

Russia Accuses Lithuania of 'Provocative' Act After Former Soviet Official Convicted

By [Reuters](#)

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Dmitry Yazov [Yuri Mashkov / TASS](#)

Russia's Foreign Ministry on Thursday accused Lithuania of an unfriendly and provocative act, a day after a Lithuanian court found a former Soviet Defense Minister guilty of war crimes for his role in a 1991 crackdown in Lithuania.

A Vilnius court sentenced Dmitry Yazov, 94, in absentia to 10 years in prison. He was the highest-ranking person on a list of 67 former military officials and army officers being sentenced after the three-year trial.

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"We characterize the given actions as extremely unfriendly and essentially provocative, demonstrating the bias and political motivation of this disgraceful judgment," Russia's Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

It accused the court of ignoring witness testimony and not allowing Russian diplomats to attend the trial.

"The attempts by the authorities to rig obvious facts using legal manipulations simply reflect the deconstructive course of the current Lithuanian leadership with regard to Russia," the Foreign Ministry said.

Lithuania became the first Soviet republic in March 1990 to declare independence from Moscow. The Soviet Union was formally dissolved in December 1991.

Fourteen civilians were killed by the Soviet army in January 1991, prosecutors say, all but one of them during the storming of the state television headquarters and TV tower by Soviet paratroopers. More than 700 others were wounded.

Russia refused to cooperate with the trial, calling it illegal and in violation of the fundamental principles of justice, and former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev, 88, declined to testify.

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