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# Austria Convicts Chechen 'Moral Guardians' for Harassing Women – Reports

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The defendants were accused of threatening, intimidating and occasionally abusing Chechen women for exhibiting "Western behavior." **Ronald Zak / AP / TASS**

Five Chechen men went on trial in Austria for outing and harassing female compatriots for exhibiting "Western behavior," Austrian media reported Thursday.

The defendants were accused of running an online chat where they threatened, intimidated and occasionally abused Chechen women for allegedly not adhering to strict Islamic rules, according to the Die Presse daily.

"The defendants wanted to enforce Sharia-compliant behavior among Chechen women," the prosecutor was quoted as saying.

A court in Vienna reportedly sentenced the one defendant who pleaded guilty to five months in prison and 10 months probation. According to Die Presse, 38-year-old Shaid N.'s time

spent in jail counts toward his sentence and he will not spend any more time behind bars.

Three other members had previous convictions or are currently serving prison sentences on charges ranging from extortion to burglary and battery, the outlet reported.

The publication did not specify which law the Chechen nationals were tried under. It reported that their Telegram messaging app group with several hundred members was recognized as a "criminal association" created to "commit acts of violence and severe coercion."

The defendants' victims included young Chechen women in Vienna who posted bikini photos on Instagram.

Many Chechens fled to Europe from the predominantly Muslim republic in Russia's North Caucasus following two separatist wars in the 1990s.

Recent years saw another wave of emigration from the region due to opposition to Ramzan Kadyrov, Chechnya's pro-Kremlin leader who is accused by activists of enforcing a strict "code of virtue" for women and committing human rights abuses.

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