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Russian Jury Acquits Gay Man's Murder Suspect

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The knife attack was "most likely due to sexual orientation," the victim's boyfriend who survived the attack said. **Artyom Geodakyzn / TASS**

A Moscow jury has acquitted a man accused of killing a gay man last year, the LGBT rights group Stimul reported Thursday.

Security cameras captured 40-year-old Roman Yedalov's stabbing death near central Moscow's Kursky train station in June 2019. His boyfriend Yevgeny Yefimov, who survived the attack, recounted that the suspect had shouted homophobic slurs.

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Jurors found Anton Berezhnyi not guilty of murder, which would have resulted in a prison sentence of up to 15 years, Stimul said.

They found Berezhnyi guilty on a lesser charge of battery, which carries a two-year prison

sentence, the Mediazona news website reported.

A Basmanny district court judge is due to deliver a verdict in the coming days, which Stimul said its legal team plans to appeal.

Berezhnyi partially admitted his guilt, the rights group said.

"He said that [Yedalov] fell on the knife," Stimul spokesperson Sergei Romanovsky told Mediazona.

The independent Dozhd news channel reported that Yedalov was killed and Yefimov was injured on their way home from a gay club.

The knife attack was "most likely due to sexual orientation," Yefimov told Dozhd.

Berezhnyi's acquittal comes a day after a prominent watchdog noted that the number of hate crimes against members of Russia's LGBT community increased in 2019.

Activists tie the rise in violence to Russia's 2013 law banning "gay propaganda among minors" and anti-LGBT rhetoric on state television.

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