The Moscow Times
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Crimean Tatar Lawmaker Handed 2 Years on Separatism Charges

September 27, 2017



Ilmi Umerov (Krim Realii / Youtube)

A Crimean court has sentenced a senior member of the banned Tatar assembly to two years behind bars on charges of separatism, the U.S.-funded Krym.Realii news website reported Wednesday.

The conviction of Ilmi Umerov, the deputy chairman of the Mejlis, comes a week after another Crimean court handed a suspended sentence to a Ukrainian journalist on the same charges.

Umerov is the second deputy head of the Mejlis to be convicted in Crimea this month. The Crimean Supreme Court sentenced Akhtem Chiigoz to eight years for inciting civil unrest.

Before sentencing, Umerov's attorney said he hoped that a new UN report on human rights abuses in Crimea would help lessen his client's sentence, Krym.Realii reports.

The UN report released Monday documented widespread abuses, including forced disappearances and torture, since March 2014, when Russia claimed the peninsula as its

territory.

Last week, the prosecution requested a 3.6-year suspended sentence for Umerov, the Mediazona news outlet reported.

The Crimean Tatar lawmaker, who was listed as an extremist in December and indicted on separatism charges the following month, says his conviction is "politically motivated."

The cases are seen as part of Russia's crackdown on the Crimean Tatars, a Turkic ethnic group that boycotted the 2014 referendum that Moscow used as a legal rationale for its annexation of Crimea.

Russia labeled the Mejlis an "extremist organization" and banned it in April 2016.

Umerov has been repeatedly detained for actively campaigning against Russia's territorial claims over the peninsula and encouraging more international sanctions.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2017/09/27/crimean-tatar-lawmaker-handed-two-years-on-separatism-charges-a59092