

Crimean Court Sentences Journalist to 6 Years in Prison

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Russian Federal Security Service / TASS

A court in Russia-annexed Crimea has sentenced a freelance journalist to six years in prison in a case that he and press freedom advocates have condemned as fabricated, [Interfax reported](#) Wednesday.

Vladyslav Yesypenko, who freelanced for the U.S.-funded RFE/RL news outlet's Crimean affiliate Krym.realii, was arrested in March 2021 on suspicion of collecting information for Ukrainian intelligence. The Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) said it found an explosive device in Yesypenko's car while he was being detained.

The Simferopol City Court found him guilty of illegal possession and transport of explosives following a closed trial.

Yesypenko denies the charges. He had initially admitted to the charges against him, but later said he was tortured and beaten into confessing while being held at a Simferopol pre-trial detention center.

Russian authorities "want to discredit the work of freelance journalists who really want to show the things that really happen in Crimea," he [said](#) in court Tuesday.

Prosecutors had asked the court to sentence Yesypenko to 11 years in prison.

The verdict has not yet entered into force and the defense intends to appeal it, Interfax reported.

A dual citizen of Russia and Ukraine, Yesypenko reported on social and environmental issues on the Black Sea peninsula, which Russia annexed from Ukraine in 2014 in a move not recognized by the international community.

His sentencing comes amid the worst tensions between Russia and the West since the end of the Cold War, with the United States and its allies warning that the 100,000 Russian troops stationed near Ukraine and in Crimea could mount an invasion against Kyiv.

"The accusations against the Ukrainian citizen [Yesypenko] are trumped up and politically motivated," Ukrainian human rights ombudswoman Lyudmyla Denisova said in the wake of the trial.

Press freedom advocates have called for Yesypenko's immediate release due to a lack of evidence in his case, while RFE/RL president Jamie Fly has described the case as a "travesty."

"Vladyslav needs to be returned home to his wife and daughter immediately," Fly added.

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