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Russia Jails Activist Pyotr Verzilov 8.5 Years in Absentia for 'War Fakes'

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Pyotr Verzilov. **Peter Verzilov / Instagram**

A Moscow court has sentenced exiled Russian-Canadian activist Pyotr Verzilov to more than eight years of prison in absentia for spreading "war fakes," the Mediazona news website reported Friday.

Moscow's Basmanny District Court found Verzilov, who is currently residing outside Russia, guilty of spreading "deliberately false" information about the Russian Armed Forces.

He was handed an eight-and-a-half years prison sentence in absentia as well as a four-year ban on using the internet.

Prosecutors had asked the court to sentence Verzilov to nine years in prison, according to Mediazona.

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Verzilov is accused of “causing social tensions” and “misleading citizens” about Moscow's invasion with social media posts about the summary execution of civilians by Russian troops in the Kyiv suburb of Bucha.

The charges of spreading “fake news” about the Russian military carry a maximum sentence of 10 years in prison.

Verzilov, 36, fled Russia in 2020 amid police searches at his and his relatives’ homes after he was charged with not informing the authorities about his Canadian citizenship.

Verzilov was the publisher of Mediazona until October, when he announced his resignation after facing backlash over an interview with popular YouTube personality Yury Dud in which he revealed that he serves as an intelligence officer for the Ukrainian military.

He is also a member of the anti-Kremlin activist group Pussy Riot.

In 2021, Russian authorities placed Verzilov, Mediazona and its editor-in-chief Sergei Smirnov on their list of “foreign agents.”

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