

Russian Court Sentences Norwegian National to 14 Years for Espionage

By [Reuters](#)

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Frode Berg **Pavel Golovkin / AP / TASS**

A Russian court found a Norwegian man guilty on Tuesday of espionage on Russian nuclear submarines and jailed him for 14 years in a verdict that could strain ties between Russia and its NATO-member neighbor.

Frode Berg, a retired former guard on the Norwegian-Russian border, was detained in Moscow in December 2017 and tried behind closed doors this month. He pleaded not guilty to charges of espionage on behalf of Norway.

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Berg will not appeal the verdict and plans to request a presidential pardon from Vladimir Putin that would see him freed, his lawyer, Ilya Novikov, said.

Norway's Foreign Ministry said it had "noted" the verdict but did not comment on its substance. It said it was working in multiple ways to bring Berg back to Norway.

"Norwegian authorities... wish to see the safe return of Frode Berg to Norway," a ministry spokeswoman said.

Berg, who was wearing a suit and was handcuffed as he watched proceedings from a glass cage, has admitted to being used as a courier for Norway's military intelligence but said he had no knowledge of the operation he took part in.

Putin last week appeared to leave the door open to the possibility that Berg could be pardoned or possibly exchanged as part of a prisoner swap.

Asked during talks with Norway's Prime Minister Erna Solberg about the possibility of a pardoning, Putin said: "We must wait for the court proceedings ... We will take a look at what we can do with this depending on the court's decision."

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State prosecutors had asked the court to jail Berg for 14 years. The maximum penalty for espionage is 20 years.

Defense lawyer Novikov said ahead of the hearing that he was expecting a guilty verdict and a lengthy sentence, and that the defense was hoping diplomatic talks would now possibly lead to Berg's freedom.

"The question is how successful diplomatic efforts will be to secure his release," Novikov said.

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