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Spain Acquits Group of Russians Suspected of Mafia Ties

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Vladislav Peznik (Sergei Fedeichev / TASS)

A Spanish court has cleared 17 people, including Russian nationals and officials, suspected of mafia ties of all charges a decade after the start of a high-profile criminal investigation.

Prosecutors in Spain sought prison sentences for 18 Russian and Spanish suspects in February on charges including money laundering and fraud. The trial came as a follow-up to the 2008 "Operation Troika" investigation that led to the arrest of infamous Tambov mafia chief Gennady Petrov and 2016 arrest warrants for several high-ranking Russian officials.

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Spain's National Court has acquitted the Russian nationals for lack of evidence, Spanish media reported Thursday, citing a 143-page ruling.

The 18th Spanish defendant's case was closed earlier due to his illness.

Those acquitted include State Duma deputy Vladislav Reznik, who claimed innocence since the trial began in February, his lawyer Alexander Gofstein confirmed to the RBC news website.

"It's sad that it took 10 years in the life of worthy, respected, innocent people and their family members to expose this obvious fake," he was quoted as saying Thursday.

Prosecutors claimed in 2016 that Reznik and a former federal drug control chief had dealings with Tambov mafia boss Petrov, who moved part of the gang's operation from St. Petersburg to Spain in 1996.

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