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Kremlin Critic Faces 9-Year Jail Term for Spreading 'Fake News' About Bucha

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Ilya Yashin speaking to journalists in Moscow. **Dmitry Serebryakov / AP / TASS**

A Russian prosecutor on Monday requested a nine-year prison sentence for Kremlin critic Ilya Yashin for denouncing Vladimir Putin's military intervention in Ukraine.

According to the prosecution, Yashin, a 39-year-old former Moscow city deputy, was guilty of claiming that the occupying Russian military had been responsible for the massacre of civilians in the Kyiv suburb of Bucha in a discussion about the current Russian government during a YouTube stream in April.

Yashin is being tried under new laws that came into force after February, when fighting intensified in Ukraine, to penalize what the authorities deem to be damaging or false information about the Russian military.

Yashin was one of the few Kremlin critics who refused to leave the country after Putin sent troops into Ukraine on Feb. 24. Since then he has regularly condemned the Kremlin's offensive on his YouTube channel, which has 1.3 million subscribers.

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The former Moscow city councilor is an ally of jailed opposition leader Alexei Navalny and was close to Boris Nemtsov, an opposition politician assassinated near the Kremlin in 2015.

In a court hearing last month, Yashin flashed a peace sign and said he loved Russia and that he was prepared to "pay with my freedom" to remain in the country.

Prosecutors in November argued that Yashin had "inflicted considerable damage to Russia" and "increased political tensions" when Russian troops were fighting in Ukraine.

"This is pure political performance, it has nothing to do with the law," Russian journalist Vasily Polonsky wrote on Telegram, suggesting that people should listen to The Beatles' "Back in the U.S.S.R." while listening to the prosecutor's speech.

AFP contributed reporting

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