

Russia Jails Crusading Ex-Cop for 5 Years

By [AFP](#)

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Vladimir Vorontsov. **Kirill Zikov / Moskva News Agency**

A Russian court on Tuesday sentenced an activist for police labor rights to five years in prison for extortion and distribution of pornography.

Arrested in May 2020, former policeman Vladimir Vorontsov has been in detention for nearly three years.

Vorontsov, who quit the Moscow police force in 2017 after 13 years, has denied any wrongdoing.

Moscow's Lyublinsky district court on Tuesday found him guilty of extortion, distribution of pornography and insulting a representative of the authorities, said OVD-Info, a human rights monitor tracking political persecution.

He was also stripped of his police rank of major and banned from administering blogs for 10

years.

Supporters say the real reason for Vorontsov's punishment was his Police Ombudsman project, a series of social media accounts dedicated to protecting police officers' rights and exposing abuse by their superiors.

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He set up his project in 2017 while still in the police, driven by a desire to highlight allegations of injustice and violations.

He later established close contacts with opposition activists and following his arrest, chief Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny's team urged police officers to keep up the pressure.

Vorontsov's case at the time sparked a rare public outcry among police, a key pillar of President Vladimir Putin's rule.

Vorontsov was detained in a spectacular fashion.

During an early-morning raid, two commando teams stormed the former policeman's top-floor apartment in southeast Moscow, one abseiling down the high-rise while the other broke down the door.

During a five-hour search, investigators even combed through their four-year-old's toys, socks and underwear, Vorontsov's wife Aleksandra told AFP in 2020.

With no genuinely independent police trade unions in Russia, Vorontsov's initiative was popular, attracting more than half a million followers.

It has exposed allegations of corruption within law enforcement and denounced pressure on officers to fulfil quotas for fines and arrests.

It has also drawn attention to long working hours and suicides in the police force.

Vorontsov has criticized excessive use of force by police and supported claimants' successful legal court cases.

Members of Russia's 750,000-strong police force openly challenged the authorities over Vorontsov's treatment but also on the functioning and methods of the police.

Dozens of serving and former police staff in Russia at the time took to social media to call for Vorontsov's release.

Some posted photos of themselves, others released anonymous pictures of their police hats and protest signs.

Conditions for police in Russia are so hard that dozens of police commit suicide every year, Kremlin critics say.

Supporters believe that Vorontsov has made enemies in the upper echelons of the police force

and several senior officers have lost their jobs due to his activism.

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