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Russia Overturns ‘War Fakes’ Sentence Against Activist Pyotr Verzilov

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Pyotr Verzilov. **Igor Ivanko / Moskva News Agency**

A Moscow court has overturned the jail sentence against exiled Russian-Canadian activist Pyotr Verzilov and sent his case for review, the Setevyye Svobody (Network Freedoms) NGO reported on Monday.

In November, Verzilov was sentenced to eight-and-a-half years in prison in absentia for spreading “deliberately false” information about the Russian military.

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

“Today, despite the prosecutor’s objections, the [Moscow] appellate court overturned the verdict and sent the case for a new trial due to procedural violations,” Setevyye Svobody said.

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

The court's press service later confirmed the retrial over "violations of procedural law," noting that the new trial would take place "in a different composition of the court."

Neither Setevyye Svobody nor the court specified the nature of the procedural violations in the first trial against the activist.

Verzilov, who was the publisher of the independent news outlet Mediazona until October, fled Russia in 2020 amid police searches at his and his relatives' homes after he was charged with failing to inform the Russian authorities about his Canadian citizenship.

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

Since the start of Moscow's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Russian authorities have opened at least 297 criminal cases for spreading "fakes" about the war, according to the independent rights watchdog OVD-Info.

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