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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Russian Court Fines Memorial Co-Chair for 'Discrediting' Army

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Memorial co-chair Oleg Orlov in court Wednesday. **Yuri Kochetkov / EPA / TASS**

A Russian court on Wednesday fined veteran rights campaigner Oleg Orlov 150,000 rubles ($1,500) for “discrediting” the Russian Armed Forces.

Orlov, who serves as co-chair of the Memorial human rights group, was found guilty of repeatedly “discrediting” Russia's military over his public opposition to the war in Ukraine.

Under wartime censorship laws, the charges can carry up to five years in prison.

But instead of jail time, state prosecutors sought to only fine the 70-year-old due to mitigating circumstances, including his old age and testimony by his supporters.

Orlov said he would appeal Wednesday's court verdict, which he called "illegal" and "unjust."

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Russian prosecutors had requested a fine of 250,000 rubles ($2,500), as well as a mental health assessment over Orlov's "heightened sense of justice, lack of self-preservation instincts and posturing before citizens."

Orlov, who was among a group of winners of the 2022 Nobel Peace Prize, slammed the requested mental health assessment as a discredited Soviet-era practice.

The human rights campaigner was accompanied at his trial by Dmitry Muratov, the editor of Novaya Gazeta and himself a winner of the 2021 Nobel Peace Prize.

Memorial established itself as a key pillar of Russia's civil society by preserving the memory of victims of Soviet-era repression and campaigning against rights violations.

Russian authorities officially dissolved Memorial in 2021, just months before President Vladimir Putin ordered his troops to Ukraine.

In March, police raids targeted Orlov and seven other members of Memorial over accusations that the group was engaged in the "rehabilitation of nazism."

Orlov said the allegations were designed to intimidate other activists.

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