The Moscow Times
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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Former Russian Senator Given Life Sentence for Murder Alongside Father

December 28, 2022

Raul Arashukov (L) and his son Rauf Arashukov. **Sophia Sandurskaya / Moskva News Agency**

A Moscow court sentenced former Russian senator Rauf Arashukov and his father Raul Arashukov to life in prison for ordering the contract killing of two men in the North Caucasus republic of Karachayevo-Cherkessia over a decade ago, court authorities said Tuesday.

The verdict came nearly four years after the politician's dramatic arrest in the Russian senate chambers on Jan. 30, 2019. His father Raul Arashukov, a former high-ranking Gazprom official, was simultaneously detained along with four other suspects on similar charges.

Investigators said that Rauf Arashukov, 36, and Raul Arashukov, 62, were part of an organized crime network that had been active in Russia's republic of Karachayevo-Cherkessia for 17 years.

In September, a jury found the Arashukovs guilty of organizing the 2010 murders of a popular youth activist and a regional politician who had been tipped to be Karachayevo-Cherkessia's next prime minister.

Circassian activist Aslan Zhukov was shot dead in the regional capital of Cherkessk in March 2010, while Circassian politician Fral Shebzukhov was beaten to death two months later.

Both father and son pleaded not guilty to the charges.

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Prosecutors had sought life sentences for the father-and-son pair earlier in December.

The Arashukovs will serve their sentences in a maximum-security penal colony.

Three other defendants in the case received between six-and-a-half-22 years in prison on charges of attempting to cover up the two murders. A fourth defendant, a Gazprom executive, was found guilty of embezzlement alongside Raul Arashukov.

A Moscow court is currently hearing cases against 14 other alleged members of the same Karachayevo-Cherkessia organized crime network.

Arashukov was the youngest senator in Russia when he was appointed to the Federation Council, the country's upper house of parliament, in 2016.

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