

Russian Court Gives Man Two-Year Sentence for Social Media Posts on Ukraine

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Kirill Silivonchik

A Russian court has sentenced a Belarusian citizen to two years behind bars for reportedly supporting “terrorism” by commenting on the crisis in Ukraine on his social networking page, his lawyer said.

Kirill Silivonchik, a 22-year-old native of the Belarusian region of Gomel who was working in Russia, was found guilty of the “public justification of terrorism or public appeals for it” by the Moscow District Court Martial earlier this month, Belarus' Nasha Niva news portal reported Tuesday.

The April 9 court verdict said Silivonchik posted a series of images and texts on his social media page in October 2014, “in which he expressed his attitude toward events in Ukraine,

called for 'killing Moskals [Russians], 'returning Crimea to Ukraine' and so on," Grani.ru reported.

"One image shows a Ukrainian soldier tearing up the Russian flag and trampling on the national emblem," the verdict passed earlier this month said, according to the report.

No picture matching that description seemed available on Silivonchik's personal page on VKontakte, Russia's main social network. The page did, however, contain a drawing of a Ukrainian soldier tying into a knot the necks of a two-headed eagle — similar to the bird featured on Russia's national emblem — with a boot planted on its tail, which bore the colors of the Russian flag.

Online users have disputed the court's description of Silivonchik's online texts, with Belarussian news portal 1863x.com sharing a screenshot of a post in which he reportedly said that Ukrainians "haven't kicked Moskals enough," rather than calling for killing anybody.

Silivonchik pleaded guilty to the charges to speed up the trial and become eligible for a minimum sentence, Nasha Niva reported.

His guilty plea may have also been prompted by his lawyer's assurances that Silivonchik would be freed under an amnesty planned to mark the 70th anniversary of the Soviet victory over Nazi Germany in World War II, which Russia celebrates on May 9, Belarussian activist Pavel Yukhnevich told Grani.ru.

A presidential amnesty bill, submitted to the State Duma and published by the Kremlin this month, proposes to grant freedom to various groups of prisoners, including war veterans, single parents of young children, convicts who have less than one year remaining of their sentences, and people with severe disabilities.

Those convicted on the "support for terrorism" charge on which Silivonchik was sentenced "may not be amnestied" under the bill, Grani.ru reported.

Silivonchik remains jailed in Nizhny Novgorod, ahead of being transferred to a prison colony where he would serve out his term, the report said.

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