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Russian Journalist Safronov Loses Final Appeal of 22-Year Treason Sentence

August 02, 2023



Ivan Safronov **Valery Sharifulin / TASS**

Russia's Supreme Court has upheld journalist Ivan Safronov's 22-year prison sentence for treason, a group of his supporters said Wednesday.

Safronov, 33, was found guilty in September 2022 of collecting secret information about the Russian military and handing it to Czech spies as a defense reporter for the Russian newspapers Kommersant and Vedomosti.

Safronov lost his final appeal on Wednesday at a Supreme Court hearing held behind closed doors, the "FreeSafronov!" group wrote on the Telegram messaging app.

The former journalist did not attend the hearing either in person or by video link for unexplained reasons, it added.

Safronov has been serving his 22-year sentence at a Siberian maximum-security prison since early 2023.

He and his supporters deny the treason accusations, claiming the criminal prosecution is revenge for his reporting on Russia's sale of fighter jets to Egypt that triggered a diplomatic scandal. Russian officials have insisted the case was not related to Safronov's journalistic work.

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Safronov was a reporter for the business daily Kommersant from 2010 to 2019, when he was forced to quit following an article about a top Russian official. His departure prompted the entire politics desk to walk out in protest of his treatment.

He went on to work as a reporter for Vedomosti before taking a job as a public communications adviser to the head of state space agency Roscosmos in 2020.

Leading Russian rights group Memorial listed Safronov as a political prisoner following his arrest in 2020.

His is the first treason case against a Russian journalist since 2001, when Russia sentenced military journalist Grigory Pasko, who had exposed nuclear waste dumping by the Navy, to four years in prison.

Two of Safronov's lawyers have fled Russia under threat of criminal prosecution and a third lawyer was arrested on charges of spreading "fake news" about the Russian military.

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