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Russian Court Sentences Ukrainian Soldier to 19 Years in Prison

November 08, 2023



Anton Cherednik. **Eric Romanenko / TASS**

A military court in southern Russia's Rostov-on-Don on Wednesday sentenced a Ukrainian soldier to 19 years in prison for allegedly shooting a civilian he suspected of being a Russian infiltrator in Mariupol last March.

Russia's Southern District Military Court said Anton Cherednik stopped a pair of civilians while on patrol in the southern port city of Mariupol, telling them to lie on the ground and demand that they say the Ukrainian word "palianytsia," a language test sometimes used by Ukrainian servicemen to identify Russian soldiers or saboteurs.

When one of the civilians Cherednik had stopped pronounced the word incorrectly, he shot and killed them, the court said.

The Ukrainian serviceman was found guilty of "murder," trying to "violently seize power," the "use of prohibited means and methods of warfare" and committing a "terrorist act."

In interrogations, Cherednik acknowledged shooting the civilian but said it was because he had flinched, as though he was going to pull out a weapon, not because he had incorrectly pronounced the Ukrainian word, Russian media reported.

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The Ukrainian serviceman pled guilty to murder but rejected the other charges against him.

His court-appointed lawyer said he would appeal the sentencing on those charges.

Cherednik was captured during the siege of Mariupol, which was taken over by Russian forces in May 2022 following months of brutal fighting that left the city largely destroyed.

He was the first Ukrainian soldier to be accused of war crimes by Russia.

Cherednik will spend three years in prison before being transferred to a maximum-security penal colony, where he will serve the remaining 16 years of his sentence.

He is currently located in a pre-trial detention center in the southern Rostov region, where he has been denied access to his family and independent lawyers.

At least 42 other Ukrainian soldiers face similar charges by the court, according to the U.S.-funded Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty news outlet.

AFP contributed to this reporting.

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