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ECHR to Rule on Prison Term for Criticizing Crimea Annexation

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The European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg

Rafis Kashapov, an activist from Russia's republic of Tatarstan, has filed a complaint to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) in Strasbourg, challenging the sentence he was handed for voicing his disagreement with the annexation of Crimea in 2014, the Kommersant newspaper reported Tuesday.

This is the first time the ECHR will evaluate the legitimacy of prosecuting people for publicly criticizing the annexation of Crimea.

Kashapov, an activist with nationalist views, was arrested in December 2014 for his posts on social media criticizing the annexation and voicing hope that Ukrainian territorial integrity would be restored.

According to the Federal Security Service (FSB) officers that investigated Kashapov's case, with these postings the activist "was forming a negative attitude toward Russia's actions in Crimea in 2014. Ignoring the will of Crimean residents that they expressed during the

referendum in March 2014, he was forming an opinion about the territory of Crimea being adjoined illegally."

The activist was charged with calling for a violation of Russia's territorial integrity and sentenced to three years in a penal colony in September 2015.

On Monday he filed a formal complaint to the ECHR, in which he accused Russian authorities of "unreasonably expanding" the definition of calling for a violation of territorial integrity, and classifying a publicly made statement about the illegality of the Crimean annexation as such, Kommersant reported.

The complaint also points out that a prison term is too severe a punishment for what might be considered an abuse of freedom of speech.

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