

St. Petersburg Man Given 5 Years for Comments Made on Archeology Forum

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Oleg Belousov zaks.ru

A St. Petersburg court has sentenced a 54-year-old man to five-and-a-half years in prison for spreading “fakes” about the Russian army and for “calling for extremist activities,” local news website Fontanka [reported](#) on Wednesday.

The case is the first time strict war censorship laws have been used in Russia's second city since their introduction last year, though the sentence handed down by the court was far more lenient than the nine-and-a-half years requested by the state prosecutor.

Oleg Belousov was arrested in June after he was [reported](#) to the authorities for critical comments he made about the war in Ukraine on social media platform Vkontakte.

“Putin is traitor number one, who plundered the country and is a war criminal. And who started these murders? Putler. Can the Russian-speaking cities of Kharkiv and Mariupol be demolished?” wrote Belousov in an online forum for hobby archeologists.

Related article: [Russia Issues First Criminal Conviction for Ukraine 'War Fakes'](#)

During his trial, Belousov pleaded not guilty and accused police investigators of taking his statements out of context.

“I didn’t call on anyone to do anything, there are no victims, and I didn’t wish harm on anyone,” Belousov said at Wednesday’s hearing.

In addition to the prison sentence, the court added Belousov to a list of terrorists and extremists and banned him from using the internet for the next four years, Fontanka reported.

Online freedom campaign group Setevye Svobodi [said](#) that while Belousov's was the first trial in St. Petersburg since the introduction of the new laws last year, at least seven more people were currently being investigated for similar offenses in the city.

Criminal cases have been [brought](#) against some 505 people for making anti-war statements since the Kremlin launched its invasion of Ukraine last year, according to leading Russian human rights watchdog OVD-Info.

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