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RUSSIA: Religious persecution and issues/ Bimonthly Digest, Nov. 01–15

Religious persecution and issues – Bimonthly Digest (01–15.11.2022)

15.11.2022 – In Novosibirsk, 67-year-old Aleksandr Seredkin was sentenced to six years in prison for reading the Bible

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/11/151422.html>

On November 15, 2022, the consideration of the case of

Aleksandr Seredkin was completed in the Oktyabrsky District Court of Novosibirsk. Judge Yevgeny Zakharov considered holding religious meetings, saying prayers and reading the Bible extremist and sentenced the believer to six years in a penal colony. He was taken into custody in the courtroom.

Criminal case under Part 1 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation against Seredkin was initiated in April 2019 by the senior investigator for especially important cases of the Federal Security Service of Russia in the Novosibirsk Region, Lieutenant Colonel of Justice E. V. Selyunin. The believer was accused of “organizing meetings and directing the reading and discussion” of religious literature.

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15.11.2022 – ECtHR awards compensation to protester against church in Yekaterinburg

Sova Center – On November 10, 2022, the European Court of Human Rights ruled in the case of Tsvetkov and Others v. Russia, which brought together the complaints of several applicants accused under various articles of the Code of Administrative Offenses of the Russian Federation and who considered their trials to be insufficiently impartial. The ECtHR considered the complaints admissible, finding a violation of paragraph 1 of Art. 6 of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (right to a fair trial) and ordered that the applicants be paid the sums claimed.

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11.11.2022 – Court in Volgograd toughens punishment for five defendants in case of involvement in Tablighi Jamaat

Sova center – The conditional imprisonment was replaced for three defendants with a real term.

On November 11, 2022, the Volgograd Regional Court considered the appeal of the prosecutor's office against the sentence of five local residents convicted of participating in the Tablighi Jamaat religious association banned in Russia under Part 2 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code (participation in the activities of an extremist organization). In September, the Sovetsky District Court of Volgograd sentenced all the defendants in the case to two years of suspended imprisonment with a two-year probationary period. After consideration of the case in the court of appeal, the sentences of three of them – Amanat Lukpanov, Batr Urazov and Gilman Nitaliev – were toughened, replacing the punishment with real imprisonment in a general regime colony. Two other convicts – Aslan Vakuev and Alexander Kolesnikov – the sentence was left unchanged. In addition, all convicts were sentenced to 10 months of restriction of freedom.

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10.11.2022 – An appeal in the Vologda Region softened the sentence of one of the convicted Jehovah's Witnesses

Link to full text in Russian:
<https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/11/101636.html>

On November 10, 2022, the Vologda Regional Court reviewed Nikolay Stepanov's sentence for holding religious services. 4 years in prison were replaced with a suspended sentence. The verdict of Yuriy Baranov, another person involved in the case, sentenced to 4 years suspended, was left unchanged.

Stepanov and Baranov became targets of criminal prosecution in December 2019, when a massive raid took place in the homes of Jehovah's Witnesses in Vologda. On September 5, 2022, the

court of first instance issued a a guilty verdict, , which the believers appealed.

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08.11.2022 – In Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky, Dmitriy and Nadezhda Semyonov were given four years suspended sentence for sharing Bible message

Link to full text in Russian:
<https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/11/081653.html>

On November 8, 2022, the judge of the Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky City Court Vladimir Bykov found the spouses **Dmitriy and Nadezhda Semenov** guilty of extremism and appointed 4 years suspended sentence to each. The verdict can be appealed.

The Semenovs learned about the criminal prosecution in September 2021 – a search was conducted in their house, the believers were interrogated and then released on recognizance not to leave. Three days before, the investigator of the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation for the Kamchatka Territory, Maxim Kudantsev, opened a criminal case against the Semenovs under Part 1.1 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation (involvement in the activities of an extremist organization).

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08.11.2022 – A Court in Penza Region sentenced Viktor Shayapov to two years suspended sentence for believing in Jehovah God

Link to full text in Russian:
<https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/11/081647.html>

On November 7, 2022, Judge of Nikolsky District Court of the

Penza Region Nikolay Razdrogin sentenced one of Jehovah's Witnesses **Viktor Shayapov**, 32, to 2 years' suspended sentence with 8 months' probation. The believer received such a punishment for the peaceful practice of his religion.

Viktor became a defendant in a criminal case for his faith in October 2020. At that time, a wave of searches took place in Nikolsk at the homes of local Jehovah's Witnesses, including the Shayapov family. In February 2022, Shayapov was detained in the Moscow region, taken to Penza and placed under house arrest. He spent almost 9 months in isolation from society with a location-tracking bracelet on his leg. The believer was also included in the Rosfinmonitoring list.

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08.11.2022 – The Court of Cassation upheld the verdict against five Jehovah's Witnesses from Nevelsk

Link to full text in Russia:
<https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/11/081642.html>

On November 8, 2022, the Ninth Court of Cassation of General Jurisdiction in Vladivostok approved the conviction of five believers from Nevelsk – their suspended sentences of two to six-and-a-half years remain unchanged.

In January 2022, the Nevelsk City Court of the Sakhalin Region found Sergey and Tatyana Kulakov, Vyacheslav Ivanov, Aleksandr Kozlitin and Yevgeniy Yelin guilty of either organizing or participating in the activities of an extremist organization. Three months later, the Sakhalin Regional Court dismissed the believers' appeal against the verdict.

The fact that the criminal persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses continues contrary to Russian law causes bewilderment and misunderstanding among the international human rights

community.

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07.11.2022 – New tightening of legislation on “foreign agents” will affect religious organizations

Sova Center – On November 7, 2022, it became known about changes to the draft law on legislation on “foreign agents” adopted by the State Duma in the first reading. The new changes concern Art. 239 of the Criminal Code (creation of a non-profit organization that infringes on the personality and rights of citizens) and toughen responsibility for it.

The current version provides for under part 1 of this article (the creation of a religious or public association whose activities involve violence against citizens or other harm to their health, as well as the leadership of such an association) punishment in the form of a fine of up to 300 thousand, or restriction of freedom up to four years or forced labor or imprisonment for the same period. The amendments propose punishment in the form of forced labor for up to five years, or imprisonment for up to seven years.

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07.11.2022 – The owner of the Anderson cafe chain was complained to the prosecutor’s office because of Halloween

Sova Center – In early November 2022, it became known that the journalist and author of the book “The State of Honor. Monarchy is the future of Russia” Anna Palyukh (Shafran) appealed to the prosecutor’s office with a request to conduct an inspection under Art. 148 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation (violation of the right to freedom of conscience and religion). The reason for the appeal was the holding of a

children's Halloween in the cafe and a master class on cooking monsters.

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07.11.2022 – The Ministry of Defense confirmed the granting of a deferment to the clergy

Sova center – On October 31, 2022, the Ministry of Defense confirmed the granting of a deferment from military service during the period of mobilization to clergymen and students of theological and theological faculties.

This is stated in the response signed by the head of the department for interaction with religious associations of the Main Military-Political Directorate of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation O. Veselkov to the appeal of the head bishop of the Russian United Union of Christians of the Evangelical Faith (Pentecostals) Sergei Ryakhovsky dated September 29.

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07.11.2022 -A Court in Rubtsovsk sent Andrey Danielyan, 53, to a Penal Colony for six years for talking about the Bible

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/11/071330.html>

On November 7, 2022, the judge of the Rubtsovsk City Court of the Altai Territory, Aleksey Bezrukov, considered reading and discussing the Bible extremism, finding Andrey Danielyan guilty and assigning the believer 6 years of real imprisonment in a penal colony. The believer was taken into custody in the courtroom.

Joint worship of God with other believers was interpreted by the prosecution as illegal activity with criminal intent. Although there is not a single victim in the case, the prosecutor asked the court to sentence Danielyan to 7 years in prison. The verdict has not entered into force and can be appealed. The believer insists on his complete innocence.

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04.11.2022 – Appeal in Pskov overturned the acquittal verdict against one of Jehovah’s Witnesses Aleksey Khabarov

Link to full text in Russian: <https://jw-russia.org/news/2022/11/041621.html>

On November 3, 2022, the Court of Appeal in Pskov overturned the acquittal verdict against **Alexey Khabarov** and sent the case for a new trial to a different court of first instance.

The believer was criminally prosecuted under Article 282.2 (2) of the RF Criminal Code because of his religion. The verdict of “not guilty” was handed down by the Porkhovsky District Court of Pskov region on June 27, 2022. The prosecutor’s office, which had requested a sentence of 3.5 years in prison, appealed the acquittal verdict to the Pskov Regional Court of Appeal.

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04.11.2022 – In Belgorod, an inspection is underway in connection with the distribution of a book by ex-governor Savchenko about his new religion

Sova Center – On April 7, 2022, it became known about the check against the speaker of the Belgorod Regional Duma Olga Pavlova, her deputy Valery Sergachev and the leader of the

regional branch of United Russia Elena Bondarenko. The reason for the inspection was the distribution of the book of the former governor of the Belgorod region Yevgeny Savchenko "Shock", in which he describes his new religion. Security officials do not rule out the presence of signs of extremism in the book.

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03.11.2022 – The Constitutional Court refused to define the difference between a religious group and a joint confession of faith

Sova Center – On November 3, 2022, it became known that the Constitutional Court refused to consider the complaint of believers who asked to clarify how the joint confession of faith differs from the creation of a religious group.

Earlier, Baptists from Anapa turned to the Constitutional Court with a request to check whether they comply with Art. 28 and 30 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation, the provisions of the first sentence of paragraph 1 of Art. 7 and the first sentence of paragraph 2 of Art. 7 of the law "On freedom of conscience and religious associations". The Constitutional Court registered the complaint, but refused to accept it for consideration.

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01.11.2022 – Russian Baptists called for an end to hostilities in Ukraine

Sova Center – The RSECB published an appeal to the presidents of four countries calling for the soonest establishment of peace on the territory of Ukraine and the prevention of the use of nuclear and chemical weapons.

On October 20, 2022, the Russian Union of Evangelical Christian Baptists (RSECB) published an appeal to the presidents of Russia, Ukraine, France and the United States. The appeal was published on behalf of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA), the European Baptist Federation (EBF) and the RSECB itself.

The authors of the document call on the heads of the mentioned states “for a peaceful and just solution to the conflict currently taking place in Ukraine.”

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