

Free Abdulmumin Gadzhiyev, Kemal Tambiev and Abubakar Rizvanov

Case Brief: Three Russian Political Prisoners Sentenced to 17–18 Years

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Executive Summary

Abdulmumin Gadzhiyev, Kemal Shamilievich Tambiev and Abubakar Rizvanov are three Russian political prisoners sentenced to extremely long prison terms in a terrorism-related case widely considered politically motivated by human rights defenders.

On 12 September 2023, the Southern District Military Court in Rostov-on-Don sentenced Abdulmumin Gadzhiyev to 17 years, Kemal Tambiev to 17 years and 6 months, and Abubakar Rizvanov to 18 years.

All three have been recognized as political prisoners by the independent human rights project Support for Political Prisoners. Memorial.

The case raises serious concerns regarding misuse of counterterrorism legislation, criminalization of humanitarian and religious charity, pressure on independent journalism, religious freedom, fair-trial violations and grossly disproportionate punishment. Most importantly, the prosecution did not prove any crime — not terrorism financing, not participation in a terrorist organization, not criminal intent, and no direct link to terrorism.

Who They Are

Abdulmumin Gadzhiyev

A well-known Dagestani journalist, religious and community figure. He worked with the independent newspaper Chernovik. His prosecution raises serious concerns about press freedom and pressure on independent journalism in the North Caucasus. He is a father of four children.

Kemal Tambiev

A software engineer, entrepreneur, graduate of Bauman Moscow State Technical University, husband and father of two children. Before his arrest, he was involved in humanitarian and charitable initiatives. He has been imprisoned since June 2019. He also has an elderly ill grandmother with whom he is very close; she fears she may never see her grandson again in this life.

Abubakar Rizvanov

A civic and religious community figure. His case reflects a broader pattern in which Muslim civic, religious and charitable activity is treated as suspicious or criminal under counterterrorism legislation. He is a father of seven children and has ill parents who need him.

Why the Case Is Politically Motivated

- The prosecution did not prove any crime
- The prosecution did not prove terrorism financing
- The prosecution did not prove participation in a terrorist organization

- The prosecution did not prove criminal intent
- The prosecution did not prove any direct link to terrorism
- Humanitarian, religious, educational and charitable activity was portrayed as terrorism financing
- The verdict is based on assumptions rather than properly verified evidence
- The trial raised serious fair-trial concerns
- The sentences are grossly disproportionate
- One member of the trial panel issued a dissenting opinion

Public Anti-Terrorism Statements

A crucial fact in the case is that the three defendants had publicly spoken against terrorism long before the criminal case was initiated. In social media posts and public statements, they opposed terrorism in general and ISIS in particular. These public anti-terrorism statements were procedurally admitted by the court into the case file. This fact directly contradicts the prosecution's narrative and supports the defense position that the defendants did not support terrorism and did not intend to finance or participate in terrorist activity.

No Crime Was Proven

The prosecution did not prove that Abdulmumin Gadzhiyev, Kemal Tambiev or Abubakar Rizvanov:

- financed terrorism
- participated in a terrorist organization
- committed any crime
- planned or prepared any act of violence
- recruited anyone for violence
- transferred funds for a specific terrorist or violent act
- knowingly intended to support terrorism

Despite this, all three men received prison terms comparable to sentences for the gravest violent crimes.

Verdict Based on Assumptions

The conviction is based on assumptions rather than properly verified evidence. The defense argues that the prosecution failed to establish the essential elements of the alleged crimes, including intent, knowledge, direct connection to terrorism and the fact of terrorism financing itself. The case therefore raises fundamental concerns about legality, proof, individual criminal responsibility and the right to a fair trial.

Criminalization of Charity

A central concern is that humanitarian, religious and charitable activity was reinterpreted as terrorism financing. Lawful charity should not be criminalized without reliable proof of:

- individual criminal intent
- knowledge of an unlawful purpose
- direct connection to terrorism

- specific support for a prohibited act

This case therefore raises serious concerns for freedom of religion, freedom of association, humanitarian work and Muslim civic life.

Fair-Trial Concerns and Dissenting Opinion

The proceedings involved serious fair-trial concerns, including contested evidence, procedural issues and questions regarding effective legal assistance. One member of the trial panel, Judge Rizvan Zubairov, issued a dissenting opinion. According to the defense and case materials, the dissent raised concerns that the court relied on assumptions rather than properly verified evidence. It also questioned the admissibility of Kemal Tambiev's first interrogation because of lack of effective legal assistance at a critical early stage.

European Court of Human Rights

The European Court of Human Rights found violations in connection with the criminal prosecution of Abdulmumin Gadzhiyev and awarded him €6,000 in compensation. Judgment link: <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/?i=001-241581>

Although the judgment formally concerns Gadzhiyev, its reasoning is highly relevant to the same criminal case involving Kemal Tambiev and Abubakar Rizvanov. The three men were prosecuted together in one case, and the same core allegations and procedural problems affect all three defendants. Kemal Tambiev's own application before the European Court of Human Rights is currently pending.

Judicial Timeline

Instance	Date	Decision
Southern District Military Court (Rostov-on-Don)	12.09.2023	Gadzhiyev — 17 years Tambiev — 17 years 6 months Rizvanov — 18 years
Appellate Military Court	01.11.2024	Sentence reduced by 2 months for each defendant
Supreme Court of Russia (cassation)	08.07.2026	Sentence upheld without changes

Humanitarian Dimension

The case has devastated three families. Abdulmumin Gadzhiyev is a father of four children; his imprisonment has deprived them of their father and placed a heavy emotional burden on the family. Kemal Tambiev is a father of two children who have been growing up without him since his detention in 2019; he also has an elderly ill grandmother who fears she may never see her grandson again. Abubakar Rizvanov is a father of seven children and has ill parents who need his care and support. These are not only legal cases — they are human tragedies affecting children, spouses, parents, grandparents and entire communities.

Contacts for Media and Interviews

Defense lawyers

- Arsen Shabanov — shabanovarsen@yandex.ru
- Ruslan Nagiev — advokat_nagiev@mail.ru

Family members available for comment

- Laura Kurdzhieva — wife of Kemal Tambiev, based in Turkey, speaks English and Turkish — kurdzhilaura@gmail.com, +90 507 311 09 09
- Dana Sakieva — wife of Abdulmumin Gadzhiyev
- Zumrud Rizvanova — sister of Abubakar Rizvanov

Requested Action

We respectfully ask human rights organizations, policymakers, diplomats, journalists and civil society actors to:

- review the case materials
- recognize the case as politically motivated
- raise the case in public statements, reports and diplomatic communications
- call for the release of Abdulmumin Gadzhiyev, Kemal Tambiev and Abubakar Rizvanov
- support their inclusion in humanitarian release and political prisoner advocacy efforts
- highlight the misuse of counterterrorism laws against journalists, Muslim civic figures and charitable activity