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Lawyers Ask Human Rights Court to Rule on Russia's Anti-Nazi Laws

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Denis Abramov / Vedomosti

The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) is set to rule on whether Russia's ban on Nazi symbols violates free speech laws.

Judges will decide whether two Russian men were unfairly jailed for posting pictures featuring the swastika online, the Kommersant newspaper reported Wednesday.

Ivan Gorodiski, from the Russian region of Penza, and Alexei Mandrigel, from the Russian region of Krasnodar, were both given prison sentences after they shared a photo collage with images of Russian President Vladimir Putin alongside Nazi imagery.

The pair were jailed for seven and ten days respectively.

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Lawyers from Russian human rights group Angora are filing the case. They believe current laws unfairly punish citizens who use the swastika but don't want to promote fascism.

The organization claims that the law could even be used to punish those who displayed historical pictures of Nazi Germany, Kommersant reported.

Changes to Russian law in 2014 made it an offense to display any form of Nazi symbol, regardless of intent.

The decision has seen prosecutions soar from 480 cases in 2013 to 1,800 in 2016, according to Agora data from Russia's Supreme Court.

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