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Young Russians Given Lengthy Prison Sentences for Ukraine-Linked Helicopter Arson

April 15, 2025



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A military court in Moscow sentenced five young Russians to lengthy prison terms on terrorism charges for allegedly setting fire to a helicopter on behalf of Ukraine, authorities said Tuesday.

The group was accused of being paid by Ukraine's Defense Ministry intelligence agency (HUR) to destroy a Ka-32 search and rescue helicopter at Moscow's Ostafyevo International Business Airport in April 2024.

HUR later shared a video of the burning aircraft, claiming the helicopter had been used by the Russian military. Russia's Prosecutor General's Office estimated the damages at over 690 million rubles ($8.4 million).

Moscow's Second Western Military Garrison Court convicted all five defendants of terrorism,

with four also found guilty of conspiring to commit sabotage. Prior to the helicopter arson, the group was also accused of receiving 15,000 rubles ($132) to set fire to a railway relay cabinet in the Moscow region.

Related article: Moscow Court Charges 5 Russians With 'Terrorism' Over Helicopter Torching

Nikita Bulgakov was sentenced to 18 years in a maximum-security prison, Daniil Yamskov to 17 years and Stanislav Khamidulin and Roman Yakovets to 12 years and six months each. Anastasia Mochalina received 12 years and six months in a medium-security prison on terrorism charges, the prosecutor's office said.

According to the independent news outlet Mediazona, Mochalina is 20 years old, Yakovets is 21 and the other three men are 22.

Prosecutors had sought 19-year sentences for the four men and 13 years for Mochalina.

All four men pleaded guilty and asked to be charged with property damage instead of terrorism. They claimed they had not expressed opposition to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, with Yamskov reportedly requesting to be sent to fight in Ukraine while in pre-trial detention, Mediazona reported.

Mochalina denied involvement in the arson, saying she only allowed the group to use her bank card to make purchases and was unaware of their plans.

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