region's governor, Yevgeny Kuivashev.

The sentencing got a mixed reaction from Roizman, who said that although he is glad Panova won't be sent to prison, he is disappointed that she can't carry on with her professional career

for two years, Interfax reported.

He said that the main purpose of charges was to "silence" Panova by removing her from her professional duties.

Panova, who was Roizman's campaign manager for September's mayoral election, had been charged on two counts of extortion and one of abusing her authority, allegedly securing 13 million rubles of Ura.ru's funds for her own use.

She was found guilty on Thursday of extorting 1 million rubles from the son of former official Konstantin Kremko by threatening to disseminate compromising information, Znak.com news portal reported.

The court reclassified the second extortion charge, before dropping it completely under the statute of limitations, and also scrubbed the abuse of authority charge.

Another charge against Panova, fraud, was withdrawn in December due to a lack of evidence.

Ekho Moskvyy host Yulia Latynina said on her radio program in September that Kuivashev had taken a romantic interest in Panova, but that she had rebuffed him. Panova, who also published stories critical of the region's government while at Ura, was subsequently put under intense pressure from investigators, the stress of which caused her to have a miscarriage, Latynina said.

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