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No Plea Bargain in Treason Case, Russian Ex-Journalist Safronov Says in Since-Deleted Column

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Ivan Safronov faces up to 20 years in prison if found guilty of treason, charges he denies. **Moskva News Agency**

Jailed former journalist Ivan Safronov has said he will not make a plea bargain with Russian authorities over what he argues is an unfounded investigation into treason.

Safronov's lawyers said last month that investigators had pressured him to take a plea deal in exchange for a phone call to his mother on her birthday, an offer the ex-journalist rejected.

"I've made my choice: No deals whatsoever," Safronov wrote Friday in an op-ed for Vedomosti, one of the two newspapers where he was a top defense reporter before changing careers.

The column was deleted from Vedomosti's website hours later but can still be accessed via Google cache.

Safronov had been two months into his new job as an adviser to Russian space agency chief Dmitry Rogozin when he was detained in a special operation on July 7, 2020.

Safronov, 31, faces up to 20 years in prison if found guilty of treason, charges which he denies.

Though case materials are classified, investigators allege that NATO recruited Safronov in 2012 and that in 2017 he passed secret information on Russia's military activities in the Middle East and cooperation with African countries to Czech intelligence.

Safronov's lawyers have accused investigators of failing to communicate the specific crime that he has committed.

In Friday's Vedomosti column, Safronov argued that his trial is part of an "assembly line" of dozens of treason cases against ordinary Russians — often with the aim of securing testimony against others — investigated every year. He said espionage cases are on the rise in Russia because "the system requires more and more new cases" but real spies are either under diplomatic immunity or difficult to catch.

"That's why espionage cases are growing in Russia: It's easier to capture your own people so that others are afraid. But it's not foreigners who are afraid, but our own people," Safronov wrote.

"The assembly line works nonstop and it doesn't matter who you are: An official, a housewife, a saleswoman, a journalist or a scientist" who had communicated with foreign nationals through work or everyday life, he said.

A Moscow court this month extended Safronov's pre-trial detention to Oct. 7.

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