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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Russian Soldier Sentenced to Life for Murder of Armenian Family

Killings had been a major catalyst for the souring of relations between Moscow and Yerevan

By The Moscow Times

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Valery Permyakov **Valery Permyakov / VK**

Prosecutors have sentenced a Russian soldier to life in prison for the killing of a family of seven near a military base in the Armenian city of Gyumri last year.

The Armenian court found Valery Permyakov guilty of leaving his military base with a machine gun on January 12 2015 and fatally shooting and stabbing the Avetisian family in their own home. Among his victims were a 2-year-old girl and 6-month-old infant boy, who died in hospital a week later.

Permyakov was detained by Russian border guards as he attempted to cross the Armenian border into Turkey. The 19-year-old Russian private pleaded guilty to the murder charges, but refused to give testimony in court.

The killings provoked mass protests in Gyumri, a city that lies 120 kilometers northwest of the capital Yerevan and hosts a Russian garrison of around 3,000 soldiers. Demonstrations against Russia's military presence in Armenia later spread throughout the country. Protesters feared Permyakov would be sent home and demanded that he be accused in an Armenian court rather than a Russian military court.

Permyakov was initially sentenced to 10 years by a Russian military court in August on charges of desertion and stealing weapons. Later, it was decided that the young private would face an Armenian court for the murders, but that the judges would sentence him using Russian law.

Armenia has traditionally had strong relations with the Russian Federation, being one of only four former Soviet republics to join the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union. The Gyumri killings have seriously tested that relationship.

In addition, Russia's rapprochement with Turkey and its continued interest in the 22-year Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has sparked anger among the Armenian public. Russia's continued arms sales to Baku remain a serious source of contention in the country.

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