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Russian Priest's Sons Jailed Up to 17.5 Years for Trying to Join Ukraine Army

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SOTAvision

Russia has sentenced three sons of a Russian priest to up to 17.5 years in prison for attempting to join the Ukrainian army, the independent news website Mediazona reported Wednesday.

Ioann Ashcheulov, 24, Alexei Ashcheulov, 20 and Timofey Ashcheulov, 19, were detained in July 2023 while attempting to cross the Russian-Ukrainian border. The brothers, whose father is Igor Ashcheulov, a reclusive 49-year-old priest from the Lipetsk region, deny their guilt.

Moscow's Second Western Military Garrison Court found all three brothers guilty of attempted treason, unlawful attempts to cross the border and participating in a terrorist organization. They were sentenced to between 17 and 17.5 years in maximum-security prison.

Prosecutors had requested 18 years in prison for the three men.

The Ashcheulovs' trial was open to the public despite treason cases typically being held behind closed doors.

Mediazona reported that investigators had uncovered videos filmed by the fourth Ashcheulov brother in which Alexei and Timofey allegedly discussed "defecting to the Ukrainian side" and Alexei expressed "shame" about being a Russian.

FSB border guards also reportedly found emails and Telegram correspondence with a member of the Freedom of Russia Legion, a paramilitary unit of the Ukrainian army comprised of Russian nationals fighting against Moscow's troops. Russia has banned the legion, deeming it a terrorist organization.

The Ashcheulov brothers expressed opposition to Russia's invasion of Ukraine in their closing statements, according to Mediazona.

"I was born in a country that commits crimes in Ukraine. I'm responsible for the actions of my government and many peaceful citizens of Ukraine who died from Russian bombings were absolutely innocent," Ioann was quoted telling the judge.

"I can say that I don't consider myself a traitor to Russia," he added.

The Russian Orthodox Church has been an ardent supporter of the invasion of Ukraine, with Church head Patriarch Kirill referring to it as a "holy war."

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