

77-year-old scientist sentenced to 7 years in a strict regime prison colony for passing software to China

Vladimir Lapygin, a scientist who devoted half a century to his country's rocket construction industry, was detained by the FSB on 13 May 2015. According to the prosecution, Lapygin, who was deputy head of the Centre for Heat Exchange and Aerodynamics at the Central Engineering Research Institute of the Federal Space Agency Roskosmos, sent a Chinese scientist a file containing classified software for evaluating supersonic aerodynamics. On 6 September 2016 Lapygin was sentenced by Moscow City Court under Article 275 of the Russian Criminal Code ("treason") to seven years in a strict-regime prison colony.

The trial took place in camera. Vladimir Lapygin pleaded not guilty. He argued there was nothing criminal in passing on the test version of the software, and he did not hide his intention to sign a mutually beneficial contract on behalf of the Central Engineering Research Institute with the Chinese. He discussed this idea with his colleagues, as part of his official duties.

The court was presented with weighty evidence that the file given to the Chinese scientist did not contain state secrets. The independent experts who provided expertise during the investigation and the trial, according to the defence, were incompetent and had worked under pressure from the FSB. The defence had been denied a role in the selection of experts.

At the trial, prominent scientists and professors of physics and mathematics, and members of the Russian Academy of Sciences, testified that there are many software programmes similar to the test version which Lapygin sent to China, and that these have been published and are publicly accessible. The author of the software A. B. Gorshkov, himself a scientist at the Central Engineering Research Institute, spoke as a witness for the defence. He listed the sources that he used in his work, research and grants in the framework of which the software had been created, used and developed – none of which are classified and all of which have been published in open sources.

The scientists testified that the methods used to write software of this kind are well known and cannot constitute state secrets.

In February 2017, 23 scientists, including laureates of State Prizes, members of the Russian Academy of Sciences and colleagues of the convicted scientist, appealed to President Putin in an open letter to pardon Lapygin: "For a 76-year-old person who suffers from the consequences of two very serious road accidents, any term in a strict-regime prison colony is equivalent to a death sentence."

In March 2017 Vladimir Lapygin himself submitted a request for a pardon to the President of the Russian Federation.

The criminal prosecution of Vladimir Lapygin took place at virtually the same time as a number of other so-called "spy" and "treason" cases. We believe that law enforcement agencies specifically make use of these "spy" cases to strengthen their authority. In this manner, the FSB creates the appearance of working on matters of highest importance for the state, while individual officers are able to advance their careers and material well-being.

According to the Judicial Department of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation, in 2016 14 people were convicted of treason under Article 275 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation. A sharp rise in the number of such cases occurred in 2014. At that time, the number of people convicted of treason increased by a factor of four, in comparison with the preceding year, and since then has remained at approximately the same level. This is a consequence of conscious government policy and propaganda, creating a wartime atmosphere in society as the search for a "fifth column" and "enemies of the state" is ramped up. To maintain this atmosphere, new criminal cases are needed against "spies" and "traitors." As a result, law enforcement agencies bring prosecutions on trumped-up charges, and citizens' wholly legal activities are artificially criminalized.

Memorial Human Rights Centre considers Vladimir Ivanovich Lapygin a political prisoner. We demand his immediate release. We also demand that the officials responsible for his prosecution be brought to justice.

Recognition of an individual as a political prisoner, or of a prosecution as politically motivated, does not imply that Memorial Human Rights Centre shares or approves the individual's views, statements or actions.

For more information about this case, see [here](#).

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