The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Russia Jails Disabled Pilot 8 Years for Seeking to Join Ukraine Army

January 19, 2024



Igor Pokusin. **Mikhail Afanasiev / YouTube**

A Siberian court has sentenced a disabled and retired airline pilot to more than eight years in prison on charges of trying to join the Ukrainian army, the human rights project Perviy Otdel reported Friday.

Igor Pokusin, 61, was born in southwestern Ukraine's port city of Odesa but today lives in Russia's republic of Khakassia, over 3,000 kilometers east of Moscow.

He has openly expressed opposition to Moscow's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, but he maintains that he has never sought to fight for Ukraine.

Perviy Otdel notes that authorities had illegally wiretapped Pokusin's telephone conversations with friends and relatives in Ukraine, in which he discussed providing humanitarian assistance to Ukrainians.

Related article: Russia Jails Man 8 Years for Draft Office Arson Plot

Defense lawyers argue that authorities had used torture to obtain a confession from Pokusin, who has two prosthetic joints and a stent implanted in his heart.

Khakassia's Supreme Court found the retiree guilty of vandalism and "seeking to commit treason," handing him eight years and one month in a maximum security prison.

Pervyi Otdel, which specializes in cases under investigation by the Federal Security Service (FSB), says Pokusin is among the first to be convicted of treason with the purpose of defection.

Prosecutors had requested seven years and one month in prison for him.

Pokusin's vandalism charges relate to a March 2022 incident in which security cameras captured him throwing paint at the pro-war symbol "Z" and writing "Glory to Ukraine" on the wall of a local museum.

Authorities detained him in July 2022 when he tried to flee Russia for neighboring Kazakhstan.

Russia's veteran human rights organization Memorial has recognized Pokusin as a political prisoner.

"We have great doubts that he really tried to join the Ukrainian Armed Forces," Memorial has said. "The age and illness of the former pilot don't allow us to consider his intentions seriously."

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2024/01/19/russia-jails-disabled-pilot-8-years-for-seeking-to-join-ukraine-army-a83777