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Chechen Gets 2 Years in Prison for Battling Assad's Forces in Syria

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Forces loyal to Syria's President Bashar al-Assad take positions on the outskirts of the town of Morek, Syria.

A 22-year-old Chechen man has been sentenced to two years in prison for fighting in Syria's civil war, a news report said Tuesday.

Said Mazhayev, who prosecutors say went to Syria last November and fought alongside the Free Syrian Army until January, admitted his guilt in court, prosecutors told the Caucasian Knot news website.

Under Russian law, he could have faced up to 10 years in prison for taking part in an armed conflict in a foreign state. Ahead of the verdict, which was issued Monday, prosecutors had asked the judge to sentence Mazhayev to three years and two months in a penal colony.

Mazhayev's relatives expressed shock at the verdict in comments to the online news portal.

“Honestly, we are all shocked by what's happened. Up until the very end, we had hope that

even if Said were not acquitted, they'd at least give him a conditional sentence. You know, apart from what he himself told investigators, the prosecutors have no other evidence of his guilt," a female relative who spoke on condition of anonymity was cited as saying by Caucasian Knot.

The relative said Mazhayev's family was considering appealing the sentence, but she noted that doing so could result in an even harsher prison term if prosecutors pushed for the maximum punishment in the appeals process.

Mazhayev is the second Russian citizen to be charged for fighting in Syria. In October, another Chechen, Rustam Kerimov, received three years behind bars for the same crime.

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