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Russia Orders Blogger's Arrest in Absentia Over Ukraine Videos

By AFP

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Michael Nacke. **Michael Nacke / YouTube**

A Moscow court on Tuesday ordered the arrests in absentia of Russian bloggers Michael Nacke and Veronika Belotserkovskaya, accusing them of discrediting the army and its offensive in Ukraine.

Nacke, a 28-year-old Kremlin critic, hosts a YouTube channel with more than 700,000 subscribers where he discusses Russia's military actions in Ukraine.

A Russian citizen, he is currently in Lithuania, he told AFP, after a Moscow court ordered his detention.

Nacke said he was accused of "calling a war a war" and prosecuted over his updates about the course of Russia's military campaign in Ukraine on his YouTube channel.

He risks up to 10 years in prison if he returns to Russia, he said.

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He said his arrest was "part of the massive pressure on journalists and analysts who objectively describe the course of the current war."

"The goal of the Kremlin and (President Vladimir) Putin personally is to silence everyone," he said.

He said he would continue with his reports.

"There's nothing more important right now," he said.

Nacke creates videos with Ruslan Leviev, the founder of the Conflict Intelligence Team, a team of bloggers investigating the Russian military.

A court has separately ordered the arrest of Leviev, who has also left Russia.

The court in Moscow on Tuesday also ordered the detention in absentia of Belotserkovskaya, a blogger with more than 900,000 followers on Instagram.

Belotserkovskaya, who lives in France, is a popular culinary blogger who has also published comments about Russia's military campaign in Ukraine.

After Putin sent troops to Ukraine on Feb. 24, Russia introduced prison terms of up to 15 years for spreading information about its military deemed false by the government.

In March, Belotserkovskaya became the first target of the new legislation.

Many critics of Moscow's offensive in Ukraine have been arrested and jailed including opposition politician Vladimir Kara-Murza and artist Aleksandra Skochilenko.

Independent media outlets including Novaya Gazeta have in recent weeks been shut down or suspended operations, and tens of thousands of Russians have left the country.

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