

Tagir Khasanov – a real victim of a bogus fight against extremism

On 17 January 2017 70-year-old Tagir Khasanov, a resident of Nizhny Novgorod, died in a prison colony in Saratov. He had cancer and since last October had been paralyzed below the waist.

For unknown reasons, the Nizhny Novgorod prison service officials did not consider it possible to allow Tagir Khasanov, already seriously ill and confined to his bed, to remain in the hospital at the pre-trial detention facility, but sent him to the prison colony on 5 January when there were severe frosts.

However, the matter at issue is not just the senseless obstinacy of prison service officials who worsened Khasanov's health. We consider the criminal case under which Khasanov was sentenced to five years and one month in prison, for incitement to engage in terrorism, was itself fabricated.

Bagdan Umarov, who rented living space in Tagir Khasanov's apartment, left for Syria, supposedly to fight for Islamic State (a terrorist organization banned in the Russian Federation). The FSB alleged that it was Khasanov who persuaded Umarov to go to Syria by means of propaganda, conveyed during evening conversations while the two men were watching television news. Khasanov is said to have conducted such conversations with Umarov and other persons living in his apartment.

The charges were based on the evidence of citizens of Uzbekistan who also lived in Khasanov's apartment, but were deported for breaching migration law. For this reason, a majority of the 'witnesses' were not in court since they have been banned from entering Russia. Khasanov's defence lawyer located them in Uzbekistan where they told him that, after they had been beaten up, they simply signed a statement they could not understand (they know very little Russian), and that the evidence to which they signed their signatures did not correspond to the truth. The deportees told the lawyer that Khasanov had not conducted any 'conversations' with them since they always arrived back from work very late in the evening and had had almost had no communications with the owner of the apartment.

Moreover, another person who spoke as a witness at the trial was Artikov, someone who had 'figured' earlier as a provocateur in the case of Hizb ut-Tahrir in Nizhny Novgorod.

The prosecution and court also ignored the fact that one of the brothers of Umarov, who did not know Khasanov at all, had himself earlier joined Islamic State, and an international arrest warrant had been issued for him. They also paid no attention to the fact that subsequently a third brother from the Umarov family, who had not communicated with Khasanov either, went to Syria. The prosecution and the court did not take into account the statement by a friend of Umarov that the latter had become a follower of religious fundamentalism long before he met Khasanov.

Finally, the charges were given 'additional weight' by the discovery of five gun cartridges from a military weapon in Khasanov's apartment. The proof of Khasanov's guilt was said to be...his own blood on the cartridges. He himself said that the cartridges had been planted, and the blood had been taken from dishes that were in the kitchen (Khasanov was regularly undergoing bleeding as part of his medical treatment).

A close study of the circumstances of the case gives grounds to assert that Khasanov was not guilty. He fell victim to a campaign by law enforcement authorities in which criminal cases, for which there were no grounds, were fabricated against members of the public for the purpose of imitating a fight against terrorism. Once the FSB found it was not possible to stop the departure for Syria of the Umarov brothers (who, it is perfectly possible, actually were militant fighters), the agency took an 'easy' path: it seized an elderly person who rented out living space and created the myth of a 'terrorist nest'. This is far from being the first instance of law enforcement agencies – either in error or intentionally – substituting a pseudo-investigation of invented crimes for the real fight against terrorism. However, this case has a tellingly tragic ending.

We express our sincere condolences to the family and friends of Tagir Khasanov.

We call for an end to the harmful practice of substituting a bogus fight against terrorism for the real thing by means of fabricated criminal prosecutions.