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Russia Jails Foreigner 5 Years for 'War Fakes'

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Colombian citizen Alberto Enrique Giraldo Saray. **Photo from personal archive**

One of the first foreign citizens accused of spreading "fake news" about Russia's war in Ukraine has been sentenced to more than five years in prison on the charges, the Kommersant business daily reported Wednesday.

Giraldo Saray Alberto Enrique, a Colombian national who has lived in Russia for 24 years, was detained in the spring of 2022. Kommersant identified Enrique as a manager of a small computer company in Moscow that had a Russian residency permit.

According to Kommersant, investigators accused Enrique of sending 2,300 Spanish-language text messages about the murders of Ukrainian civilians by Russian troops on behalf of an organization with alleged links with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). Authorities placed his unidentified accomplices on the wanted list.

Judge Dmitry Arrant of Moscow's Golovinsky District Court found Enrique guilty and handed him a sentence of five years and two months in a penal colony.

Prosecutors had asked for a six-year sentence, Kommersant said, citing his lawyers.

“Our client received a de-facto minimum sentence, though we still intend to appeal the court decision,” the publication quoted one of Enrique’s lawyers as saying.

The Kremlin has rapidly expanded a crackdown on dissent since the invasion of Ukraine last year, which has not only led to the jailing of opposition politicians, activists and journalists, but also hundreds of civilians opposed to the war.

Enrique’s social media profiles included pro-Russian posts, including claims of rampant Russophobia in Western countries and accusations of Ukraine’s subservience to NATO.

Kommersant reported Wednesday that Enrique had received a letter of thanks for “assistance” from a Russian unit taking part in the military campaign in Ukraine. His defense team had hoped the letter would help its client receive a more lenient sentence.

Investigators also claimed, Kommersant added, that Enrique used the same mobile communications scheme to “imitate” Russia’s alleged interference in the 2020 U.S. presidential elections. Russia’s top investigative body is reportedly considering whether the allegations amount to “crimes against state security.”

Investigators believed Enrique, who also holds a Russian passport, was a flight risk because of a valid U.S. visa.

Enrique reportedly has a college-age son and a teenage daughter from a previous marriage.

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