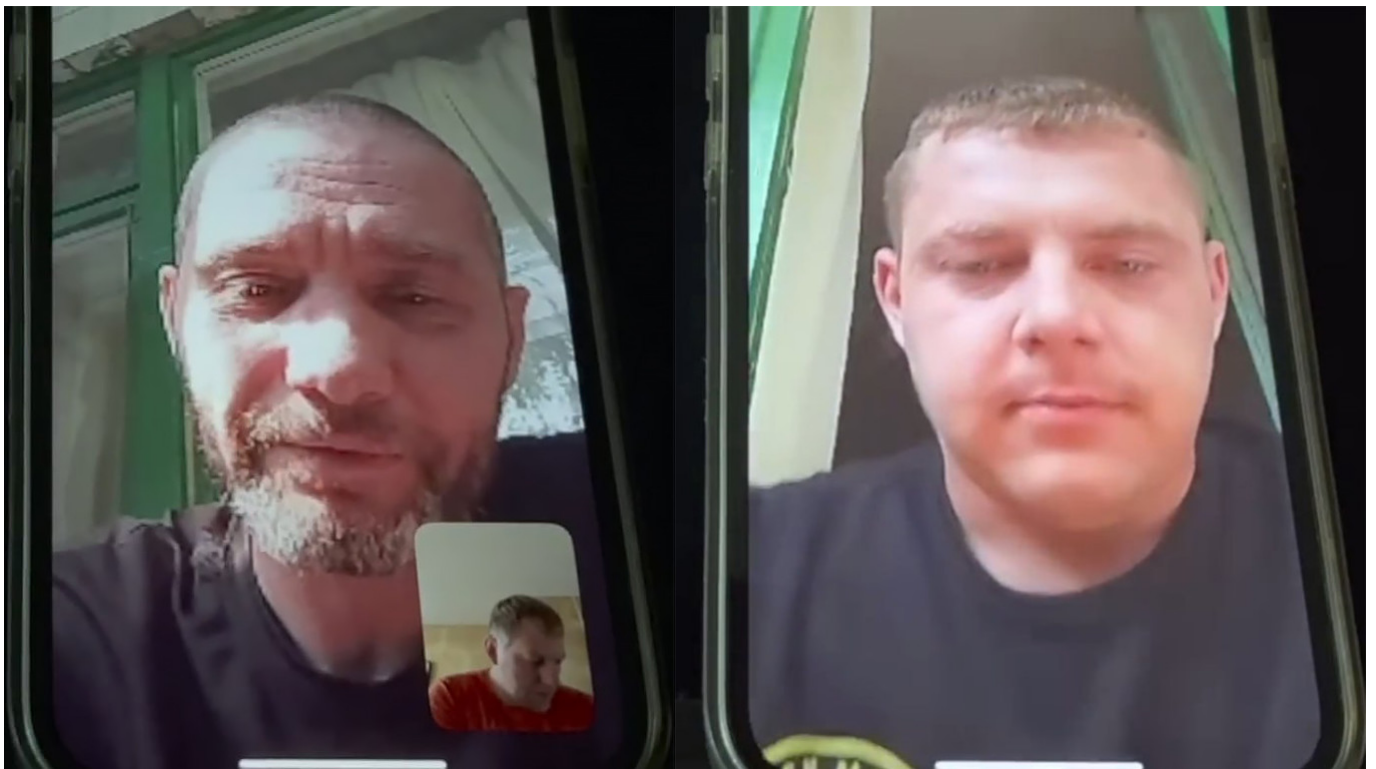


Siberian Court Jails Ex-Wagner Fighters for Interview With Activist

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Ex-Wagner fighters Maxim Zelenov and Alexei Chernyavsky. **Video grab**

A Siberian court [sentenced](#) two former fighters from Russia's Wagner mercenary group to five and a half years in prison for spreading "war fakes" in an interview with an exiled prisoners' rights activist.

Maxim Zelenov and Alexei Chernyavsky were recruited from a penal colony in the Siberian region of Irkutsk in November 2022, days after being pardoned and having their records expunged by President Vladimir Putin, according to a statement from court authorities.

The two men were said to have abandoned their training camp on Jan. 1, 2023, and later settled in Russian-occupied Luhansk in eastern Ukraine.

Later that year, they contacted Vladimir Osechkin, the exiled founder of the prisoners' rights group Gulagu.net, and claimed Wagner commanders had ordered fighters to kill civilians during Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

“There were grandmothers and grandfathers. We probably killed 40 people in a five-story building,” Zelenov [said](#) in a September 2023 interview.

Related article: [Russia Seeks Arrest of Exiled Prisoners' Rights Activist Osechkin](#)

Court authorities alleged that Osechkin offered Zelenov and Chernyavsky assistance in seeking political asylum abroad and paid them 50,000 rubles (\$580) for the interview.

The Minusinsky City Court in Russia's Krasnoyarsk region found Zelenov and Chernyavsky guilty of spreading “deliberately false information” about the Russian military.

“Zelenov and Chernyavsky misled a countless number of people, created the appearance of illegal activities by the Russian Armed Forces [that] undermined its authority in society,” the court said.

In addition, the court ordered Zelenov to undergo compulsory psychiatric treatment for an unspecified disorder.

Following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Gulagu.net founder Osechkin was himself [charged](#) with spreading “war fakes” and justifying terrorism. Russian authorities also labeled him a “foreign agent.”

Osechkin's reputation took a hit after the investigative news outlet Proekt [claimed](#) in 2023 that he was profiting from helping Russians seek asylum abroad and maintaining ties with high-ranking Russian security officials.

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