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Russian Political Activist Katz Jailed 8 Years in Absentia for Spreading 'War Fakes'

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Maxim Katz. **Maxim Katz / Facebook**

Exiled Russian political activist Maxim Katz has been sentenced to eight years in prison in absentia for spreading "fake news" about the Russian military's actions in Ukraine, the independent news website Mediazona reported Thursday.

Katz, 38, is well-known for his YouTube channel, where he discusses and criticizes Russia's military actions in Ukraine to his more than 1.8 million subscribers.

Last year, Russia's Interior Ministry placed him on the federal wanted list in October 2022. He currently resides in Israel.

Investigators said Katz "falsely" accused the Russian forces of executing Ukrainian civilians in the Kyiv suburb of Bucha in an April 2022 YouTube video that has been viewed 2.3 million times.

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Moscow's Basmanny District Court found Katz guilty, handing him an eight-year prison sentence and a four-year ban on running websites, according to a Mediazona journalist who attended the hearing.

Prosecutors had asked the court on Wednesday to sentence Katz to 10 years in a medium security prison.

The prosecution's witness told the court that Katz presented "weak arguments," according to Mediazona.

"He didn't persuade me," said the witness, Leonid Svyatodukh, who is an army veteran.

"How can you speak of mass [crimes] if there was nothing but destroyed cities [in Katz's video]?" Svyatodukh was quoted as saying.

Shortly after the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Russia criminalized the spread of information about Russia's military that deviated from the Kremlin's narrative of the war.

The law also introduced jail terms of up to 15 years for the publication of "knowingly false information" about the Russian military.

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