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Russian Activist Documenting Losses in Ukraine Says Fled Country

April 05, 2023



Vitaly Votanovsky. **kavkaz-uzel.eu**

A Russian activist who has been documenting Russia's war losses in Ukraine was forced to flee the country after the authorities opened two criminal cases against him, local news outlet Protokol reported Wednesday.

"I've left Russia. I'm starting life anew," the VCHK-OGPU Telegram news channel cited Vitaly Votanovsky as saying of his departure from Russia.

Votanovsky, a military veteran from the southern city of Krasnodar, was one of the first bloggers to discover and publish information about special burial sites for Wagner mercenaries killed in Ukraine to his over 3,000 subscribers on Telegram.

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The activist discovered a total of 1,400 graves of Wagner fighters in the Krasnodar region and

the neighboring republic of Adygeya.

His investigations helped shed light on the identities of soldiers recruited by the notorious mercenary group, including those of foreign citizens.

Materials published by Votanovsky also prompted a public stand-off between Wagner head Yevgeny Prigozhin and local officials in the Krasnodar region last month who looked to prohibit the burial of Wagner fighters at local cemeteries.

Votanovsky has been repeatedly detained for photographing the graves and for speaking out against Russia's invasion of Ukraine. He has also been forced to pay several administrative fines for breaching Russia's wartime censorship laws.

But the latest charges against him, which include repeated "discreditation" of the Russian army and cooperation with an "undesirable" organization, mean the activist could face up to five years in- Russian prison.

Vatanovsky said he is planning to obtain residency in an EU state, but vowed to return to Russia after the change of the regime.

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