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# U.S. Citizen Sentenced to 4 Years in Russian Prison for Attempted Firearms Smuggling

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**Sofia Sandurskaya / TASS**

A Moscow judge has sentenced a U.S. citizen to four years in a penal colony for attempting to smuggle firearm components out of the country, the state-run TASS news agency reported Tuesday, citing court documents.

Prosecutors accused Robert Mao, a California resident and self-described military equipment and firearms enthusiast, of trying to transport parts for a Kalashnikov assault rifle and a Saiga carbine from Russia to the United States via Turkey.

In his testimony, Mao said he had traveled to Moscow in October 2024 to take part in a marathon. While in the capital, he bought accessories for Kalashnikov rifles that he said he legally owns in the U.S.

Before arriving in Russia, Mao said he arranged via a website to buy rifle stocks for a

Kalashnikov and Saiga carbine from an unidentified seller and paid in cryptocurrency.

He also bought other components and gunsmithing tools at an official Zenit store on Moscow's Arbat Street.

Mao was arrested at Moscow's Vnukovo Airport after checking in for a flight to Istanbul and passing through the green corridor at customs without declaring the firearm parts in his luggage, according to TASS.

Moscow's Solntsevsky District Court found Mao guilty of illegally moving key parts of firearms across Russia's customs border.

Mao's defense had appealed the verdict but the appeals were dismissed, TASS reported.

According to the materials cited by the agency, Mao admitted partial guilt during the initial trial and fully admitted guilt at the appeal stage.

Mao also told the court that he would not have carried the gun parts in his luggage had he known it was a criminal offense.

TASS reported that Mao had donated the seized weapon accessories and modification parts to a Russian unit fighting in Ukraine and that a letter of gratitude from the unit was included in his case file.

Mao then asked the court to acquit him.

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