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Ex-Wagner Fighter Signs Military Contract After Second Murder Conviction

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Sergei Bobylev / TASS

A convicted murderer in Russia has signed his second contract to fight in Moscow's war on Ukraine just months after receiving a new prison sentence for another murder, the Travmpunkt legal rights group said Monday.

Ivan Rossomakhin had been serving a 14-year sentence for murder when he was first recruited by the Wagner mercenary group in 2022 to fight in Ukraine.

In April, he was sentenced to 22 years in prison for stabbing and raping his elderly neighbor upon returning to his hometown in the Kirov region. An appeals court later extended Rossomakhin's sentence to 23 years.

According to Travmpunkt, which advocates for victims of violent crime, the head of the prison where Rossomakhin was incarcerated informed the victim's family that he had been released

under a law permitting convicted criminals to join the military. Despite his new sentence, the former Wagner fighter reportedly served less than six months before being sent back to the front lines.

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The Telegram news channel Ostorozhno Novosti, which first broke the story of Rossomakhin's latest military contract, said his case likely marks the first time "a recruited prisoner has evaded punishment by being deployed to a war zone for the second time."

The practice of recruiting prisoners for the war in Ukraine was spearheaded by Wagner in 2022. However, Russia's Defense Ministry took over prison recruitment early last year.

Under a law signed by President Vladimir Putin in March, convicted recruits have their remaining sentences suspended for the duration of their military service. They could even have their criminal records expunged if they receive state awards.

In 2023, Russian courts convicted a record number of soldiers for murder amid growing reports of violence committed by servicemen after returning from Ukraine.

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