

# Jailed Russian Nationalist Girkin Seeking to Fight in Eastern Ukraine Despite Ban

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Igor Girkin (Strelkov). **Pelagia Tikhonova / Moskva News Agency**

The wife of jailed Russian nationalist and ex-rebel commander Igor Girkin said Wednesday that her husband is seeking to clear his criminal record and serve at the front line in eastern Ukraine.

Girkin, a convicted war criminal in the West better known by his pseudonym Igor Strelkov, was arrested in July after criticizing Russian President Vladimir Putin for what he described as incompetence in managing the war against Ukraine. In January, the 54-year-old was [sentenced](#) to four years in prison for “inciting extremism.”

His wife Miroslava Reginskaya [said](#) a military unit in the self-proclaimed Donetsk People’s Republic had [approved](#) her husband’s candidacy to serve as a platoon commander in January. She did not specify which military unit agreed to allow him to join its ranks.

“When a country is going through a severe military conflict, it is a crime not to let an officer and a patriot with unique experience and knowledge in the military to the front

line,” Reginskaya said. “But it was precisely this critical mistake that the authorities made by sending Igor Strelkov to prison on political charges of extremism.”

**Related article:** [Ex-Rebel Leader Girkin Sentenced to 4 Years for Extremism After Criticizing War](#)

Under a new recruitment rule that Putin [signed](#) into law last month, individuals convicted of “extremism” and other serious felonies, such as treason, espionage, terrorism and sex crimes, cannot join the military.

Despite that apparent legal setback, Girkin’s lawyer Alexander Molokhov [told](#) the RBC news website that his client still has a “legal opportunity” to avoid the ban if an appeal court tosses out his sentence or if Putin personally pardons him. Girkin’s next appeal hearing is [scheduled](#) for May 15.

The prospects of Girkin’s ability to return to the battlefield and expunge his criminal record were not immediately clear.

Girkin commanded a pro-Russian separatist militia in eastern Ukraine in 2014 and played a key role in the annexation of Crimea. In November 2022, a Dutch court sentenced him in absentia to life in prison over the 2014 downing of Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 in eastern Ukraine, which killed all 298 people on board.

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