

Jury Rules 'Not Guilty' in Primorsky Partizany Retrial

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Primorsky Partizany / VK

Members of the Russian gang known as the “Primorsky Partizany” in the country's Far East have been cleared of murdering four civilians in 2009 after the Supreme Court ordered a retrial of the case.

A jury in a Vladivostok court ruled Wednesday there was insufficient evidence for some of the murder charges against the five defendants — brothers Alexander and Vadim Kovtun, Vladimir Ilyutikov, Maxim Kirillov and Alexei Nikitin, the Interfax news agency reported.

The Primorsky Partizany gained fame in 2010 after embarking on a violent rampage against police in Russia's Far Eastern Primorye region, killing two officers and wounding six others. Four of the rebels were captured by authorities after a manhunt spanning several months. Two others reportedly committed suicide.

After being apprehended, the four group members were also blamed for the killings of four security guards at a hemp plantation in 2009 as part of an alleged drugs feud. Two local residents, Vadim Kovtun and Alexei Nikitin, were accused of involvement in the killings.

The jury's ruling on Wednesday morning meant Nikitin and Vadim Kovtun walked free after spending the last six years in jail.

An unofficial spokesperson for the group, Yulia Zhukovich, said the ruling had come “as a total surprise.”

“Everyone is deliriously happy,” she told The Moscow Times. “No one expected this.” As well as happiness, there is some bitterness. “Two people have spent six years in prison for no reason,” she said.

Regional prosecutors, however, are not giving up and have [pledged](#) to contest the verdict in the Supreme Court.

Russia's Supreme Court in May last year referred the case back to the regional court, ruling that the link between the suspects and the reported drugs killings of 2009 was insufficiently strong. The results of the retrial do not apply to the charges relating to the deaths of the police officers, meaning the remaining suspects will continue to serve up to 25 years in jail.

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