

Russian Investigative Committee Opens Criminal Case Against Putin Accuser

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Anton Gerashchenko

Russia's Investigative Committee has opened a criminal case on charges of appeals for "terrorism" against an adviser to Ukraine's interior minister for his calls to publicize information about the "crimes" of Russian President Vladimir Putin in Ukraine and Syria.

Anton Gerashchenko, an adviser to Ukraine's Interior Minister Arsen Avakov, is under investigation for "public calls for committing acts of terrorism or the public justification of terrorism," the Russian agency's spokesman Vladimir Markin said in a statement Wednesday.

Gerashchenko's crime, according to Russian investigators, was to "publish on his page on a social networks, where he publicly called for users to disclose the information known to them about Russian military servicemen involved in the operation in Syria," Markin said.

"By expressing such an idea, Gerashchenko has intentionally defied the countries that are incessantly fighting the terrorist threat," he said.

Russia claims that its air strikes in Syria against opponents of President Bashar Assad are targeting Islamic State militants and other "terrorists." But U.S. officials say most of the strikes, which started on Sept. 30, target Western-backed opponents of Assad in an effort to support his regime.

Gerashchenko, who emerged as a vocal critic of Putin following Russia's annexation of Crimea last year and support for pro-Moscow separatists in eastern Ukraine, has scoffed at the Investigative Committee's accusations.

Moscow officials "are lying as usual," Gerashchenko said on his Facebook page Wednesday.

"I have appealed and continue to appeal for recording on the 'Mirotvorets' ('Peacekeeper') website the crimes of terrorist Putin and his henchmen against the Ukrainian and Syrian people, and against others on whose blood Putin is trying in vain to build a new evil empire," Gerashchenko said.

Gerashchenko has been promoting the Mirotvorets website, 4army.com.ua, which publishes the names and photographs of Russian "mercenaries" and their Ukrainian "collaborators."

So far, project organizers have gathered data on some 9,000 "militants," leading to the arrest of about 150 "terrorists" who tried to cross the Ukrainian border back into Russia, according to the website.

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