

Russian Playwright Begins Prison Sentence for ‘Justifying Terrorism’ in Award-Winning Play

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Russian playwright Svetlana Petriyчук. **Stanislav Krasilnikov / TASS**

Russian playwright Svetlana Petriyчук has been transferred to a prison colony to begin serving her nearly six-year sentence for “justifying terrorism” in her award-winning play, her husband [said](#) Friday.

Petriyчук and theater director Yevgenia Berkovich were [sentenced](#) last July to six years in prison over their award-winning play, “Finist the Bright Falcon,” which tells the story of Russian women who fall in love with Islamist militants in Syria. In December, Berkovich’s sentence was [reduced](#) to five years and seven months and Petriyчук’s to five years and 10 months after an appeal.

Both artists, who were arrested in May 2023, pleaded not guilty to the charges. “Finist the Bright Falcon,” which received funding from Russia’s Culture Ministry, won Russia’s main theater prize, the Golden Mask, a year earlier.

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 identities testified in favor of Berkovich and Petriychuk.

Berkovich was [transported](#) to a prison colony in the western Kostroma region earlier this February.

Petriychuk was transported to the Mozhaisk women's prison colony No. 5 in the Moscow region on Thursday after a 10-day transition period in pre-trial detention, her husband Yury Shekhvatov said.

"Sveta will have to continue to serve this absurd sentence imposed by the military court," Shekhvatov wrote on a Telegram channel devoted to Petriychuk's case.

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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