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International Outcry After Kremlin Critic Kara-Murza Sentenced To 25 Years For Denouncing Invasion Of Ukraine

- By [RFE/RL](#)

Journalist Vladimir Kara-Murza, a Russian-British dual national and one of the Kremlin's most vocal critics, has been sentenced to 25 years in prison by a Moscow court after a closed-door trial for treason and other offenses, sparking an international outcry and calls for his immediate release.

The Moscow City Court, overflowing with reporters, diplomats, and supporters, handed down its verdict in the trial on April 17, just over a year after Kara-Murza, who twice nearly died after what he says were deliberate poisoning attacks, was arrested on the charge of spreading "false information" about Russia's armed forces. He denies the charges.

After his sentence was pronounced, Kara-Murza, who reporters said sat almost motionless inside a glass cage in the courtroom while listening to the judge, proclaimed that "Russia will be free," an opposition slogan.

"This sentence shows that they are so afraid of him and that they hate him so much for his consistency, for his courage, for his amazing bravery," Yevgenia Kara-Murza told a Washington Post conference.

She added that her husband put his life on the line for a democratic Russia "where human rights are respected, where the government does not persecute its own citizens for opposing the official narrative."

Russian news agencies quoted Maria Eismont, part of his defense team, as saying they would immediately appeal the judgement because of various legal violations.

Another of Kara-Murza's lawyers, Vadim Prokhorov, said the case was "political revenge" and that the closed-door format was "absolutely illegal," as there were no secret documents presented at the trial.

The British government immediately condemned the verdict and sentence, one of the harshest penalties to date against a Russian who has spoken out against the Kremlin's war against Ukraine,

saying the case against the 41-year-old father of three was "politically motivated."

It added in a statement that the Russian ambassador to the United Kingdom had been summoned and that British officials "will make clear that the U.K. considers Mr. Kara-Murza's conviction to be contrary to Russia's international obligations on human rights, including the right to a fair trial."

United Nations rights chief Volker Turk called on Russia to release Kara-Murza "without delay," while the European Union also condemned the sentence.

"Today's outrageously harsh court decision clearly demonstrates yet again the political misuse of the judiciary in order to pressure activists, human rights defenders, and any voices opposing Russia's illegitimate war of aggression against Ukraine," EU foreign affairs chief Josep Borrell said in a statement.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov declined to comment on the case when asked by reporters in Moscow.

In August, Russian authorities added the charge of involvement in an "undesirable" foreign organization, and in October they added the treason charge for his public criticism of the Russian authorities in the international arena.

Kara-Murza ended up being sentenced to 18 years for the treason charge, seven years for the spreading of false information, and three years for participating in the actions of an "undesirable" organization. Some of the sentences will run concurrently.

Aleksei Navalny, another Kremlin critic who has been handed a lengthy prison sentence for what most analysts say are trumped-up charges in retaliation for speaking out against President Vladimir Putin and his policies, called the sentence "unlawful, shameless, and simply fascist."

The trial was delayed last month after his lawyer told the court his client's health had "significantly deteriorated." A certificate from the medical unit of Kara-Murza's detention facility stated he was being treated for polyneuropathy, which he says is a result of the poisonings.

In his final statement to court on April 10, Kara-Murza, who Amnesty International has designated a "prisoner of conscience," said the level of opaqueness about the charges against him surpassed the trials of Soviet dissidents in the 1960s and '70s, and the language used against him was reminiscent of the 1930s, when Soviet citizens were arrested on fabricated charges and put on show trials.

Russia adopted a law criminalizing spreading "false information" about its military shortly after it sent troops into Ukraine on February 24, 2022.

RFE/RL's [Live Briefing](#) gives you all of the latest developments on Russia's full-scale invasion, Kyiv's counteroffensives, Western military aid, global reaction, and the plight of civilians. For all of RFE/RL's coverage of the war, [click here](#).

Kara-Murza is the latest in a string of opposition activists, reporters, and others who have been arrested and prosecuted under the legislation amid a growing Kremlin crackdown on civil society.

According to the human rights group [OVD-Info](#), almost 20,000 Russians have been detained for anti-war protests since the Kremlin launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

Several hundred people have had criminal cases opened against them for opposing the war in Ukraine, with some facing sentences of up to 15 years for offenses as slight as posting anti-war messages on social media. OVD-Info said in the next week alone, 53 "political criminal cases" are scheduled for the coming week.

"The criminalization of criticism of government actions is a manifestation of fear, not strength," U.S. Ambassador to Russia Lynne Tracy [said](#) on the steps of the court building. "Vladimir Kara-Murza and countless Russians believe and hope for a future in which fundamental freedoms are respected in Russia. And we share these hopes."

"Thirty years ago, Russia fought for the creation of democracy. Now this struggle has taken a sad turn," the Canadian ambassador to Russia, Alison Leclaire, said after the court session.

Kara-Murza was a key advocate for the U.S. Magnitsky Act, which sets out sanctions for human rights violators in Russia. He has also called for sanctions to be imposed on culpable Russian officials.

On March 3, the United States designated six people, including three judges, for sanctions due to their role in Kara-Murza's detention.

The judge who chaired the trial and who read the ruling on April 17, Sergei Podoprighorov, was one of the first sanctioned by the United States under the Magnitsky Act 10 years ago. The British government also has already sanctioned him for "previous involvement in human rights violations."

He was also the judge who approved the pretrial detention of the law's namesake, Sergei Magnitsky, a whistle-blowing Russian tax lawyer who died in a Moscow jail in November 2009, just seven days before the expiration of the one-year term during which he could be legally held without trial.

Magnitsky, who accused Russian law enforcement and tax officials of a massive tax fraud scheme, was tried posthumously and convicted on tax evasion charges.

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The late U.S. Senator John McCain was a proponent of Kara-Murza's efforts, and he served as a pallbearer at McCain's funeral in 2018.

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