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Prosecutors Request 6-Year Prison Sentence for Golos Election Monitor

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Grigory Melkonyants **EPA / TASS**

Russian prosecutors have asked a judge to sentence the co-chair of the independent election monitor Golos to six years in prison on charges of running an "undesirable" organization, the exiled news website Mediazona reported Monday.

Grigory Melkonyants was arrested in August 2023 on accusations of working with the European Network of Election Monitoring Organizations (ENEMO), a Montenegro-based civil society group.

Prosecutors claim that Golos is "practically a structural division" of ENEMO, which Russia blacklisted as "undesirable" in 2021. ENEMO, which combines election monitors from 18 Central and Eastern European countries, denies the claims.

Melknoyants has denied the charges, which carry a maximum penalty of six years in prison.

"We are, of course, shocked by the requested punishment," Mediazona quoted defense lawyer

Yulia Ostrovskaya as telling the Basmanny District Court judge in Moscow.

Founded in 2000, Golos had denounced alleged voting irregularities in Russia's 2011 parliamentary elections, the 2012 presidential vote, which saw President Vladimir Putin return to the Kremlin, and the 2020 constitutional referendum that paved the way for the Russian leader to extend his rule to 2036.

Golos trains election observers and also runs a hotline through which voters can report election violations. Russia's Justice Ministry labeled Golos a "foreign agent" in 2021.

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