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Jailed Crimean Ex-Official Asks to Join Russian Army in Ukraine

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Former Crimean Culture Minister Vera (Arina) Novoselskaya. **Sergei Savostyanov / TASS**

A jailed ex-minister in annexed Crimea has asked to join the Russian military and be deployed to Ukraine, a Russian prison watchdog member told state media Monday.

Moscow's Zamoskvoretsky District Court last July sentenced Vera Novoselskaya, Crimea's former Russian-installed culture minister, to 10 years in prison for accepting 25 million rubles ($270,000) in bribes.

Russia's Public Monitoring Commission (PMC) learned of Novoselskaya's request to take part in the offensive in Ukraine during a recent visit to the Moscow prison where she is currently held, according to the state-run RIA Novosti news agency.

"She told us she had applied for service," said PMC member Arslan Khasavov, using the Kremlin-approved term "special military operation" to refer to the invasion.

Russia started recruiting prisoners for the war in Ukraine in the summer of 2022, offering

pardons in exchange for serving six months on the battlefield. The effort was initially spearheaded by the Wagner mercenary group but eventually taken over by the Defense Ministry in early 2023.

Reports in early 2024 said the practice of presidential pardons has since been gradually phased out in favor of conditional release for the duration of the war in Ukraine.

Russian lawmakers last month passed legislation to allow future suspected or convicted criminals to join the military and fight in Ukraine.

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