

France

Former Sarkozy minister cleared of rape and sexual assault

Mayor of Draveil Georges Tron was resigned from cabinet post in 2011 following allegations

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Georges Tron leaves Bobigny courthouse. The court ruled there was ‘no evidence of coercion’. Photograph: Geoffroy van der Hasselt/AFP/Getty Images

A former French minister accused of the rape and sexual assault of two women at the town hall where he is mayor was cleared of the charges on Thursday.

Georges Tron was forced to resign from his government post seven years ago after the allegations emerged.

His deputy, Brigitte Gruel, accused of aiding and abetting the mayor, was also cleared.

The public prosecutor had called for prison sentences after hearing evidence from two women, Virginie Ettel and Eva Loubrieu, who were

former town hall workers. They claimed Tron made them submit to foot massages that turned into rape and sexual assault.

In its judgment the court, made up of three magistrates and six jurors, declared it “proven” that there had been a highly charged sexual atmosphere at the Draveil town hall, but ruled that “no evidence of coercion” had been produced.

Tron and Gruel had vehemently denied all the charges; Tron claimed he was “totally innocent” and the case was a plot by far-right political opponents.

Gruel told the court: “I’ve lived this horror for seven years. Me and my family have been through hell. These accusations are totally false. I’m the victim of professional and personal revenge and jealousy.”

The case made headlines in 2011 shortly after the then president, Nicolas Sarkozy, appointed Tron to a junior cabinet post. The two women came forward after the head of the International Monetary Fund at the time, Dominique Strauss-Kahn, was arrested in New York over the alleged attempted rape of a hotel worker in May 2011. The women who accused Tron said Strauss-Kahn’s arrest had given them the courage to speak out.

After losing his government job, Tron ran again for mayor of Draveil. He was re-elected despite the allegations and ongoing case against him.

During the four-week trial Tron insisted the “resentment” of the former town hall workers had been exploited by far-right political rivals.

Advocate General Frédéric Bernardo, told the court Tron had “abused his power over his subordinates” then tried to “politicise a purely sexual affair”.

“There was an omerta around him ... if someone was no longer part of the group they were sidelined. There were many victims in all that. He was a mayor who had a good image of being capable of doing anything,” Bernardo, said.

He said the two victims had been “turned into objects”.

“Faced with their suffering the response was to make a case and claims against them. There was a perverse mechanism at work in this case.”

Tron’s lawyer, Antoine Vey, denounced a trial based on “rumour”. He said the case had been constructed “around myths ... and an accumulation of nothing at all”.

Tron, who has described himself as a trained reflexologist, was known as the “Chinese masseur” among MPs in the Assemblée Nationale.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/nov/15/mayor-of-draveil-georges-tron-former-sarkozy-minister-cleared-rape-sexual-assault>