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Popular Standup Comic Jailed for Insulting Russians – Reports

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Idrak Mirzalizade said he has received multiple online threats and been physically assaulted over the joke. **Idrak / YouTube.com**

A Moscow court has jailed a popular standup comic for inciting hatred in a joke it ruled to be denigrating to ethnic Russians, media reported Monday.

Idrak Mirzalizade, who is Azerbaijani but holds a Belarusian passport, made the offending joke on a popular YouTube show this spring, where he told a story about non-Slavs facing discrimination when trying to rent apartments in Moscow.

After saying he and his brother had found a feces-stained mattress in an apartment whose previous tenants were ethnic Russians, Mirzalizade made the offhand remark that "Apparently, Russians smear s*** on themselves and go to sleep" — a comment that sparked uproar on social media and state-run television.

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Prosecutors had in late July summoned Mirzalizade and said that linguistic experts found "signs of humiliation of a group of persons singled out on a national basis, as well as propaganda of its inferiority."

The Russian capital's Tagansky district court found Mirzalizade guilty and sentenced him to 10 days of administrative arrest, the Moskva news agency reported, citing his lawyer. The charges are punishable by a maximum sentence of 15 days.

"I plead not guilty, but I apologize and repent to the people who saw and misinterpreted me," Mirzalizade said in court, according to a video shared by the news agency.

"I had no intention to offend, especially since I was participating in a comedy performance," he continued. "But I repent to those who saw the bits taken out of context since it sounded inappropriate to them, and I understand their feelings."

Mirzalizade took to social media in June to report that he had received multiple online threats and been physically assaulted in central Moscow over the joke.

The comic is the latest pop culture figure to face court cases over content that authorities rule to be illegal.

Rapper Morgenshtern was in June fined over what authorities deemed to be "drug propaganda" in his songs. Popular YouTuber and journalist Yury Dud has been accused of the same infractions in his interviews with Morgenshtern and blogger Ivangai.

Another YouTuber with millions of subscribers, Yury Khovansky, was arrested over a leaked performance mocking the deadly 2002 Moscow theater hostage crisis.

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