The Moscow Times
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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Russia Sentences Ukrainian Azov Fighters to Lengthy Prison Terms on 'Terrorism' Charges

March 26, 2025



Members of the Ukrainian Azov Battalion as their verdict is read. **Erik Romanenko / TASS**

A Russian military court on Wednesday sentenced 12 members of Ukraine's Azov Battalion to prison terms ranging from 13 to 23 years on terrorism charges in the largest and highest-profile trial of Ukrainian prisoners of war since the full-scale invasion.

All of the defendants were taken as prisoners of war, arrested during filtration procedures or voluntarily surrendered to Russian occupying forces in the city of Mariupol, which was almost entirely razed to the ground during an 80-day Russian siege at the outset of its invasion.

The individuals include military personnel as well as support staff like cooks and handymen, the independent news website Mediazona reported.

The Southern District Military Court in Rostov-on-Don found them guilty of seizing power, organizing or participating in a terrorist organization as well as undergoing training for

terrorist activities.

The sentenced individuals were among the 24 current and former Azov members, including nine women, who were arrested in southern Russia on terrorism charges in March-May 2022. Russia's Memorial human rights organization has designated all of them as political prisoners.

The nine women on trial were said to have been cooks or cleaners. Two men were tried in absentia after being included in a prisoner exchange in 2022.

One of the detainees, Oleksandr Ishchenko, died in Russian custody in 2024.

Related article: Ukrainian Azov Fighter Dies in Russian Prison

During the trial, defendants described severe mistreatment in custody, including being beaten to the point of broken bones, interrogated with bags over their heads and forced to sing the Russian national anthem.

They also alleged that they were given food contaminated with waste or chemicals, female detainees were denied hygiene products and a dead prisoner's body was left in an overcrowded cell for days, Mediazona reported.

Despite multiple requests to exclude confessions obtained under duress from the trial's evidence, the court denied their appeals.

Russia designated the Azov battalion as a "terrorist" organization in August 2022, months after the individuals were arrested.

The battalion formed in 2014 as a far-right volunteer paramilitary unit fighting against pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine but was later reformed and integrated into Ukraine's national guard. Moscow has used Azov's past extremist right-wing links to justify what it calls its "denazification" of Ukraine.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2025/03/26/russia-sentences-ukrainian-azov-fighters-to-lengthy-prison-terms-on-terrorism-charges-a88486