The Moscow Times
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Russia Jails Exiled War Critics 11 Years in Absentia Over 'Fakes'

August 28, 2023



Michael Naki (left) and Ruslan Leviev (right). **@MackNack / YouTube**

A Russian court has handed 11-year prison sentences to exiled anti-war journalists Ruslan Leviev and Michael Nacke, who were found guilty of spreading "war fakes," the Ostorozhno Novosti news channel reported Tuesday.

Nacke, a 29-year-old former radio personality of the now-disbanded Ekho Moskvy station, hosts a YouTube channel with 1.4 million subscribers, where he publishes daily reports on Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Leviev, whose real name is Ruslan Karpuk, is the co-founder of the independent war monitor Conflict Intelligence Team (CIT), which conducts open-source investigations of the Russian military.

Authorities accuse Nacke and Leviev of "fabricating evidence" and being motivated by political hatred in a March 2022 video report on Russian attacks in Ukraine.

Related article: Russia Labels War Monitor Conflict Intelligence Team 'Undesirable'

State prosecutors on Monday had requested Moscow's Basmanny District Court to sentence Nacke and Leviev to 13 years in prison, according to the independent Mediazona news outlet.

Tuesday's sentencing also bans both journalists from "uploading materials on the internet for five years."

A Moscow court had ordered Nacke and Leviev's arrests in absentia in May 2022. Both are currently living outside Russia.

Mediazona said that the prosecution's key witness is a resident of Russian-occupied eastern Ukraine with a last name Sachkov, who introduced himself as an "internet user" in court.

Sachkov, who is currently fighting on Russia's side in Ukraine, had reportedly testified that Nacke and Leviev's video first caused "outrage about the actions of the Russian Armed Forces."

Sachkov then determined that Nacke and Leviev spread false information after he watched Russia's Defense Ministry briefings, Mediazona said.

After President Vladimir Putin sent troops to Ukraine on Feb. 24, 2022, Russia introduced prison terms of up to 15 years for spreading "false" information about its military.

Russia's Prosecutor General's Office labeled CIT an "undesirable organization" earlier this month, banning its work in Russia and criminalizing any engagement with its content.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2023/08/28/russia-jails-exiled-war-critics-11-years-in-absentia-over-fakes-a82269