

8 August 2017

## RUSSIA: One year of "anti-missionary" punishments

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*In the first year of "anti-missionary" punishments, Forum 18 found 193 cases under Administrative Code Article 5.26, Parts 3, 4 and 5. Of these 143 resulted in initial convictions (140 fines). In 11 cases religious literature was confiscated. Five foreigners were ordered deported (one overturned on appeal).*

Prosecutions under Russia's "anti-missionary" legal changes have gathered pace in the year since they came into force on 20 July 2016, with an average of six cases a week reaching court between April and June 2017, Forum 18 has found.

Activities as diverse as holding prayer meetings in homes, posting worship times on a religious community's website, and giving a lecture on yoga have all been interpreted by police and prosecutors as "missionary activity", thanks to the broad definition now enshrined in the Religion Law. Despite a clear predominance of prosecutions brought against those who see their faith as requiring them to publicly share their beliefs, such as Protestants and Jehovah's Witnesses, people from at least 15 different religious traditions have faced charges.

Forum 18 found 193 cases brought against 136 individuals and 57 religious communities under the July 2016 "anti-missionary" legal changes between 20 July 2016 and 20 July 2017. Of these, 143 resulted in initial convictions, with 140 fines being imposed. Of the foreigners prosecuted, 5 were ordered deported (though one of these had the deportation order overturned on appeal). More than half the regions in Russia have seen at least one prosecution (see analysis below, as well as a full list at F18News 9 August 2017 <[http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2306](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2306)>).

The cases led to 11 religious communities having religious literature confiscated. In three of these cases, judges illegally ordered the religious literature destroyed, although two of these rulings were subsequently overturned (see analysis below, as well as a full list at F18News 9 August 2017 <[http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2306](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2306)>).

Russia has also imposed these punishments in Crimea, which it occupied in March 2014. Forum 18 found 27 administrative cases in the year of the "anti-missionary" punishments there, resulting in fines in 16 of the cases so far (see F18News 24 July 2017 <[http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2299](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2299)>).

Confusion remains over what exactly constitutes "missionary activity" and under what circumstances individual believers may share their faith with others.

"This law is impossible either to understand or to implement," Moscow-based lawyer Mikhail Frolov, who has acted for several Hare Krishna defendants, told Forum 18 on 1 August. "Believers don't understand what is permitted and what is forbidden. It is possible to sentence people under this for any religious activity".

### Background

On 6 July 2016, President Vladimir Putin signed amendments to the Religion Law imposing harsh restrictions on the sharing of beliefs, including on where and by whom they may be shared. There were widespread Russian protests against the changes, which ban, among other things, broadly and imprecisely defined "missionary activity" by anyone without written permission from an officially recognised religious association, and by religious organisations not using their full legal names. The changes also ban anyone who is a former member of an allegedly "extremist" religious organisation from carrying out so-called "missionary activity", and allow wide scope for arbitrary official actions. The amendments were introduced as part of an "anti-terrorism" package proposed by United Russia Duma deputy Irina Yarovaya and Senator Viktor Ozerov (see Forum 18's general Russia religious freedom survey <[http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2246](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2246)>).

There was an initial lack of consensus among judges over whether the absence of written authorisation from a religious organisation or group is itself evidence of an offence or proof of innocence (see Forum 18's general Russia religious freedom survey <[http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2246](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2246)>).

It now appears, however, that judges are increasingly seeing a lack of formal written authorisation (which should include evidence of an organisation's registration or a group's notification of its existence) as grounds for conviction.

A 2015 amendment to the Religion Law, for the first time and against international human rights law, required all unregistered religious groups to notify the authorities of their existence and activities. This includes providing names and addresses of all their members, and addresses where any meeting takes place. A draft law making failure to do this a punishable administrative offence has been accepted at committee level in the State Duma and will be considered at a first reading in September 2017 (see Forum 18's general Russia religious freedom survey <[http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2246](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2246)>).

Although no explicit punishment currently exists for not submitting this notification (usually to local branches of the Justice Ministry), Forum 18's analysis of prosecutions under Administrative Code Article 5.26, Parts 4 and 5, shows that failure to do is frequently taken as evidence of unlawful "missionary activity".

## Punishments

Individuals and legal entities who violate any of the July 2016 restrictions and requirements are subject to punishment under Administrative Code Article 5.26, Parts 3 ("Implementation of activities by a religious organisation without indicating its official full name, including the issuing or distribution, within the framework of missionary activity, of literature and printed, audio, and video material without a label bearing this name, or with an incomplete or deliberately false label"), 4 ("Russians conducting missionary activity"), or 5 ("Foreigners conducting missionary activity"). These were all signed into law at the same time (see Forum 18's general Russia religious freedom survey <[http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2246](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2246)>).

Under Part 4 ("Russians conducting missionary activity"), Russian citizens are liable for a fine of 5,000 to 50,000 Roubles. For organisations (legal entities), the fine stands at 100,000 to 1 million Roubles. Religious groups, while they may share beliefs in limited circumstances, are not legal entities - their members would therefore be subject to prosecution as individuals.

Foreigners may be fined 30,000 to 50,000 Roubles for the same offence under Part 5 ("Foreigners conducting missionary activity"), with the possibility of expulsion from Russia.

Part 3 punishments are a fine of 30,000 to 50,000 Roubles and possible confiscation of any materials.

A fine of 50,000 Roubles (about 6,600 Norwegian Kroner, 710 Euros or 835 US Dollars) represents about six weeks' average wages for those in work or 15 weeks' average state retirement pension.

## How do cases begin?

Although in some cases it is not possible to ascertain from verdicts how an alleged offence came to be detected, many written decisions indicate that charges were brought after either a systematic inspection by police or prosecutor's office officials, or a tip-off from a member of the public. In several cases, monitoring of internet-based and surveillance of other activities by the FSB security service or "anti-extremism" investigators has provided the basis for charges.

Court records suggest that most prosecutions move fairly quickly through first instance courts, with hearings taking place shortly after cases are lodged, but that appeals (which must be submitted ten days after a verdict is issued) may take months to be concluded.

## 2016-2017 figures

In an analysis of available court records, Forum 18 has found a total of 193 prosecutions brought to trial under Article 5.26, Parts 3, 4, and 5 between 20 July 2016 and 20 July 2017 (see full list at F18News 9 August 2017 <[http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2306](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2306)>). It is unknown how many more individuals and organisations have faced charges, as cases against Russian citizens and legal entities (which comprise the vast majority) are heard in magistrates' courts, of which there are more than 7,000 across the country.

The 193 cases recorded by Forum 18 involved 136 individuals and 57 religious organisations (some of them prosecuted more than once for different incidents). Thirty one women and 102 men are known to have been charged, as well as three people whose gender is unknown.

Prosecution rates for all Parts steadily increased throughout late 2016 and early 2017 (most markedly for Part 4 "Russians conducting missionary activity"), with a surge in prosecutions reaching court in March and April 2017.

There was a significant decline in prosecutions in late 2016 under Article 20.2 (Parts 1, 2, and 5) ("Violation of the established procedure for organising or conducting a gathering, meeting, demonstration, procession or picket"), Forum 18 notes (see F18News 5 July 2017 <[http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2293](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2293)>).

Alexander Verkhovsky, Director of the Moscow-based SOVA Center for Information and Analysis, attributes the decline in Article 20.2 prosecutions of religious believers "partly" to the "anti-missionary" legal changes. "Often, the police simply choose the law [under which to prosecute] at random", Verkhovsky commented to Forum 18 on 4 July, "and the emergence of options leads to a redistribution."

The full effect on "anti-missionary" prosecutions of the Supreme Court's decision to liquidate all Jehovah's Witnesses' organisations and ban their activities (which entered full legal force on 17 July 2017) has yet to be seen (see F18News 18 July 2017 <[http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2297](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2297)>). It could mean a decrease in prosecutions as liquidated communities have ceased to meet and individuals now face criminal charges if found engaging in any Jehovah's Witness activity, but it also opens up the possibility of prosecution under Article 5.26 Parts 4 and 5 specifically for proselytising on behalf of a liquidated "extremist" organisation.

Between 20 July 2016 and 20 July 2017, there were: 59 prosecutions (47 of communities, 12 of community leaders) under Part 3 ("Implementation of activities by a religious organisation without indicating its official full name, including the issuing or distribution, within the framework of missionary activity, of literature and printed, audio, and video material without a label bearing this name, or with an incomplete or deliberately false label"); 119 prosecutions (10 of organisations, 109 of individuals) under Part 4 ("Russians conducting missionary activity"); and 15 prosecutions under Part 5 ("Foreigners conducting missionary activity") (see full list at F18News 9 August 2017 <[http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2306](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2306)>).

First instance courts convicted a total of 143 defendants and acquitted only 31. Two cases under Part 4 ("Russians conducting missionary activity") were closed because the statute of limitations had expired, and another two for unknown reasons. Eleven cases were returned by judges to police or prosecutors for the correction of technical errors and were not resubmitted. The outcomes of four prosecutions remain unknown.

Of those convicted, 140 received fines. For Russians, these ranged from 5,000 Roubles, the minimum penalty for individuals under Part 4 ("Russians conducting missionary activity") and the most common punishment up to 40,000 Roubles. Organisations were fined between 30,000 Roubles (the minimum under Part 3 "Implementation of activities by a religious organisation without indicating its official full name, including the issuing or distribution, within the framework of missionary activity, of literature and printed, audio, and video material without a label bearing this name, or with an incomplete or deliberately false label") and 100,000 Roubles (the minimum under Part 4).

An additional punishment under Part 3 ("Implementation of activities by a religious organisation without indicating its official full name, including the issuing or distribution, within the framework of missionary activity, of literature and printed, audio, and video material without a label bearing this name, or with an incomplete or deliberately false label") is the confiscation of religious literature or other items found not to be labelled with an organisation's full legal name - this took place in 11 cases, including three in which judges illegally ordered the materials in question to be destroyed.

In Vladivostok on 20 December 2016, Lenin District Magistrate's Court No. 4 ruled that Bibles and other materials confiscated from the local Salvation Army branch should be destroyed after they were found not to show the organisation's full official name. After the case attracted considerable media interest and disapproval from many in Russia, including the Moscow Patriarchate, an appeal court overturned this order on request of prosecutors.

A similar punishment was imposed in relation to materials belonging to Nizhny Tagil Evangelical Christian Church (see F18News 1 March 2017 <[http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2261](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2261)>). It came into force on 7 July 2017 after the church's supervisory appeal was unsuccessful.

When Noyabrsk Magistrate's Court No. 1 (Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous District) found Hare Krishna devotee Andrei Sysolyatin guilty under Article 5.26 Part 4 ("Russians conducting missionary activity") of distributing religious literature in the street, Judge Yelena Pryadko ordered that his copy of the Bhagavad Gita, a Hindu sacred text, four copies of "The Vedas: Mysteries from the East", and one copy of "One More Chance" should be confiscated and destroyed (see F18News 1 March 2017 <[http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2261](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2261)>). Sysolyatin's appeal at Noyabrsk City Court on 29 March 2017 was successful, however, and both the 9 January destruction order and the 5,000 Rouble fine were overturned.

Two communities charged under Part 3 ("Implementation of activities by a religious organisation without indicating its official full name, including the issuing or distribution, within the framework of missionary activity, of literature and printed, audio, and video material without a label bearing this name, or with an incomplete or deliberately false label"). These were unrelated cases, but were tried by the same judge in Chelyabinsk Region. Both communities were given warnings rather than fines. A Presbyterian seminary in Vladivostok escaped punishment altogether when the judge decided that the alleged offence (also Part 3) was "insignificant".

Foreign citizens received fines of up to 50,000 Roubles, and in five cases were ordered to be deported from Russia (see F18News 1 March 2017 <[http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2261](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2261)>). This was overturned on appeal in one instance. Among the fifteen individuals prosecuted under Part 5 ("Foreigners conducting missionary activity") were: three Ukrainians, two Ghanaians,

two Americans, two South Koreans, one Indian, one citizen of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, one Nigerian, one stateless person, and two people whose nationality is unknown. All four Africans were students who entered Russia in order to attend Russian universities.

## Deportations

Indian Protestant Pastor Victor-Immanuel Mani became the first foreigner to be ordered deported on 20 December 2016, when Judge Mansur Saitgareyev of Naberezhnyye Chelny City Court found him guilty of advertising religious gatherings on social media and allegedly giving religious literature to a non-member of his church. He was also fined 30,000 Roubles (see F18News 1 March 2017 <[http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2261](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2261)>).

Despite his having lived legally in Russia for several years, married a Russian citizen, and had a Russian-born child, Mani was obliged to leave the country after his appeal to the Supreme Court of Tatarstan on 25 January 2017 was unsuccessful. He told Forum 18 that he would continue to attempt to have the ruling overturned.

Judge Atsamaz Gagiyeu of Soviet District Court in Vladikavkaz fined South Korean citizens Eun Chul Sin and Zh. Yu. Ong 30,000 Roubles each on 1 July 2017 and ordered them to leave the country. The pair, both pastors of the Good News Evangelical church, were charged with carrying out unspecified "missionary activity" on the premises of an unregistered church in Vladikavkaz which had not notified the authorities of its existence as a religious group. Because they already had plane tickets out of Russia, the judge agreed not to have them detained or forcibly deported.

Ghanaian student Issa Salifu was ordered forcibly deported and taken to a police detention centre for foreign citizens on 2 June 2017 after October District Court in Ufa found him guilty of performing "missionary activity" without having submitted notification of the creation of a religious group. Salifu had arranged gatherings of fellow African Protestants for "collective worship and dissemination of beliefs" in a hotel conference hall and on church premises, including with members of other religious groups - according to the written verdict, "that is, carried out missionary activity". Salifu appealed to the Supreme Court of Bashkortostan on 19 June 2017 and managed to have the deportation ruling rescinded so that he could finish his studies. Judge Zaytuna Abzemilova ordered that he should be immediately released from the detention centre, but upheld his fine of 30,000 Roubles.

Judge Inna Bulanova of Frunze District Court, Vladivostok, ruled on 3 April 2017 that A.V. Rudenko (religious affiliation and nationality unknown) should be forcibly deported, as he had already been convicted of breaking migration law. He was found guilty of "positioning himself as the priest of a religious association not registered in the Russian Federation" and "publicly disseminating information about his beliefs with the aim of involving new members in the association, including underage children", and also received a fine of 30,000 Roubles.

## Appeals largely unsuccessful

Defendants have submitted appeals in 97 cases, 12 of which have not yet been heard. Of the rest, only 14 were successful, while 58 were unsuccessful and 5 were rejected without consideration by the court. Three defendants have been sent for retrial - one was acquitted and one reconvicted, while the third case was closed because the statute of limitations had expired. Sentences were reduced in another two cases, although the convictions were upheld. The outcome of three appeals is unknown.

Police and prosecutors also appealed against 14 acquittals, three returns of cases for technical reasons, and the single instance of a judge imposing no sentence because of the "insignificance" of the offence - all of these attempts were unsuccessful. In one case, prosecutors successfully requested on appeal that a destruction order on confiscated Bibles lifted after a widespread outcry from religious figures across Russia.

Prosecutions have involved individuals or organisations belonging to the following religious communities: Protestant churches, including Pentecostals - 63; Jehovah's Witnesses - 43; all Baptists (Baptist Union, Council of Churches, and independent/unknown) - 31; Society for Krishna Consciousness (Hare Krishna devotees) - 12; Muslims - 9; people associated with the Bible distribution organisation the Gideons - 6 (all in the same case); Seventh-day Adventists - 5; Jews (Federation of Jewish Communities and a Kabbalah teacher) - 3; Buddhists - 2; unknown Christians - 2; New Apostolic Church - 1; Salvation Army - 1; Presbyterian Church - 1; Lutherans - 1; Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) - 1; Ukrainian Reformed Orthodox Church - 1; and Russian Orthodox Church Abroad - 1. Two others - a village elder charged in connection with a Protestant case, and the leader of a group interested in ancient Slavic culture, accused of propagating pagan beliefs on social media - were also brought to court. The religious affiliation of 8 individuals is unknown. No individuals or communities associated with the Moscow Patriarchate appear to have been prosecuted (see full list at F18News 9 August 2017 <[http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2306](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2306)>).

Fifty out of 83 federal subjects of the Russian Federation saw at least one prosecution (not counting Crimea and Sevastopol). The highest figures were found in Sverdlovsk Region (14 prosecutions), the Republic of Bashkortostan (14), Zabaikalsk Region (12), Nizhny Novgorod Region (10), Krasnoyarsk Region (8), Chelyabinsk Region (8), Oryol Region (7), the Republic of Mordovia (7), Tver Region (6) and Kaliningrad Region (6). Multiple prosecutions often arise from a single incident (for example, a group of Baptists or Jehovah's Witnesses offering literature in the same place on the same day) or a single law enforcement investigation.

In the Republic of Mordovia, for example, police appear to have made a concerted effort to pinpoint Muslim organisations not displaying their full official names, charging six mosque communities under Article 5.26 Part 3 ("Implementation of activities by a religious organisation without indicating its official full name, including the issuing or distribution, within the framework of missionary activity, of literature and printed, audio, and video material without a label bearing this name, or with an incomplete or deliberately false label") with failing to have proper signage on their buildings. Romodanovo District Magistrate's Court, however, acquitted the Tauba, Ramazan, Dzhuma, Al-Radzhah, and Al-Furkan communities (all in the 90 per cent Muslim Tatar village of Belozyorye) on the grounds that they did have signs bearing their full official names on their interior walls, something the police "ignored or did not check", according to the written verdicts. The Muslim community of Aksyonovo village, charged with the same offence, was also acquitted at Lyambir District Magistrate's Court No. 1. Police appeals in all six cases were unsuccessful.

Possible to share beliefs as private individuals?

The most frequent grounds for prosecution under Parts 4 and 5 is the defendant's apparent lack of documents authorising them to engage in "missionary activity" on behalf of a particular organisation or group. Such authorisation, according to the July 2016 amendment to the Religion Law, should be obtained from an organisation's governing body or a general meeting of a religious group, and should include evidence of an organisation's registration or a group's official notification to authorities of its creation.

Defendants often argue that they do not have such documents because they are exercising their constitutional right as individuals to share their own beliefs, but it appears that police, prosecutors, and judges are increasingly seeing individual religious expression as tied, by definition, to formally constituted and officially recognised groups and organisations, thus confining the freedom of religion and belief more and more to an officially regulated and monitored sphere.

Inconsistent judgements

Prosecutions for exercising freedom of religion or belief are also frequent under Administrative Code Article 20.29 ("Production or mass distribution of extremist materials") (see Forum 18's "extremism" Russia religious freedom survey <[http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2215](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2215)>). Prosecutions for possessing allegedly "extremist" religious literature rose between 2015 and 2016 (see F18News 19 June 2017 <[http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2287](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2287)>). Prosecutions have also been frequent under Administrative Code Article 20.2 ("Violation of the established procedure for organising or conducting a gathering, meeting, demonstration, procession or picket") (see Forum 18's general Russia religious freedom survey <[http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2246](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2246)>). But prosecutions under Article 20.2 fell in 2016, as officials began bringing prosecutions with the far higher possible penalties under the "anti-missionary" Article 5.26 instead (see F18News 5 July 2017 <[http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=22937](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=22937)>).

In prosecutions under both these Administrative Code articles their vague language often leads judges to reach differing conclusions in very similar cases.

On 26 May, for instance, taxi driver D.Kh. Sharafeyev (charged under Article 5.26 Part 4 "Russians conducting missionary activity") was acquitted of carrying out "missionary activity" without authorisation from a religious organisation or group. He admitted to Nizhnekamsk Magistrate's Court No. 8 that he had given a Tatar-language leaflet from the New Life Evangelical Church to one of his passengers, but argued that he had done this on his own behalf and not as a representative of the church. His lawyer Konstantin Andreyev pointed out that Sharafeyev had not invited the man to any meetings for worship and that the leaflet contained only "general Christian content", not specific to any particular organisation.

The judge agreed that Sharafeyev had been acting as a private individual and decided that there was insufficient evidence that he had intended to involve his passenger in any religious association. A police appeal at the Supreme Court of Tatarstan was unsuccessful on 27 July 2017.

Baptist shopkeeper Ivan Manakov, meanwhile, was charged with the similar offence of offering religious literature for free at his stall inside a hypermarket in the Stavropol Region town of Essentuki, without written authorisation from the Baptist Union church from which he had obtained the material. He was found guilty on 20 March 2017 at Essentuki Magistrate's Court No. 4 and fined 5,000 Roubles - despite his argument that he had done this on his own initiative and had not been representing the church.

Lack of notification also a problem

Another common reason behind the prosecution of individuals is an alleged failure to submit notification of the existence of a religious group, even if the defendant is not in fact a member of any religious group. This has been a particular problem for both independent Baptists and Council of Churches Baptists. The latter refuse on principle to seek any kind of state registration, and have argued publicly against the restrictions imposed by the introduction of the group notification requirement in 2015.

Formal membership of a religious association (or the lack of it) appears to be key to many prosecutions under Parts 4 and 5, rather than religious identification. In two Part 4 ("Russians conducting missionary activity") cases in Bryansk Region, Muslims were fined

for leading Friday prayers (namaz) "in the presence of people who were not members of a religious association", when they themselves were "not the imam of a mosque [and] not officially part of a religious organisation" and had not notified the local Justice Ministry of the creation of a religious group. Despite the fact that everyone in attendance was also Muslim, this was interpreted as "missionary activity" by both police and judges.

Judge Konstantin Samantsov of Pochep District Magistrate's Court No. 48 fined qualified imam Islam Gadzhiyev 5,000 Roubles on 14 March 2017 for holding prayers in a utility room at a sawmill. At the same court on 25 April 2017, Judge Raisa Koroteleva found Kifoyatullo Mirzoyev guilty of leading prayers at an immigration detention centre and also fined him 5,000 Roubles.

Despite the fact that the (actual or hypothetical) presence of "non-members" is often key to securing a guilty verdict, neither the "anti-missionary" changes themselves nor any subsequent court ruling has offered any guidance on how "members" of a religious association may be defined or identified.

### Ill-defined offences

The July 2016 anti-missionary legal changes and the associated additions to Administrative Code Article 5.26 are extremely vaguely worded (see Forum 18's general Russia religious freedom survey <[http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2246](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2246)>). This means that law enforcement agencies can and frequently do interpret almost anything as subject to punishment (see eg. F18News 20 December 2016 <[http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2242](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2242)>).

Under Part 3 ("Implementation of activities by a religious organisation without indicating its official full name, including the issuing or distribution, within the framework of missionary activity, of literature and printed, audio, and video material without a label bearing this name, or with an incomplete or deliberately false label"), this has included having a website, keeping books in a library, and even a religious organisation's mere existence, if its full official name is not displayed. In many cases under Part 3, these "activities" have nothing to do with even loosely defined "missionary activity".

To avoid potential punishment, communities and individuals must now take particular care over what information they share in the public sphere about their beliefs and even their most mundane activities, and what form this takes.

After Aleksei "Svetozar" Ryzhkov was fined 10,000 Roubles for posting about pagan beliefs on VKontakte, the group which he runs - "Pokon Roda", which is interested in ancient Slavic culture and traditions - edited its information page on the social network, noting that this had been done "in accordance with the Yarovaya law".

Other individuals convicted under Part 4 ("Russians conducting missionary activity"), particularly those whose cases were based on online activity, have deleted social media posts and even posted disclaimers stating that nothing they write or share is intended as "missionary activity". (END)

For more background see Forum 18's surveys of the general state of freedom of religion and belief in Russia at <[http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article\\_id=2246](http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=2246)>, and of the dramatic decline in this freedom related to Russia's Extremism Law at <[http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article\\_id=2215](http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=2215)>.

A personal commentary by Alexander Verkhovsky, Director of the SOVA Center for Information and Analysis <<http://www.sova-center.ru>>, about the systemic problems of Russian anti-extremism legislation, is at F18News 19 July 2010 <[http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article\\_id=1468](http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1468)>.

A personal commentary by Irina Budkina, Editor of the <<http://www.samstar.ucoz.ru>> Old Believer website, about continuing denial of equality to Russia's religious minorities, is at F18News 26 May 2005 <[http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article\\_id=570](http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=570)>.

More reports on freedom of thought, conscience and belief in Russia can be found at <<http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?query=&religion=all&country=10>>.

A compilation of Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) freedom of religion or belief commitments can be found at <[http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article\\_id=1351](http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1351)>.

A printer-friendly map of Russia is available at <<http://nationalgeographic.org/education/mapping/outline-map/?map=Russia>>.

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