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Russian Hitman Gets Life Sentence for Georgian's Killing in Berlin

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People hold portraits of Zelimkhan Khangoshvili in front of the German Embassy in Tbilisi, September 2019. **ZURAB KURTSIKIDZE / EPA / TASS**

A German court on Wednesday sentenced a Russian man to life in prison for shooting dead a former Chechen commander in a central Berlin park, a murder prosecutors say was ordered by Moscow.

The verdict is expected to add further strain to already frayed Russian-German ties.

The Berlin court found Vadim Krasikov, alias Vadim Sokolov, guilty of gunning down 40-year-old Georgian national Tornike Kavtarashvili in the Kleiner Tiergarten park in broad daylight on Aug. 23, 2019.

German prosecutors said they did not establish who specifically ordered the killing.

Russia's Ambassador to Germany, Sergei Nechayev, called the verdict "biased and political" and said it will "seriously aggravate" ties between the two countries.

"This outcome is of serious concern to us; it is an obvious unfriendly act and will not be left without a response," Nechayev was quoted as saying by the state-run RIA Novosti news agency.

Riding a bicycle, Krasikov approached the victim from behind and fired a Glock 26 equipped with a silencer at the side of Kavtarashvili's torso. Krasikov then fired two more shots at Kavtarashvili's head after he fell to the ground, killing the victim on the spot.

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Prosecutors said Krasikov was seen throwing a bag in the nearby Spree river, where police divers later recovered the Glock, a wig and a bicycle.

Days before the killing, Germany's Der Spiegel weekly reported that Krasikov had posed as a tourist, visiting sights in Paris and then touring the Polish capital of Warsaw before vanishing on Aug. 22 without checking out from his hotel.

Investigators found Krasikov's phone and a return flight ticket for Moscow on Aug. 25, 2019, in his hotel room in Warsaw.

Krasikov's trial started in October 2020, with more than 50 witnesses questioned during the investigation. Germany accused Russia of poor cooperation and expelled two Russian diplomats, a move mirrored by Moscow.

The investigative website Bellingcat has reported that Krasikov received training from Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) and was part of its elite squad.

He reportedly grew up in ex-Soviet Kazakhstan before moving to Siberia.

The trial took place with Europe already outraged over the poisoning of Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny in August 2020.

AFP contributed reporting.

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