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Russia Issues First Criminal Conviction for Ukraine 'War Fakes'

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SERGEI ILNITSKY / EPA / TASS

A court in Russia's Far East has handed down the country's first guilty verdict for spreading "fake news" on Moscow's war in Ukraine.

Authorities in the Zabaikalsky region accused local resident Pyotr Mylnikov of falsifying unspecified Russian Defense Ministry documents, as well as posting "knowingly false" videos in a social media chat he moderated in March.

Mylnikov, who ran a group called "I Live in Ruins" on Russia's popular social media site VK, reportedly pleaded guilty to the charges.

Officials did not specify what the clips contained, but Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) told local media that Mylnikov "wanted to form a negative attitude toward the Russian army taking part in 'the special operation'" — the Kremlin's preferred term for its ongoing invasion of Ukraine.

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Zabaikalsky's Olovyaninsky District Court Monday issued a fine of 1 million rubles ($16,280), but stopped short of imposing the maximum sentence of three years imprisonment spelled out in Russia's Criminal Code.

Mylnikov was charged with a section of the law relating to the "public dissemination of deliberately false information about the use of the Russian armed forces."

Harsher 10-year prison sentences can be handed down if a court finds that "war fakes" have been spread out of "hatred" or through abuse of power, while 15-year prison sentences can be used if they "cause serious consequences."

Russian authorities have opened at least 53 criminal cases into the dissemination of "fake news" about the Russian army since March.

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