

Military Court Reduces Sentence for Theater Director and Playwright Jailed for 'Justifying Terrorism'

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Playwright Svetlana Petriychuk (left) and theater director Yevgenia Berkovich (right). **Alexander Zemlianichenko / AP / TASS**

A military court of appeals reduced the prison sentences for theater director Yevgenia Berkovich and playwright Svetlana Petriychuk on charges of “justifying terrorism,” the independent news outlet [Mediazona](#) [reported](#) Wednesday.

Berkovich and Petriychuk were [sentenced](#) to six years in prison each in July over the content of their award-winning play, “Finist the Brave Falcon,” which is about Russian women who fall in love with Islamist militants and plan to join them in Syria.

Both artists, who were arrested in May 2023, pleaded not guilty to the charges. Their defense team said it would appeal the July sentencing.

Following that appeal, a judge on Wednesday reduced Berkovich’s sentence to five years and

seven months in a medium-security penal colony, and Petriychuk's to five years and ten months.

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The women's defense team insisted that the prosecution was based on contradictory testimony from anonymous witnesses. At the same time, almost all other witnesses who did not hide their faces testified in favor of Berkovich and Petriychuk.

“Finist the Brave Falcon,” which received funding from Russia’s Culture Ministry, received a Golden Mask award, the country’s top theater prize.

During a court session last year, Berkovich stressed the play had “a very simple and transparent idea that dozens of women in our time become, I emphasize, random victims of evil.”

“Understanding and justifying why this happens are two different things,” she said in court.

After Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, Berkovich wrote emotional poems against the war. Her supporters believe her anti-war statements were the real reason for criminal prosecution against her.

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