

Memorial recognises Astrakhan resident Igor Stenin as a political prisoner

On 16 May 2016 resident of Astrakhan Igor Stenin, who is a Russian nationalist of oppositionist views, was sentenced to two years in a low-security penal colony for public incitement to extremist activity using the Internet (Article 280, Part 2, of the Russian Criminal Code).

Stenin appealed against his conviction and remains at liberty, under travel restrictions, until the sentence enters into legal force. If the judgment is upheld, Stenin will have to travel to the place where he is to serve his sentence himself.

Stenin is accused of posting on the 'Russian Astrakhans' community page on Vkontakte a short message calling for the annihilation of 'Kremlin occupiers,' and reposting a message by a user going by the pseudonym 'Sergei Romanov,' beginning with the words 'the situation in the ATO (Anti-Terrorist Operation) zone is changing very rapidly' (in fact this was a commentary placed by 'Romanov' under the post by Stenin).

The accusation that Stenin reposted material urging extremist action is absurd. It is obvious to any person, even vaguely conversant with the principles of the way the social network Vkontakte works, that the text beginning with the words 'the situation in the ATO zone is changing very rapidly' is a comment from the user 'Sergei Romanov' to Stenin's post. Both Stenin's post and the comment from 'Sergei Romanov' can be separately 'liked,' which would be impossible if this was a case of reposting. The fact that the user 'Sergei Romanov' commented on the post of Stenin was indicated in the initial report by an FSB official of 28 August 2014.

We consider that the conviction of an internet user for a commentary posted under their own message on a social networking site is a dangerous precedent (moreover, we note that the commentary itself is a quotation from a post on Facebook by the Ukrainian journalist, Peter Shuklinov which, in our opinion, does not constitute incitement to extremist action).

It is obvious that, in the case of Stenin, the investigation, the prosecution and the court demonstrated an extreme degree of partiality and subjectivity, related to the political motivation of the criminal case. The partiality manifested itself in manifold procedural violations in the course of the trial. For example, the trial was unlawfully held in camera, and the judge did not allow the defence to call a specialist who would have explained how the social network Vkontakte works. During the trial, at the request of the prosecutor, a group of second year students from the law faculty of Astrakhan Technical University was summoned and questioned. They gave uniform evidence against Stenin, which we consider the court accepted in an insufficiently critical manner.

We demand that the criminal proceedings against Igor Stenin be terminated.

For further details about the case visit the site: [Memorial Human Rights Centre](#).

The recognition of a person as a political prisoner or as someone prosecuted for political motives does not mean that Memorial Human Rights Centre agrees with that person's views or statements, nor supports that person's statements or actions.

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