**Russia jails Crimean dissident for speaking out against Moscow's rule**

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By: Reuters Staff

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MOSCOW (Reuters) - A court on Wednesday found a Crimean dissident opposed to Russia’s annexation of Ukraine’s Crimea guilty of separatism and sentenced him to two years in a prison colony, a punishment supporters said amounted to a death penalty for such an ill man.

Ilmi Umerov was deputy head of the Crimean Tatars’ semi-official Mejlis legislature before it was suspended by Moscow after it took control of the peninsula in 2014, a move condemned by the West and Ukraine.

State prosecutors had accused the 60-year-old of making statements that undermined Russia’s territorial integrity by calling in an interview for an end to Russian control of Crimea.

Umerov, who suffers from Parkinson’s disease and attacks of high blood pressure, said he did oppose Russia’s annexation but that the interview which prosecutors objected to had been badly translated and his words distorted.

The Ukrainian government called the verdict an “illegal and politically-motivated sentence” which it said violated Umerov’s human rights.

“Russia continues its shameful policy of pressure on the independent leaders of occupied Crimea,” Ukraine’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement.

Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko described the verdict as “embarrassing,” saying on social media that he hoped the West would now increase pressure on the Russian authorities.

Umerov’s lawyer, Mark Feygin, said he would appeal Wednesday’s verdict which was delivered by a court in Simferopol, the Crimean capital.

Feygin said his client’s life was on the line. “His dispatch to a prison colony would mean his death,” he wrote on social media, alluding to Umerov’s frail state of health.

The Tatars, a mainly Muslim community that makes up about 15 percent of Crimea’s population, have largely opposed Russian rule in the peninsula and say the 2014 annexation was illegal, a view supported by the West.

Moscow says the overwhelming majority of Crimeans voted to join Russia in a proper and fair referendum.

Ahtem Chiygoz, another Crimean Tatar leader, was found guilty of stirring up anti-Russian protests earlier this month and jailed for eight years, a move Ukraine’s president called an act of Russian repression.

A U.N. human rights report said on Monday that Russia had committed grave human rights violations in Crimea, including its imposition of citizenship and by deporting prisoners. Moscow said it deemed those allegations “groundless”.