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St. Petersburg Election Candidate Jailed 10 Days for Old Social Media Posts

July 14, 2026

Yaroslav Kostrov. **@tvrain / Telegram**

A judge in St. Petersburg has sentenced a local activist and political candidate to 10 days in jail for displaying "extremist" symbols in social media posts he made in 2021, the exiled news outlet Mediazona reported Tuesday.

Yaroslav Kostrov, who leads a group campaigning to preserve St. Petersburg's historic architecture, was arrested on Monday and held at a police station overnight ahead of his court appearance.

The administrative charge against him stems from old social media posts containing links to Instagram and Facebook, platforms owned by Meta, which Russia designated as an "extremist" organization in 2022.

According to Mediazona, a judge at St. Petersburg's Leninsky District Court found Kostrov guilty of displaying "extremist" symbols and handed him a sentence of 10 days in jail. The charge carries a maximum punishment of 15 days in jail.

The left-leaning A Just Russia party had nominated Kostrov to run as a candidate in September for St. Petersburg's legislative assembly. However, under Russian law, his conviction bars him from seeking elected office for one year.

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In court, Kostrov's lawyer reportedly argued that Russia's Constitution prohibits the retroactive application of laws to past actions.

The judge was said to have rejected a motion by the defense to submit screenshots showing that Russian government agencies still link to Meta platforms on their own official pages.

Kostrov decried his sentence as "absolute lawlessness" and said he was jailed as punishment for trying to seek political office. He said his defense team plans to file an appeal later on Tuesday.

The charges against Kostrov are similar to those pressed against anti-war politician Boris Nadezhdin on Monday. Nadezhdin faces up to 15 days in jail for sharing a link to a video that contained an image of the late opposition activist Alexei Navalny.

Last week, another activist in St. Petersburg and a Communist Party member in the Leningrad region were jailed for 10 days each for the same charge of displaying "extremist" symbols.

The growing number of cases appears tied to the upcoming September elections and resembles a practice known as "candidate filtering," whereby Russian authorities disqualify unwanted challengers ahead of elections to keep them off the ballot entirely.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2026/07/14/st-petersburg-election-candidate-jailed-10-days-for-old-social-media-posts-a93242