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Russian Court to Review Actor's Jailing After Public Outcry

By Reuters

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Sergei Fadeichev / TASS

A Moscow court said on Thursday that it would review the jailing of an actor over an opposition protest after state prosecutors formally requested that he be released on bail following a public outcry over his conviction.

Pavel Ustinov, 23, was sentenced on Monday to three and a half years in jail for dislocating a police officer's shoulder during his detention at an Aug. 3 rally in Moscow. He denied the charges and said he had not taken part in the protest.

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The Moscow court said it would rule on a request from prosecutors on Friday, meaning that

Ustinov could be freed from custody this week.

In addition to requesting Ustinov be released on bail until the court rules on the appeal, the Russian prosecutor general's office late on Thursday also asked the court to change the final verdict and to punish him less severely. Prosecutors still believe he is guilty.

Ustinov is one of several people jailed for about three to four years over a series of political protests that flared this summer when opposition candidates were barred from taking part in a local election in Moscow.

The Kremlin's critics say the convictions are harsh and that they sought to scare off would-be sympathizers from joining the biggest protest movement in the capital for years. The authorities deny the critics' allegations.

Ustinov's case struck a nerve with the public in particular and this week celebrity actors and show business stars took to social media to call for his release.

The conviction was subsequently also condemned by a senior official in the ruling United Russia party as well as a prominent pro-Kremlin state television presenter.

In June, a similar public outcry prompted authorities to drop drug charges against an investigative journalist, Ivan Golunov, whose supporters said he had been framed to punish him for his reporting.

Ustinov is due to appeal his conviction at a court hearing on Monday.

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