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# Election Monitor Grigory Melkonyants Sentenced to 5 Years for 'Undesirable' Affiliation

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Grigory Melkonyants. **@sotavisionmedia**

Grigory Melkonyants, co-chair of the independent election watchdog Golos, was sentenced Wednesday to five years in prison on charges of participating in the activities of an "undesirable" organization.

Judge Evgeniya Nikolaeva of Moscow's Basmanny District Court found Melkonyants guilty of working with the European Network of Election Monitoring Organizations (ENEMO), a Montenegro-based NGO blacklisted by Russian authorities in 2021.

In addition to the prison term, the judge barred Melkonyants from "engaging in public activity" for nine years following his release, the exiled news outlet Mediazona reported.

Prosecutors had sought the maximum six-year sentence, claiming that Golos functioned as "a structural division" of ENEMO. Both Melkonyants and ENEMO, a coalition of election

observers from 18 Central and Eastern European countries, denied the affiliation.

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Melkonyants was arrested in August 2023. Judge Nikolaeva said the time he spent in pre-trial detention would count toward his overall sentence.

“Don’t worry, I’m not discouraged. You shouldn’t be either,” Melkonyants told supporters in court following the verdict.

His lawyer Mikhail Biryukov told reporters that he and his client will appeal the sentencing.

Founded in 2000, Golos has long drawn the Kremlin’s ire for documenting election violations, including during Russia’s disputed 2011 parliamentary vote, the 2012 presidential election that returned President Vladimir Putin to the Kremlin, as well as the 2020 constitutional referendum that extended the Russian leader’s rule to 2036.

Golos trains election observers and runs a hotline for reporting violations. Russia’s Justice Ministry designated it a “foreign agent” in 2021.

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