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Russia ‘Jails’ Journalist Masha Gessen 8 Years in Absentia for Bucha Comments

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Masha Gessen. **Ilya Schurov (CC BY 2.0)**

A Moscow court has sentenced Russian-American journalist Masha Gessen to eight years in prison in absentia for spreading fake information about Russia’s military, the human rights NGO Net Freedoms Project reported Monday.

Moscow’s Basmanny District Court found Gessen, who was born in Russia but lives in the U.S., guilty of "disseminating knowingly false information about Russian military personnel motivated by political hatred."

The criminal case against the journalist was linked to an interview that they gave to popular YouTuber and journalist Yury Dud, in which they spoke out about atrocities committed by the Russian army in the Ukrainian town of Bucha.

Moscow denies the atrocities against civilians in the Ukrainian town of Bucha, instead accusing Kyiv and its Western allies of staging the scenes.

Russia issued an arrest warrant for Gessen in December last year.

In addition to the prison sentence, the Basmanny District Court also ruled to ban the journalist from administering websites for four years, according to the Net Freedoms Project.

Gessen, 57, is a nonbinary and transgender person who is known as one of the most outspoken critics of President Vladimir Putin. They moved to New York in 2013, when Russia started imposing restrictive policies against the LGBTQ+ community.

Russia outlawed disseminating "knowingly false information" about the Russian military shortly after invading Ukraine in February 2022, with punishments ranging from fines to a maximum of 15 years in prison.

More than 130 people have been charged with violating Russia's "army fakes" law as of April this year.

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