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Anti-Putin Protest Gets 4 More Bolotnaya Activists Jailed

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Leonid Razvozhayev, co-defendant of opposition leader Sergei Udaltsov, gestures from the defendants cage during a court hearing in Moscow.

Four defendants were convicted and sentenced on Monday for their participation in a 2012 anti-Kremlin protest that took a dark turn, ending in violent clashes with law enforcement officers.

Ilya Gushchin, Alexei Gaskarov, Alexander Margolin and Yelena Kokhtareva were found guilty by Moscow's Zamoskovretsky Court of having participated in a May 6, 2012, rally in downtown Moscow's Bolotnaya Square, where demonstrators protested Vladimir Putin's inauguration to a third term as president.

Two other suspects were convicted last month in the ongoing case, and dozens have been indicted.

The sentences have ranged in severity. Gaskarov, an activist, and Margolin, the deputy director of a publishing house, were each handed 3 1/2-year prison terms, a slight reduction of the four-year sentences initially requested by prosecutors, RIA Novosti reported.

Gushchin, a university student, was sentenced to 2 1/2 years in prison after prosecutors requested he serve out a sentence of three years and three months. Kokhtareva, a 58-year-old pensioner, was handed a suspended sentence after she admitted guilt.

The defense, which rejected prosecutors' claims that the Bolotnaya protest devolved into "mass riots," said their clients acted out of self-defense against police violence, legal news agency RAPSI reported.

A banner reading "Putin's court is a shame for Russia" was unfurled from the roof of an apartment building across from the court but was later removed by police, independent news channel Dozhd reported Monday.

Police also detained twelve people who had gathered outside the courthouse, including protesters demonstrating in support of the defendants, opposition-minded Ekho Moskvy reported.

Protest leaders Sergei Udaltsov and Leonid Razvozzhayev last month were convicted of having organized riots at the rally. Both were handed 4 1/2-year prison sentences.

Twenty-nine people have been indicted in the Bolotnaya Square case so far. Eleven were granted amnesty in December last year in honor of the 20th anniversary of Russia's constitution.

Putin said at the time that the amnesty would apply to individuals who had "not committed grave crimes or crimes involving violence against representatives of the authorities."

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