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Russia Seeks 5-Year Prison Term for Ex-Rebel Leader Girkin

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Igor Girkin. **Sergei Kiselev / Moskva News Agency**

Russian authorities are seeking to jail Russian army veteran and ex-security officer Igor Girkin for almost five years on extremism charges, his wife said Thursday.

Public court records show that Girkin, 53, was charged with "public incitement of extremist activity," which is punishable by up to five years in prison.

"The prosecutor requested four years and 11 months in a general security prison colony for Igor Strelkov," his wife Miroslava Reginskaya said on the messaging app Telegram, referring to her husband by his nom-de-guerre, which means "shooter."

"That's one month less than the maximum possible punishment under the [criminal] article he's charged with," she added.

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The hardline nationalist Girkin was instrumental in sparking hostilities in 2014 between separatist forces in eastern Ukraine and Kyiv.

He ran afoul of Moscow and was detained after the Wagner mercenary group — a key force fighting in Ukraine for the Kremlin — tried to topple Russia's military leadership in June.

Girkin was detained the following month after he made a series of posts on social media criticizing Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Officials told The Moscow Times on condition of anonymity at the time that the Kremlin "got f***ing annoyed" with Girkin.

While still in pre-trial detention, the army veteran announced his bid to run for president in Russia's March election, though his supporters admit he has no chance of having his candidacy approved.

In November 2022, a Dutch court sentenced Girkin in absentia to life in prison over the 2014 downing of Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 in eastern Ukraine, which killed 298 people.

AFP contributed reporting.

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