The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Five Europeans Go on Trial in Separatist-Controlled Ukraine

By AFP

August 16, 2022



Andrew Hill, Dylan Healy, Vjekoslav Prebeg, John Harding, and Mathias Gustavsson (L-R), charged with mercenary activities, appear at a hearing at the Supreme Court of the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR). **Nizami Gadzhibalayev/TASS**

Five Europeans captured in eastern Ukraine went on trial Monday in a court administered by Kremlin-backed separatists in the city of Donetsk, Russian media reported.

The five — Mathias Gustafsson of Sweden, Vjekoslav Prebeg of Croatia, and Britons John Harding, Andrew Hill and Dylan Healy — all pleaded not guilty to charges of being mercenaries, according to Russian media reports.

They could face the death penalty under the laws of the self-proclaimed, unrecognized Donetsk People's Republic.

The next court hearing in their case is scheduled for October, Russian media reported.

Harding, Prebeg and Gustafsson were captured in the Ukrainian port of Mariupol and face possible execution for attempting to "seize power by force" and "taking part in armed conflict as mercenaries," the RIA Novosti news agency reported.

Hill faces charges of being a mercenary, while Healy is being tried for taking part in the recruitment of mercenaries for Ukraine, the news agency said.

On June 9, the supreme court of the self-proclaimed republic already sentenced two Britons and a Moroccan, all of whom were captured by pro-Russian forces in Ukraine's industrial east, to death for being mercenaries. All three have appealed their verdicts.

There has been a moratorium on the death penalty in Russia since 1997, but it does not apply in the two separatist regions in Ukraine.

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