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Russia Jails Man 3.5 Years for Urging Friend to Surrender to Ukrainian Army

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FSB

A court in southern Russia's Saratov region has sentenced a man to three and a half years in prison for trying to persuade his friend to surrender to the Ukrainian army, Russian media reported Wednesday.

Federal Security Service (FSB) agents detained 31-year-old farmer Ilya Usoyan in the fall of 2023 on accusations of "repeatedly persuading" a Russian soldier in Ukraine to surrender, according to the FreeNews-Volga news website.

The independent news outlet Mediazona, citing Usoyan's lawyer, reported that the soldier was his friend who months earlier had gone to fight in Ukraine. It was unclear whether the friend was a volunteer, contract or mobilized soldier.

"[Usoyan] learned that his friend was feeling bad [in Ukraine], so to speak, and decided to go to a Ukrainian website to connect them," his lawyer Alexei Balalaykin told Mediazona.

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Citing the regional FSB branch's press service, FeeNews-Volga reported that the Rtishchevsky District Court on Tuesday found Usoyan guilty and sentenced him to three years and six months in a medium-security prison. The farmer pleaded guilty, according to Mediazona.

Balalaykin told the outlet that he also represented Usoyan's soldier friend, but he did not say what the charges against him were.

"He finished military service, returned [and] was acquitted," Mediazona quoted the lawyer as saying.

Mediazona previously reported that a record-setting number of Russian soldiers were put on trial for desertion and other service evasion charges in 2023, with a majority of those tried receiving suspended sentences so they could be sent back to fight in Ukraine.

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