

Moscow Court Releases Bolotnaya 'Traitor' on Parole

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Opposition activists Alexei Gaskarov and Ilya Guschin standing behind bars in a court room before hearings.

A Moscow court on Thursday released Russian opposition activist Konstantin Lebedev on parole before the end of his 2 1/2 year sentence.

The Lefortovo Court made the ruling after deciding that an appeal for parole by Lebedev's lawyers was legally grounded, judge Margarita Kotova said, Itar-Tass reported.

Lebedev, along with activists Sergei Udaltsov and Leonid Razvozzhayev of the Left Front political coalition, and Georgian politician Givi Targamadze, were charged in absentia for masterminding what the Kremlin says were "riots" on Moscow's Bolotnaya Ploshchad on May 6, 2012, the day before Vladimir Putin was sworn in his third term as Russian president.

Lebedev, who took a plea agreement with the prosecution, testified against Udaltsov and Razvozzhayev in March, saying that organizers of the protest had received more than \$150,000 from their supporters.

Lebedev testified that some of these funds had arrived through Targamadze, who was based in Lithuania, giving credence to the Kremlin's claims that Western and pro-Western governments had orchestrated the protest.

Some protesters have accused Lebedev of being a "traitor" for having made the plea agreement, while others have dismissed the accusation.

"I do not think that anybody betrayed anyone in this case because there was no one to betray," Maria Baronova, a fellow Bolotnaya participant who was amnestied in honor of the 20th anniversary of the Russian Constitution in December, told The Moscow Times. "I am not aware whether anyone took any money from the West, but Konstantin Lebedev himself said that he took money from Givi Targamadze."

In April of last year, Lebedev was sentenced to 2 1/2 years in prison after the plea bargain was arranged. Prosecutors had initially demanded a five-year prison term, which was shortened when Lebedev pleaded guilty to the charges.

On Thursday he told the judge that his days of "dangerous thinking," participating in "riots" and "living off the funds of foreign governments" were in the past, RIA Novosti reported. "From now on I will work honestly," he said.

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