

Russia Jails Former Energy Exec for 15 Years on Spying Charges

By [AFP](#)

December 29, 2020



Karina Tsurkan had been a board member of the Inter RAO energy group before being detained in 2018.

Alexander Avilov / Moskva News Agency

A Russian court on Tuesday handed a 15-year prison sentence to a former manager of an energy company for spying for Moldova, the latest in a string of high-profile espionage trials.

Karina Tsurkan, a former board member of the Inter RAO energy group, was detained in 2018 on suspicion of handing classified information to Moldovan intelligence.

The Federal Security Service (FSB) accused Tsurkan, a 46-year-old Moldovan-born Russian citizen, of passing documents detailing Russian energy supplies to Ukraine — including areas held by Russian-backed separatists — in 2015.

The Moscow city court said in a statement on Tuesday that Tsurkan was sentenced to 15 years in prison following a trial that was held behind closed doors.

The court added that 656 million rubles (\$8.9 million) seized from Tsurkan was added to state coffers.

Tsurkan's lawyer Ivan Pavlov said that his client intended to appeal the decision.

Russia's most prominent rights group Memorial in October described Tsurkan as a political prisoner who had been denied a fair trial.

"The Tsurkan case is directly related to the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine," where Russia has backed armed separatists since a popular uprising in 2014, Memorial said.

The rights group described the trial as part of an effort by the authorities "to maintain the image of Russia as a besieged fortress surrounded by enemies."

The former executive's sentencing was the latest in a string of high-profile espionage cases in Russia that has spurred criticism from rights groups.

The FSB in July arrested on treason charges a respected former defense journalist who had recently become an advisor to the head of Russia's space agency.

A court in Moscow the month before handed former U.S. marine Paul Whelan a 16-year jail term on espionage charges.

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