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Court Upholds FSB Chief's Defense of Stalinist Repressions

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Kirill Zykov / Moskva News Agency

A Moscow court has upheld a Russian intelligence chief's controversial interview defending his predecessors, who were involved in organizing mass purges and the Gulag prison system.

Federal Security Service (FSB) chief Alexander Bortnikov sparked an outcry last December for remarks to the Kremlin-backed Rossiiskaya Gazeta appearing to excuse purges under Soviet leader Josef Stalin. As many as 30 million are believed to have been killed during the repressions.

Bortnikov's remarks came at a time when revisionist history has come under sharp focus. President Vladimir Putin has famously called the 1991 fall of the Soviet Union — which he and many Russians lament as a blow to Russia's status as a great power — the "greatest geopolitical catastrophe" of the 20th century.

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After the FSB chief's interview was published, a former investigator for the General Prosecutor's Office filed suit, the Kommersant business daily reported Monday. The investigator, Igor Stepanov, sought damages and demanded that Rossiiskaya Gazeta allow him to publish a rebuttal.

Moscow's Savyolovsky district court sided with Bortnikov in June, and the Moscow City Court struck down Stepanov's subsequent appeal in November, according to the city's legal database.

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The ruling "means that the state is not guilty, that we don't have victims of political repression, only individual victims," Stepanov's attorney Leonid Gozman was cited by Kommersant as saying Monday.

According to Kommersant, at least 20 of Stepanov's family members were deported to the gulags.

In their decisions, the courts said that Rossiiskaya Gazeta's eventual explanation that Bortnikov's interview was an expression of his personal views served as grounds to dismiss Stepanov's lawsuit.

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