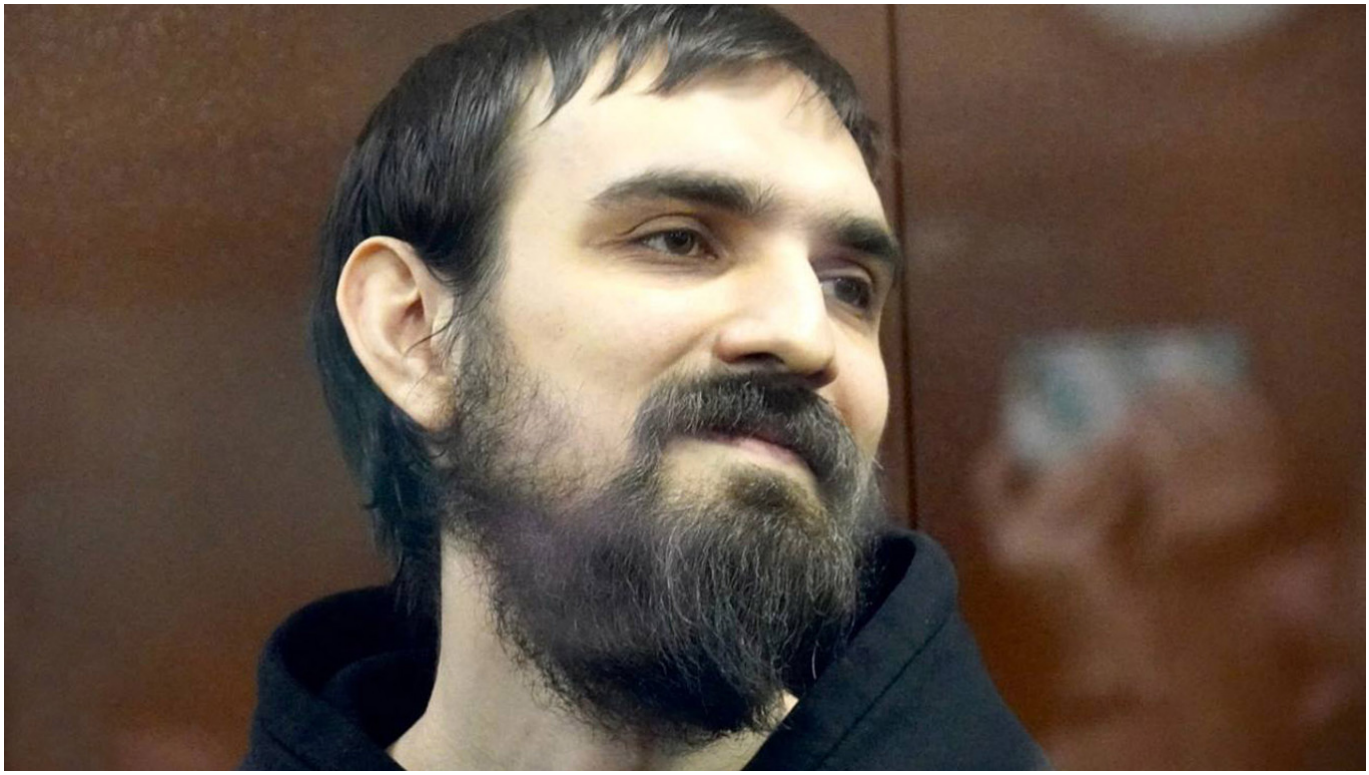
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Moscow Court Jails Stand-Up Comedian Nearly 6 Years for Alleged Joke About War Veterans

February 04, 2026



Artemy Ostanin. **@sotavisionmedia / Telegram**

A Moscow court on Wednesday sentenced stand-up comedian Artemy Ostanin to five years and 9 months in prison after he was found guilty of "inciting hatred" and "insulting the religious feelings of believers" in jokes he made during performances last year.

Ostanin was arrested in Belarus in March 2025 after Call of the People, a group known for publicly denouncing Russians, filed a police complaint accusing him of mocking veterans who lost limbs fighting in the war against Ukraine.

The comedian denied that his joke was directed at war veterans, and his lawyer also said that a linguistic analysis failed to uncover signs of "hatred" in the joke. Footage of the stand-up performance that triggered the backlash suggests the joke was taken out of context.

Ostanin was later hit with a second charge of "insulting religious feelings" after law

enforcement authorities discovered a joke he previously made about Jesus.

He was designated as a terrorist and extremist in June.

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Last week, a state prosecutor asked Judge Olesya Mendeleyeva of the Meshchansky District Court in Moscow to sentence Ostanin to five years and 11 months on the two criminal charges.

The case against Ostanin went to trial on Jan. 12, with the verdict being rendered during the fourth hearing. In addition to the nearly six-year prison sentence, the comedian was also fined 300,000 rubles ($3,900).

"I hope that no one finds themselves in a situation of such egregious lawlessness as I find myself in now," Ostanin said in his final statement in court.

The human rights group Memorial has designated Ostanin a political prisoner.

Ostanin accused Belarusian law enforcement officers of beating and electrocuting him during his arrest last year. He suffered a spinal fracture before being transferred to Russia to stand trial.

Authorities in Minsk denied the allegation.

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