

Editor in chief of a media online prosecuted

Translation by Irina Loutfoullina

HRWF (20.01.2015) - Alexander Soldatov, editor in chief of Portal-credo online, known for writing on sensitive topics related to the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), is facing serious criminal charges because of his documentary "Приставное благочестие" ("Extreme piety")* that was officially considered extremist material. The video which is available on YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6bAj75qpugU>) deals with a conflict between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Russian Orthodox Autonomous Church (ROAC) over relics of two men considered to be saints by both churches.

The issue was taken to court and the video was analyzed by four experts. Three of them did not find anything extremist in the documentary. However, one of them, when asked questions such as "do you believe the movie incites violence towards religious people?" would consistently give a positive answer. The fact that the journalists who were involved in the production of the film were not prosecuted and that only Mikhail Baranov, one of the film makers, was called to testify at the court indicates that the target was clearly Soldatov himself.

On 21st November 2014, the court declared the movie as being extremist material and had it put on the federal list of extremist material.

The Moscow Helsinki Group (human rights monitoring NGO) asked to participate in the trial as a third party but the District Court of Vladimir City turned down their request.

The trial was short and there were some gross violations of the law. The court said the video was extremist but did not point at any part of the movie which did not comply with the law. When asked, the prosecutor refused to make things clear. Mikhail Baranov, one of the authors of the film, was told only 24 hours before the beginning of the trial that he had to participate in it. Mikhail Baranov's request to read the case material first and prepare his defense was denied.

The Moscow Helsinki Group has repeatedly drawn the attention of the Russian authorities and the public to the repressive nature of some Russian legislation. Now this repressive mechanism directly threatens the editor in chief of Portal-Credo.Ru, Alexander Soldatov, and its entire staff.

The Moscow Helsinki Group said it would do everything in its power to protect the Portal. Since 2002, Portal-Credo.Ru has been editing articles about the persecution of believers and non-believers thus making a significant contribution to the development of the Russian civil society and promoting fundamental humanitarian values.

Moscow Helsinki Group also highlights the systematic violation of the rights of the ROAC (Russian Orthodox Autonomous Church) members by the authorities of Vladimir City. Over the past 5 years, they were forced to transfer to the government 16 restored churches which they use to use.

Portal-Credo.Ru demands an immediate end to these wrongful persecutions and ask not to turn the Vladimir region in an laboratory for the revival of the Inquisition in Russia.

Portal-Credo.Ru thinks that the purpose of the decision of the court is to intimidate and restrict the activities of it.

(*) Fake Piety could also be another translation

Sources: <http://contact.az/docs/2014/Politics/121700100248ru.htm> and <http://www.portal-credo.ru/site/?act=news&id=110954&cf=>