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Tatar Activist Kashapov Gets 3-Year Prison Sentence for Crimea Posts

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Rafis Kashapov

A court in Russia's republic of Tatarstan has sentenced a local activist to three years in prison for criticizing the Kremlin's policies and Russia's annexation of Crimea last year.

Rafis Kashapov, who heads the Tatar Public Center NGO, was found guilty on Tuesday of calling for separatism and inciting ethnic hatred, the regional Investigative Committee said in an online statement.

After Moscow annexed Crimea last year, Kashapov published several articles on Russia's main social network VKontakte, harshly criticizing the land grab and Russia's support for separatists in eastern Ukraine.

Among the articles cited in the case against him were those titled “Crimea and Ukraine will be free from occupants!” and “There where Russia is, there are tears and death,” Sova, a Russian think-tank that focuses on human rights issues, said Tuesday on its website.

Addressing the court with his closing statement earlier this month after pleading not guilty, Kashapov argued the charges against him had been trumped up by Russia's Federal Security Service, or FSB, news portal OVD Info reported.

Sova in its statement denounced Tuesday's verdict, saying it had found “no signs” of the inciting of ethnic hatred in Kashapov's posts and prosecuting someone for expressing his opinion violated the freedom of speech.

Kashapov was designated a political prisoner by Russia's leading human rights group Memorial earlier this summer.

Kashapov's twin brother and fellow activist, Nafis, has been granted political asylum in Poland, Krym.Realii news agency – a Crimean news service of RFE/RL – reported earlier this year.

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