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Russian Court Frees French Cyclist Arrested for Illegal Border Crossing

By AFP

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French cyclist Sofiane Sehili. **United press service of the Primorsky Krai region courts / AFP**

A Russian court on Thursday freed a French cyclist who was detained for more than seven weeks on suspicion of illegally crossing the border, despite finding him guilty of the charge.

Sofiane Sehili, 44, was arrested on the Russian-Chinese border in early September while attempting to break the record for the fastest endurance cycle from Lisbon to Vladivostok.

"He was first found guilty of illegally crossing the border and fined 50,000 rubles ($612)," a spokeswoman for the court service in the Primorsky region in Russia's Far East told AFP by phone.

But he was "exempted from paying the fine and released in the courtroom," she said, citing the time Sehili spent in pre-trial detention.

In footage posted by the court service, Sehili was seen wearing cycling shoes and standing in a

metal cage reserved for defendants ahead of his release.

His partner, Fanny Bensussan, welcomed the ruling.

“He's going home,” she said on Instagram, adding that a few days would be needed to arrange his trip back to France.

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Russia said the French endurance cyclist had attempted to cycle into Russia from China via a border crossing intended only for trains and buses.

But to abandon his bike and take public transport would have invalidated his record after cycling thousands of kilometers over more than 60 days.

The cyclist left Lisbon in early July and intended to cross 17 countries to arrive in Vladivostok in Russia's Far East in early September.

Several Westerners have been detained in Russia since Moscow launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

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