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## **RUSSIA : Religious persecution and issues – Bimonthly digest Feb 01-15**

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### **Religious persecution and issues – Bimonthly digest Feb 01-15**

**14.02.2023 – Two Catholic priests expelled from Russia**

Sova Center – On January 21, it became known about the disappearance of the rector of the Belgorod Catholic parish, priest Mark Bakezhinski, a citizen of Poland. Later it became

known that he was detained by law enforcement agencies. January 24 Belgorod District Court under Part 1 of Art. 20.1 of the Code of Administrative Offenses (petty hooliganism) sentenced him to seven days of arrest for allegedly arranged by him on the morning of January 22, when he was supposed to prepare for the liturgy, “a scandal in a public place, during which he expressed rude obscene language, did not react to comments to stop hooligan actions , which violated public order and expressed a clear disrespect for society.

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### **10.02.2023 – Fled fearing prosecution for preaching that war is “terrible”**

A Russian Orthodox (Moscow Patriarchate) priest has been forced to leave Russia for fear of criminal prosecution over his opposition to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Fr Aleksandr Dombrovsky, from Bryansk Region, went abroad in January, shortly after police told him that the Federal Security Service (FSB) had opened a case against him. He had repeatedly preached against the war in Ukraine in his sermons. “Everything related to my anti-war position was recorded in a most thorough manner,” he told Forum 18.

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### **09.02.2023 – In Moscow, a native of Chechnya was banned from wearing a hijab in the office**

Sova Center – On February 7, 2023, it became known that the management forbade Aminat Kantaeva, an employee of one of the Moscow private organizations, to wear a headscarf in the workplace.

Kantaeva, a native of Chechnya, complained to the Commissioner for Human Rights in this republic, Mansur Soltaev. He, in a telephone conversation with the head of the department where Kantaeva works, found out the reason for such a requirement: according to the employer, the scarf “scars away customers” who come to the office.

The CEO of the company promised to resolve this issue in the near future.

### **09.02.2023 – Court in Mezhdurechensk refuses to ban Falun Dafa founder’s books**

The decision was made in November 2022. The prosecutor’s office decided to appeal it.

On November 9, 2022, the Mezhdurechensk City Court of the Kemerovo Region dismissed an administrative claim by the prosecutor’s office to recognize the books “Falun Dafa. The essence of diligent cultivation. I-II” and “Falun Dafa. The essence of diligent cultivation. III” by Li Hongzhi. On February 2, 2023, the Kemerovo Regional Court received an appeal from the prosecutor against this decision, and its consideration is scheduled for March 2.

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### **06.02.2023 – In St. Petersburg, a criminal case was opened against a former priest about “fakes” about the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation**

Sova Center – On June 8, 2022, it became known that a criminal case had been opened in St. Petersburg under paragraph “e”, part 2 of Art. 207.3 of the Criminal Code (public dissemination under

the guise of reliable reports of knowingly false information containing data on the use of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation based on political, ideological, racial, national or religious hatred or enmity or based on hatred or enmity against any social group) in regarding the former priest John (Dmitry) Kurmoyarov.

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### **06.02.2023 – Publisher Ezhaev sentenced to 17 years in prison**

On February 3, 2023, the Second Western District Military Court found the head of the Umma publishing house, Aslambek Ezhaev, guilty under Part 4 of Art. 205.1 of the Criminal Code (organization organization of financing of terrorist activities) and sentenced him to 17 years in prison.

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### **05.02.2023 – Ouster of Buddhist leader in Kalmykia likely to make that Republic a new headache for the Kremlin**

The Kremlin may have felt it had no choice to push for the ouster of the long-time Buddhist leader of Kalmykia given his criticism of Moscow's war in Ukraine, China's unhappiness with a Buddhist leader in Russia so close to the Dalai Lama and the Kalmyk political leadership's desire to have its own man in that position.

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### **03.02.2023 – In Kamchatka, another foreign citizen fined for “illegal” missionary work**

Sova Center – On January 20, 2023, the Elizovsky District Court of the Kamchatka Territory found the foreign citizen **Abdulmashit Abduvaliev** guilty under Part 5 of Art. 5.26 of the Code of Administrative Offenses (implementation by a foreign citizen of missionary activity in violation of the requirements of the law) and fined him 30 thousand rubles.

According to the court, he, being in the temporary detention center for foreign citizens of the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs for the Kamchatka Territory, “conducted religious ceremonies with the participation of at least 10-12 persons”, without permits and not belonging to any religious organization. Abduvaliev admitted guilt.

### **03.02.2023 – The ECtHR has published a decision on the complaint against the ban on the magazines “Zvezda Selenny” and the Novosibirsk organization “Allya-Ayat”**

The European Court considered that the right of the leader of the Novosibirsk group “Allya-Ayat” Valery Milshtein to freedom of religion, freedom of expression and freedom of association was violated.

On January 31, 2023, the European Court of Human Rights published the decision rendered on January 10 on application No. 1377/14 Milstein v. Russia. Valery Milshtein, a resident of Novosibirsk, appealed against the decision to ban publications and activities of adherents of the Alla-Ayat (Elle-Ayat) sun-worshipping movement, which preaches the treatment of all diseases through nature-related rites.

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## **02.02.2023 – ECtHR decides to pay compensation to Jehovah's Witnesses for disrupted services**

On January 31, 2023, the European Court of Human Rights ruled in the Nabokikh and Others v. Russia case, which brought together the complaints of several Jehovah's Witnesses whose religious meetings in 18 Russian regions were disrupted by security forces in 2010-2013.

We are talking about the cases "Nabokikh and others against Russia" (Kirov, Volgodonsk, Prokhladny, Vladimir, Ufa), "Martynenko and others against Russia" (Yoshkar-Ola), "Zinchenko and others against Russia" (Smolensk, Perm, Kazan, Kaliningrad, Voronezh, Belgorod, Blagoveshchensk), Burenkov and Others v. Russia (Salekhard), Golovko and Others v. Russia (Kemerovo), Shaikhiev and Others v. Russia (Naberezhnye Chelny, Dubna), Mashinsky and Others v. Russia" (Primorsky Territory).

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## **02.02.2023 – ECtHR rules on complaint against ban on Zhuan Falun and three other Falun Gong materials**

The European Court held that the ban on Falun Gong materials violated Art. 9 and 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights, guaranteeing the right to freedom of expression and

freedom of religion.

On January 31, 2023, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) published a ruling on the complaints of the followers of the spiritual movement “Falun Gong” Mikhail Sinitsyn and Sergey Alekhin on the recognition of four materials of the movement as extremist materials. The applicants pointed out that their rights guaranteed by Art. 9 and 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights – on freedom of religion and freedom of expression.

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