

RUSSIA: Misuse of anti-extremism in October 2017

Prosecuting Religious Organizations and Believers

SOVA Center for Information and Analysis (10.11.2017) – <http://bit.ly/2mMxvuj> – On October 13, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe adopted a Declaration on Freedom of Religion in Russia. The declaration was signed by 28 deputies from 14 European countries. The authors of the declaration noted that, *“whilst the Russian Constitution guarantees every citizen the right to freedom of religion or belief, this fundamental right is at risk as the Russian authorities continue to foster an atmosphere of intolerance, discrimination and persecution against religious minorities throughout the entire Federation.”* The total [ban](#) imposed on Jehovah’s Witnesses in 2017 served as the principal example of this trend. According to the declaration, Evangelical Christians, Lutherans, Baptists, Pentecostals, Methodists, Presbyterians, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Scientologists and representatives of other religious groups are being persecuted in Russia; some of them remain under arrest awaiting their trial on the basis of the 2002 law on combating extremist activity, while, in fact, they are charged for *“simply engaging in peaceful religious beliefs and activities.”* The Declaration calls on the Russian government to *“put an end to these violations of the right to freedom of religion or belief of members of religious minorities.”*

In late October, it was reported that a court in Nizhny Novgorod recognized a citizen of Uzbekistan, a team leader in a cleaning company, guilty under Article 282.2 Part 2 of participation in the activities of Tablighi Jamaat and sentenced her to 1 year of imprisonment to be served in a

settlement colony.

The criminal case under Article 282.2 of the Criminal Code for involvement in the activities of Tablighi Jamaat was initiated in Crimea in early October. Several homes on the peninsula were searched, and four people were arrested.

It became known in October, that, in late September, the Supreme Court of the Republic of Tatarstan changed the verdict, issued by the Naberezhnye Chelny City Court under Part 2 of Article 282.2 in April with respect to nine Tablighi Jamaat supporters. The reference to an aggravating circumstance in the form of committing a crime by a group of persons was excluded from the verdict, and, therefore, the prison terms were reduced for all the offenders.

We would like to remind that the Tablighi Jamaat religious association was banned in Russia in 2009; we regard this ban as inappropriate. The movement is engaged in preaching its version of Islam and has not been implicated in any calls for violence.

In October, we learned about at least two cases of prosecution under Article 20.29 of the Code of Administrative Offences for distribution of inappropriately banned (in our opinion) religious literature. A resident of Magas faces a fine for storing in a market pavilion two copies of the *Fortress of a Muslim* – a collection of daily prayers, which shows no signs of extremism. A resident of Kunashak, the Chelyabinsk Region, was fined for distributing to his co-religionists an inappropriately forbidden brochure *Woman in Islam and in the Judeo-Christian World*, which extolls the advantages of the women's position in societies that live according to the Islamic tradition.

Prosecution for Anti-Religious Statements

It was reported in mid-October that a criminal case had been opened in Krasnodar under Article 282 Part 1 of the Criminal

Code against Maxim Drozdov. The charges were based on the fact of publication by Drozdov of his own satirical poem "Heretic" on his VKontakte page. Despite the fact that the material in question is an obvious satire on the Orthodox radicals, the investigation declared that the poem was aimed at humiliating the dignity of the social group "atheists." In our opinion, the poem does not give the slightest grounds for criminal prosecution; hopefully, this absurd case will not reach the court.

In late October, the Central District Court of Sochi partially granted the appellate complaint of Viktor Nochevnov, convicted under Article 148 Part 1 of the Criminal Code (insulting the feelings of believers). The verdict of the Magistrates Court was revoked and the case was sent for a new consideration. In August, the Magistrates Court sentenced Nochevnov to a fine of 50,000 rubles. The prosecution was based on the fact that Nochevnov, under the pseudonym "Vityok Vlasov," had shared a series of caricature images of Christ via the social network VKontakte. We [spoke out](#) against the verdict to Nochevnov.

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