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Former Khabarovsk Governor Found Guilty of Double Murder

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Vyacheslav Prokofiev / TASS

The former governor of Russia's Khabarovsk region, Sergei Furgal, was found guilty of murder by a Moscow region court on Thursday, according to state-run news agency RIA Novosti.

The case against Furgal dates from 2020, when two years into his first term as Khabarovsk governor he was arrested and charged with the double murder of businessman Yevgeny Zori and former police officer Oleg Bulatov, the attempted murder of businessman Alexander Smolsky and running a criminal gang involved in money laundering, in what were widely seen as politically motivated charges.

As the jury in the case announced their guilty verdict, adding that the accused did not deserve leniency, Furgal shouted that he was ashamed for the jury members.

The guilty verdict leaves Furgal facing life imprisonment. He is due to be sentenced on Feb. 6.

Furgal came to prominence in Russia in 2018 when, as the candidate for the ultranationalist Liberal Democratic Party, he outperformed the Kremlin's candidate to win the Khabarovsk gubernatorial race, representing an extremely rare electoral loss for Putin's United Russia party.

Following his arrest, Furgal was removed from office by President Vladimir Putin "due to loss of confidence," and replaced by a controversial but more Kremlin-friendly member of his party. Furgal then spent two years in pre-trial detention in Moscow's notorious Lefortovo prison until his trial began in May.

Furgal announced he was going on hunger strike in November over what he claimed were multiple irregularities in the prosecution of his case, which he argued constituted a violation of his legal rights.

During his two-year stint as governor, Furgal proved to be a popular politician and his arrest and removal from office led to months-long protests attracting tens of thousands of people in Khabarovsk, as well as in other cities across Russia.

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