

News story: Hayling Island people smuggler guilty

Vladyslav Kurtoglu, 50, was convicted of assisting unlawful immigration at Portsmouth Crown Court. His co-conspirator, Dmytro Kruik, 29, had earlier pleaded guilty to the same offence.

The men, both Ukrainian nationals of no fixed UK address, were caught when their yacht 'The Tazik' was intercepted by a Border Force Coastal Patrol Vessel (CPV) near Hayling Island on 20 May 2017.

The yacht was sailing towards the UK from Barfleur, France, when the CPV hailed the vessel and escorted it into Sparkes Marina. Kurtoglu was confirmed as the captain with Kruik as his deck hand. Kruik told officers that they had come to the UK on what he said was "just a trip". Border Force officers carried out a search of the vessel which revealed that there were 6 additional Ukrainian men on board.

Kurtoglu and Kruik were arrested by Border Force officers and the case was passed to Immigration Enforcement's Criminal and Financial Investigation (CFI) team. The 6 other Ukrainian men on the yacht were arrested and later removed from the UK.

When officers examined Kruik's phone they discovered a video he had filmed of a reconnaissance route from a harbour side in Barneville-Carteret to a nearby car park. Investigators believe that the car park was where the illegal entrants were dropped off, under the cover of night, before boarding the yacht. In the clip, Kruik can be heard commenting on the fact that there are no security cameras covering the area. The video was dated 21 April 2017, a month before the men were arrested. Officers also discovered paperwork on board the yacht which showed that it had been registered and insured using false details.

Kurtoglu claimed in his defence that after he purchased the yacht, he planned to hold his 50th birthday party on board. He wanted to employ the Ukrainians as crew for the event, so had sailed from Barfleur to the middle of the channel to assess their seafaring abilities. He then claimed that a huge storm had moved in and the yacht had also developed engine problems. Becoming frightened, he said the Ukrainian crew turned on him and threatened to throw him overboard unless he brought them to the UK.

This story was disproved by evidence from a marine engineer who examined the engine of the Tazik yacht and concluded that it was running smoothly. The Met Office provided a marine weather report for the day in question which showed that conditions at the time were calm.

Lyn Sari, from CFI, said:

The video on Kruik's phone is indicative of the planning and

organisation that went into this attempt. I cannot think of a reason why you would record such a film and comment approvingly on the lack of security cameras unless your intentions were criminal.

Kurtoglu's unlikely defence was readily undermined by mechanical and meteorological evidence. The reality was that these men were engaged in a quite deliberate attempt to undermine the UK's immigration laws.

My officers work closely with other law enforcement partners, such as the National Crime Agency who provided valuable assistance with this investigation, to bring people smugglers like Kurtoglu and Kruik to justice. Anyone involved in this kind of offending should understand that the consequences are considerable.

The judge also ordered the forfeiture of the yacht, which will now be sold and the proceeds returned to the public purse.

Border Force works closely with the marine community to gather intelligence about threats to the UK's coastline.

Where people witness suspicious activity near the coastline and require immediate assistance, they should call 999. If an emergency response is not required, the activity should be reported to local police on 101, or anonymously to Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111.