

Ex-Ukrainian Military Spokesperson Jailed 20 Years in Absentia by Russian- Backed Court

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Sarah Ashton-Cirillo. pravda.com.ua

A court in occupied eastern Ukraine has sentenced a former U.S. journalist who briefly served as a spokesperson for Ukraine's military to 20 years in prison in absentia, Russian authorities [announced](#) Monday.

Sarah Ashton-Cirillo, 47, traveled from the United States to Ukraine in March 2022 to report on Russia's invasion and later joined the Ukrainian Territorial Defense Forces. She was appointed as the English-language spokesperson for the force in August 2023.

Ukraine's military [suspended](#) her the following month after she said Kyiv would "hunt down" Russian state-affiliated journalists — remarks that drew condemnation from Moscow and [prompted](#) Russian authorities to pursue criminal charges.

Last year, Russia [charged](#) Ashton-Cirillo with fighting as a mercenary and spreading "fake

news” about the Russian military. She was placed on the country’s wanted list and [added](#) to a registry of “extremists and terrorists.”

Russia’s Prosecutor General’s Office said the Moscow-installed Supreme Court in the occupied Donetsk region found her guilty on both counts.

According to prosecutors, Ashton-Cirillo had taken part in combat operations and published a video in August 2023, accusing Russia of using biological weapons in Syria and Ukraine.

She was sentenced to 20 years in a medium-security prison. In-absentia sentences typically take effect only if the individual is extradited to Russia.

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