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Russian Influencer Blinovskaya Jailed 5 Years for Tax Fraud

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Yelena Blinovskaya in court. **Sergei Savostyanov / TASS**

A Moscow court sentenced popular Instagram blogger Yelena Blinovskaya to five years in prison for money laundering and payment fraud, court authorities said Monday.

Blinovskaya and her husband, Alexei, were among several Russian influencers arrested on tax fraud charges in 2023. At the time, Russia's top investigator, Alexander Bastrykin, said tax evasion was "unacceptable" while the country was at war in Ukraine.

Experts say the crackdown has pushed other influencers to comply with Russia's tax laws.

The Investigative Committee said Blinovskaya's tax evasion charges were dropped due to the statute of limitations, but the money laundering and payment fraud charges remained. She pleaded guilty to all three charges and repaid 320 million rubles ($3.5 million) of her debt.

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Moscow's Savyolovsky District Court sentenced her to five years in a medium-security penal colony, ordered her to pay a fine of 1 million rubles ($11,100) and banned her from operating a business for four years.

Prosecutors had sought a six-year prison sentence.

A civil lawsuit brought by Moscow prosecutors ordered Blinovskaya to pay 587.6 million rubles ($6.5 million) in damages to the Russian budget.

Blinovskaya, who had 5.3 million Instagram followers at the time of her arrest, marketed herself as a life coach offering self-help courses and personal growth events that gained popularity during the Covid-19 pandemic. Critics have accused her of defrauding her followers.

She was arrested at the Russian-Belarusian border in April 2023 on suspicion of underreporting nearly 1 billion rubles ($11.1 million) in earnings from online services between 2019 and 2021 and then laundering and misusing part of the funds.

Her husband, Alexei, volunteered to fight in Ukraine in April 2024 to avoid criminal prosecution.

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