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Russia Sentences Crimean Performance Artist to 15 Years in Prison

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Artist Bohdan Ziza. **Bogdan Ziza / instagram**

A court in southern Russia on Tuesday sentenced a Crimean performance artist to 15 years in a penal colony, the Ukrainian Telegram channel Grati reported.

Bohdan Ziza was arrested in May 2022 after he splashed paint in the colors of the Ukrainian flag on the door of the Yevpatoria city administration building in Russian-annexed Crimea. He also unsuccessfully attempted to set the entrance to the building on fire with a Molotov cocktail.

The artist recorded a video of the stunt along with an anti-war speech calling on people to protest against Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Ziza then posted the call to protest on his social media pages.

Hours after his detention on May 19 a clip in which Ziza was shown apologizing for his actions aired on a local TV channel. The artist later confirmed that the video was filmed under duress.

Russian authorities accused Ziza of committing an act of terrorism and said they found threats and calls for committing other attacks in the video he posted on social media.

The Russian military court in Rostov-on-Don found him guilty and sentenced him to 15 years.

Prosecutors had requested an 18-year sentence for Ziza.

“Am I sorry for what I have done? I am sorry that I overdid it and my actions gave grounds for a terrorist case... But otherwise I acted according to my consciousness,” Grati cited Ziza as saying in his final address to the court on Monday.

“My act was a cry from the heart and consciousness directed at those who, just like I am, were scared but did not and do not want this war...It is better to be imprisoned with a clear consciousness than to be a silent cattle animal on the loose.”

In his final word in court, Ziza also vowed to launch a hunger strike on June 10 to demand that authorities strip him of his Russian citizenship and free Ukrainian political prisoners held in Russia.

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