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Finland Charges Russian Nationalist Fighter With War Crimes Allegedly Committed in Ukraine

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Vojislav Torden, also known as Yan Petrovsky. **Markku Ulander / IMAGO / TASS**

Finnish prosecutors on Thursday pressed charges against Russian nationalist fighter Vojislav Torden, accusing him of having committed war crimes in eastern Ukraine in 2014.

Torden, formerly known as Yan Petrovsky, was detained at Helsinki Airport in July 2023 on suspicion of committing terror crimes in Ukraine. In February, a Finnish court handed him a suspended prison sentence of 40 days on separate charges of violating EU sanctions by entering the country under an alias.

Ukrainian authorities have sought Torden's arrest since 2016, accusing him of helping pro-Moscow rebels in eastern Ukraine as a member of the far-right militant group Rusich between 2014 and 2015. Finland's Supreme Court earlier refused to extradite him to Ukraine.

On Thursday, prosecutors in the Nordic country announced they were charging Torden with

having committed five war crimes in eastern Ukraine. According to them, those crimes led to the deaths of 22 Ukrainian soldiers and the injury of four others.

“In three of the cases Ukrainian soldiers were killed or wounded and the two other charges are about some other kind of breach of the laws of war,” Deputy Prosecutor General Jukka Rappe told AFP.

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Finland’s National Prosecution Authority said in a statement the charges were also related to actions “contrary to the laws of war… and the treatment of wounded and killed enemy soldiers.” Torden has denied the allegations.

According to Finnish state media, the case against Torden marks the first time someone in the Nordic country has been charged with war crimes committed in Ukraine.

Earlier this month, Finland’s National Bureau of Investigation completed a comprehensive probe, which was launched last December, accusing Torden of several war crimes in the fall of 2014 in eastern Ukraine.

That investigation involved close cooperation with Ukrainian prosecutors and security services, as well as Europol, the International Criminal Court and Eurojust — the European Union Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation.

Finland recognizes what is called “universal jurisdiction,” a legal principle allowing it to bring charges on its soil for suspected crimes committed anywhere in the world.

A date for the trial has yet to be set, but Deputy Prosecutor Rappe said he expects it to begin in November.

AFP contributed reporting.

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