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Putin Pardons Killer in High-Profile Domestic Violence Case, Activist Says

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Vladislav Kanyus at Kemerovo's Leninsky District Court in 2021. **Maria Pimenova / TASS**

Russian President Vladimir Putin has pardoned a man convicted in the murder of his ex-girlfriend after he is believed to have signed up to fight in Ukraine, women's rights activist Alyona Popova said Wednesday.

Last summer, Vladislav Kanyus was sentenced to 17 years in a maximum-security prison over the 2020 murder of Vera Pekhteleva in the Siberian city of Kemerovo.

Activist Popova said prison authorities had confirmed Kanyus' transfer to southern Russia's Rostov region, which borders Ukraine, after Pekhteleva's mother discovered photographs of him dressed in a military uniform and holding a weapon.

Popova posted a letter from the Russian Prosecutor General's Office dated Nov. 3, in which Kanyus was said to have been pardoned and had his conviction expunged by presidential decree on April 27.

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Pekhteleva's father later said prison bailiffs had informed him that Kanyus was also freed from paying 4 million rubles ($44,500) in damages to her family, according to Russia's news magazine Sobesednik.

"One-and-a-half million for each parent, 1 million to her uncle, and another 200,000 rubles to the state for court-appointed lawyers. The presidential decree also relieved him of these obligations," Pekhteleva's father told the publication.

Putin said in June that he was "signing pardon decrees" for prisoners fighting in Russia's war against Ukraine, claiming the recidivism rate among them was below 1%.

Days later Putin signed a law allowing convicts to join the country's military, except for those who have committed serious crimes.

In 2017, Russia decriminalized first-time domestic violence offenses, a move activists argue enables abusers and strengthens the culture of impunity around these crimes.

Efforts to pass new legislation to protect women stalled with the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in early 2020.

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