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Russia Threatens War Movie Star With Criminal Case Over Ukraine Criticism

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Actor Artur Smolyaninov. **Artyom Geodakyan / TASS**

An exiled Russian war movie star faces criminal charges over his criticism of Russia's military campaign in Ukraine, authorities announced Monday.

Actor Artur Smolyaninov "made a series of statements against Russia in an interview to a Western publication," Russia's Investigative Committee, which probes major crimes, said in a short statement.

It did not identify the publication or specify which charges Smolyaninov faces.

But in an interview published Friday with the independent Novaya Gazeta Europe news website, Smolyaninov said: "If I went to this war, then only on the side of Ukraine.

"It's not even on the side of Ukraine for me: It's on the side of my brothers who have been attacked by my other brothers for nothing," he told Novaya Gazeta Europe, which is blocked inside Russia.

Embed:

> Бастрыкин поручил возбудить уголовное дело против актера Артура Смольянинова.
>
> Ранее в интервью «Новой газете Европа» Смольянинов заявил, что если бы ему пришлось участвовать в войне, то он бы воевал на стороне ВСУ.
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> Видео: «Новая газета Европа» pic.twitter.com/HhaEXIoseB
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> — Republic (@Republic_Mag) January 9, 2023

The actor's pro-Ukraine comments raised a storm among Russian lawmakers, a number of whom have called on investigative authorities to pursue criminal charges against him.

Smolyaninov, 39, rose to popularity in Russia for his portrayal of a Soviet soldier during the Afghan war in director Fyodor Bondarchuk's 2005 box office hit "The 9th Company."

President Vladimir Putin, who ordered Russian troops to invade Ukraine in February 2022, had praised the movie for being "close to life."

On Monday, Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the Kremlin "doesn't think anything good about this actor's words."

Smolyaninov was dropped from a number of state-funded film projects in Russia after voicing his opposition to the invasion of Ukraine in April 2022.

He was charged with discrediting the Russian army in October 2022 for anti-war remarks made in an unspecified interview and fined 30,000 rubles ($430).

He has since then lived in European Union and NATO member Latvia.

In his Novaya Gazeta Europe interview, Smolyaninov said he would "no doubt" shoot his "The 9th Company" co-star who was reportedly deployed with the Russian military in Ukraine.

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