

PACE Claims Jailed Ukrainian Pilot Savchenko is Immune From Russian Prosecution

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Nadezhda Savchenko in a Moscow court defendant's cage Wednesday.

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) has claimed that jailed Ukrainian pilot Nadezhda Savchenko's membership in the organization provides her with immunity from prosecution, legal news agency RAPSI reported Wednesday.

According to RAPSI, attorney Ilya Novikov presented a PACE document at Moscow's Basmanny district court Wednesday stating it considered Savchenko, who was elected in absentia to the Ukrainian parliament in October and approved as a PACE delegate in January, had immunity from prosecution despite having become a parliamentarian after her alleged crime took place.

Russia accuses Savchenko, Ukraine's first female military pilot, of having abetted the deaths

of Russian journalists Igor Kornelyuk and Anton Voloshin, who were killed by mortar fire in eastern Ukraine in June.

Savchenko, who claims she was captured by pro-Russian separatists and taken to Russia against her will last summer, has repeatedly denied any wrongdoing.

The court rejected PACE's argument, claiming Savchenko's status as a delegate does not make her eligible for immunity.

"Savchenko's alleged crime, her arrest and her initial detention occurred before she became a PACE delegate," the judge presiding over Wednesday's hearing, Artur Karpov, was quoted by Interfax news agency as saying. "This means that there are no grounds to change the conditions of her detention."

The court also dismissed Wednesday the defense's complaint about investigators' refusal to let Savchenko attend PACE sessions.

Russia withdrew in January its invitation to PACE monitors to visit Savchenko, who is currently being held at Moscow's high-security Lefortovo Prison. In February, the Investigative Committee overturned a request to drop charges against her.

Savchenko's health has been precarious since she embarked on a hunger strike in December. She complained Wednesday of chest pains in court, requesting that an ambulance be called to measure her blood pressure, pulse and blood sugar levels, Interfax news agency reported. Medical personnel on site confirmed that Savchenko was strong enough to take part in the hearing.

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