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RUSSIA: Wide-ranging blocking of religious-related websites

By Victoria Arnold, Forum 18 (<https://www.forum18.org>)

Russia blocks: websites, apps and Wikipedia pages related to Jehovah's Witnesses and Muslim sites related to theologian Said Nursi (blocked as "extremist"); a website supporting LGBT+ people in religious communities; religious sites criticising Russia's war against Ukraine, including Christians Against War, and Christianity Today; Ukrainian religious sites, including of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine and of religious news sites; social media sites of those opposing the war on religious grounds, such as Fr Ioann Kurmoyarov; and news and NGO sites which include coverage of freedom of religion or belief violations.

The regime's ever-increasing internet censorship has seen religious websites and materials blocked for: "extremist" content; opposition to Russia's war against Ukraine from a religious perspective; and material supporting LGBT+ people in religious communities. Also blocked are Ukraine-based religious websites, social media of prosecuted individuals, and news and NGO sites which include coverage of freedom of religion or belief violations.

This also denies local people freedom of expression in religion-related matters and the opportunity freely to seek information and views on religious issues. It also has a chilling effect on those considering publishing their views on issues related to religion which the regime dislikes.

Many of the blocked religious-related websites are listed at the foot of this article.

Internet users in parts of Ukraine Russia has illegally occupied face the same Roskomnadzor blocking that users face within Russia's internationally recognised boundaries.

Communications regulator Roskomnadzor blocks access to websites (https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2934), demands that even foreign sites remove information deemed to threaten state security or public order in Russia, monitors (with the security services) the use of social media, and is exploring the use of artificial intelligence to make all these processes more efficient.

Websites may be blocked specifically for their religious content (https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2934), if this is associated with material or religious organisations which courts have already outlawed as "extremist", as in the case of Jehovah's Witnesses' sites and even Wikipedia pages about them. This also includes sites supporting LGBT+ people in religious communities (see below).

The majority of religious sites, however, have become subject to "military" censorship since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, with any opposition to the war being taken as grounds for preventing access (https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2934). Similarly, several individuals who have been prosecuted for protesting against the war in religious terms or from a religious perspective have found their social media profiles blocked by order of Roskomnadzor (see below).

Roskomnadzor has also blocked a large number of websites of media outlets, civil society organisations, and human rights groups (https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2934) which have reported on violations of freedom of religion and belief. While their coverage of such issues is not typically the reason for the blocking, restricting access to their work on freedom of religion or belief further reduces the space for discussion of the topic inside Russia (see below).

Beyond their immediate impact, the concrete measures state agencies take to restrict access to online information also has a chilling effect on freedom of expression in general, with Freedom House noting in its 2023 report on Russia (<https://freedomhouse.org/country/russia/freedom-net/2023>) an increase in self-censorship when writing about "controversial" topics.

The majority of religious websites now inaccessible by readers in Russia (without a VPN) appear to have been blocked "openly" – that is, Roskomnadzor has added them to the publicly searchable registry of sites (https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2934) which Russian internet providers are obliged to prevent their customers from seeing.

A few, however, are not in the registry, yet still appear to be inaccessible (https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2934) to some or all internet users inside Russia. It is unclear why this might be – it is possible that such sites have fallen victim to the filtering of internet traffic through Roskomnadzor's "technical means of countering threats" (TSPUs – see below), that smaller, local internet providers may be blocking access or having technical problems, or in the case of sites hosted abroad, the websites' servers may be blocking access requests from Russia.

Forum 18 wrote to Roskomnadzor and its subsidiary, the Main Radio Frequency Centre on 25 September, to ask:

- why sites are blocked for the expression of religious opinions, including on war in general or the war in Ukraine;
- why sites are being blocked without being added to the publicly searchable registry;
- as well as to ask for clarification of technical details of blocking.

Roskomnadzor Press Service's response of 26 September did not answer Forum 18's questions and asked which sites Forum 18 was referring to.

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BLOCKED RELIGIOUS-RELATED WEBSITES

The list of some of the blocked religious-related websites below is based on searches of Roskomnadzor's Unified Registry, use of internet censorship monitoring services (such as Roskomsvoboda and GlobalCheck), and reports by site owners and users.

Religious websites blocked for "extremist" content

Since the mid-2000s, courts in Russia have had literature associated with Jehovah's Witnesses and with late Turkish Islamic theologian Said Nursi ruled "extremist" and added to the Justice Ministry's Federal List of Extremist Materials (https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2897).

In 2008, the Supreme Court outlawed "Nurdzhular" (https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2897), an association based on Nursi's teachings which Muslims in Russia deny has ever existed as a formal entity, leading to prosecutions for "continuing the activity of an extremist organisation" of people who meet to study Nursi's works. For example, on 10 July 2024 Zurab Dzhabrailov was jailed for 6 years and Dzheykhun Rustamov was jailed for 2 years and 9 months (https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2922), for "continuing the activity of a banned extremist organisation".

In 2017, the Supreme Court banned and ordered liquidated the Jehovah's Witness Administrative Centre (https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2897) and its subsidiary entities. Subsequently, nearly 800 Jehovah's Witnesses have also faced prosecutions and jailings for "continuing the activity of a banned extremist organisation" (https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2916).

Roskomnadzor has consequently blocked websites hosting the literature of the Jehovah's Witness and Said Nursi, or otherwise linked to them. It has also blocked sites containing other religious texts which appear on the Federal List of Extremist Materials (https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2897).

Blocks sometimes appear to lead to the complete demise of websites. In multiple cases, site owners either deleted them or ceased to pay hosting fees, allowing domain names to become defunct. In such cases, the blocked addresses are put up for sale again by hosting providers (sometimes leading to Roskomnadzor unblocking the addresses) and are often taken over by gambling, dating, or pornography sites.

Name: Jehovah's Witnesses

Address: <https://www.jw.org>

Date of block: 2 April 2015

Requesting agency: Central District Court, Tver; Kurgalinsky District Court, Krasnodar Region

Background: the main international site of the Jehovah's Witnesses, available in over 1,000 languages, including Russian – Tver City Prosecutor's Office initially had the website ordered blocked on 7 August 2013 on the grounds that it contained literature banned as extremist, but the Jehovah's Witnesses successfully challenged this ruling; the blocking order was reinstated after prosecutors appealed to the Supreme Court (another district court issued a separate blocking order on 27 July 2020).

Name: Jehovah's Witnesses: Legal Situation in Russia

Address: <https://www.jw-russia.org>

Date of block: 30 August 2019 (with www.); 6 December 2019

Requesting agency: Central District Court, Tyumen; Nalchik City Court, Kabardino-Balkariya

Background: site run by the European Association of Jehovah's Witnesses to chronicle prosecutions of Jehovah's Witnesses and other legal issues in Russia; two separate blocking orders dated 13 February 2018 and 22 April 2019 respectively.

Name: JW Library

Address: downloadable from Play Store and Apple Store

Date of block: unknown, but problems reported as early as 2 April 2021

Requesting agency: October District Court, St Petersburg

Background: app offers access to Jehovah's Witness books, pamphlets, and Bible translations; banned as extremist on 31 March 2021.

Name: Wikipedia pages "Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia" and "Persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia"

Address: https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/????????_?????_?_????? and
https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/????????????_????????_?????_?_?????

Date of block: 31 January 2023

Requesting agency: General Prosecutor's Office

Background: Roskomnadzor notified Wikipedia of the pages' violation of Federal Law "On Information, Information Technologies, and Protection of Information", stating that they comprised "Information containing the rationale and (or) justification for the implementation of extremist activities, including terrorist activities" [Roskomnadzor's own English translation];

Name: Ru-nur.com

Address: <https://ru-nur.com>

Date of block: 11 August 2017

Requesting agency: Railway District Court, Novosibirsk

Background: Russian-language Turkish website offering texts of Said Nursi's books, plus an online Koran and general information about Nursi and Islam; block derived from 9 April 2014 Railway District Court ruling; also court rulings by Koptevsky District Court, Moscow (2007); Central District Court, Kaliningrad (2012); Lenin District Court, Kirov (2015), and Novo-Savinovsky District Court, Kazan (2015), according to official registry.

Name: "Official website of translations of the books of 'Risale-i Nur' into Russian by the publishing house 'Envar Ne'riyat'"

Address: <https://www.risale.ru-nur.com/>

Date of block: 5 March 2019

Requesting agency: Railway District Court, Novosibirsk

Background: Russian-language Turkish website offering translations of Said Nursi's writings; blocking order by Railway District Court, Novosibirsk, on 9 April 2014; block also based on 2010 ruling by Railway District Court, Krasnoyarsk, and 2012 ruling by Central District Court, Kaliningrad;

Name: Way to Allah

Address: <https://www.way-to-allah.com>

Date of block: 29 July 2014

Requesting agency: unknown court

Background: multilingual German website offering Islamic texts in translation; according to SOVA Center, court decision dated to 9 June 2014 – block appears to be because the site hosted Muhammad al-Tamimi's "Book of Monotheism" (banned as extremist by Savelovsky District Court in Moscow in 2004).

Name: Library of Islam from A to Ya

Address: <https://bibliotekaislama.wordpress.com/2012/04/24>

Date of block: after 26 May 2014

Requesting agency: Duldurga District Court, Zabaykalsky Region

Background: court decision blocking website page hosting al-Tamimi's "Book of Monotheism" dated 26 May 2014; page and site still exist but remain blocked in Russia with Error 451 message stating site was blocked (in its entirety) by order of the Russian government and linking to further information and the Justice Ministry's Federal List of Extremism Materials; neither listed in registry but marked on Globalcheck as Code 451 (not available for legal reasons).

Religious websites blocked for opposition to Ukraine war / falling into another prohibited category

- Supporting LGBT+ people in religious communities

Name: Nuntiare et Recreare

Address: <https://www.nuntiare.org>

Date of block: 13 July 2023

Requesting agency: Federal Agency for Youth Affairs (Rosmolodyozh)

Russian multi-faith ministry for LGBT+ believers which held meetings in St Petersburg, provides pastoral care, and collates LGBT-affirmative theological materials on its website – the first religious site known to have been blocked (https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2817) for its connection to the LGBT community; first blocked on 11 July 2022 (order dated 28 April 2022), then briefly unblocked between 17 April and 13 July 2023.

- Criticism of invasion of Ukraine / conduct of war

Name: Baznica.info

Address: <https://baznica.info>

Date of block: 10 April 2022

Requesting agency: General Prosecutor's Office

Background: Latvian-based, Russian-language religious news website, edited by Lutheran pastor and commentator Pavel Levushkan; blocking decision dated 7 April 2022 (https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2763).

Name: InVictory Megaportal of Christian Resources

Address: <https://invictory.org>

Date of block: 24 May 2022

Requesting agency: General Prosecutor's Office

Background: Russian-language non-denominational Christian news and information website, critical of war in Ukraine; Roskomnadzor had previously blocked three of its pages (https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2763) (an appeal to

Russian Christians by a Ukrainian Baptist pastor and two articles about deaths and detentions among Protestant civilians in Mariupol), which were unblocked after the full site was rendered inaccessible; site appears to have mostly moved to <https://www.invictory.com>

Name: -

Address: <https://www.invictory.com/forum/subject-21984-books-press.html>

Date of blocking: 7 September 2023

Requesting agency: Pervomaysky District Court, Omsk

Background: a discussion on InVictory's public forum of the "divinely chosen" nature of the "Muscovite-Russian people", with one user in particular mocking the idea, calling it "pseudo-Christian and anti-Christian", and suggesting Russia is a Nazi state; court made blocking decision on 21 July 2023; according to Globalcheck, entire site is inaccessible in Russia.

Name: Public Orthodoxy

Address: <https://publicorthodoxy.org>

Date of block: 31 May 2022

Requesting agency: General Prosecutor's Office

Background: public-facing scholarly forum of Fordham University's Orthodox Christian Studies Centre, New York, which has published numerous articles (https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2763) criticising the Moscow Patriarchate's endorsement of the war in Ukraine and Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill's favoured concept of "Russky Mir" ("Russian World"); blocking decision dated 27 May 2022.

Name: -

Address: <https://ieshua.org/yurij-sipko-gospod-a-ty-za-kogo-htm>

Date of block: 7 July 2022

Requesting agency: General Prosecutor's Office

Background: a page on a Messianic Jewish internet portal containing an anti-war poem (https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2817) by a former head of Russia's Baptist Union, Yury Sipko; page now appears to have been removed from the site; according to Globalcheck, whole site appears to be inaccessible in Russia; blocking decision dated 28 June 2022.

Name: Wikipedia page "The Russian Orthodox Church and Russia's invasion of Ukraine"

Address: https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/??????_????????????_??????_?_????????_??????_??_??????

Date of block: 2 March 2023

Requesting agency: General Prosecutor's Office

Background: According to notification Roskomnadzor sent to Wikipedia, site blocked for "Informational materials containing unreliable socially significant information about the special military operation conducted by the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation in the territory of Ukraine, its form, methods of conducting combat operations, as well as information about numerous casualties among the civilian population of Ukraine".

Name: Akhilla Zen page

Address: <https://dzen.ru/ahilla>

Date of block: 31 May 2024

Requesting agency: General Prosecutor's Office

Background: channel with 35,000 subscribers reproducing materials from main website <https://ahilla.ru> (independent Russian Orthodox website highly critical of Moscow Patriarchate and the war in Ukraine); now displays message "Error 451. Publication blocked by demand of Roskomnadzor", whether accessed from within or outside Russia; despite Roskomnadzor notification of inclusion in Unified Registry, does not appear in registry search results and marked by Globalcheck as 100 per cent accessible – may actually have been blocked by Dzen itself.

(Akhilla announced on its website on 4 June 2024 that its Zen channel had been blocked: "Earlier, Roskomnadzor demanded that we remove some 'extremist' materials, such as a song by the group 'Porno filmy' or a repost of some 'foreign agent'. Then they turned off monetisation, limited the channel only to subscribers, and now they have completely closed it without explaining why exactly.

"However, it is clear anyway: the Russian Ministry of Truth has been diligently explaining to Russians for the third year now: 'war is peace, slavery is freedom', and being an anti-war and anti-totalitarian resource in our time of chauvinism and jingoism is a terrible crime. So if one day you cannot access the 'Akhilla' website, you will know the reason").

(Note: media content platform Zen was created by Yandex in 2017 but sold to VKontakte in September 2022).

Name: Christianity Today

Address: <https://www.christianitytoday.com>

Date of block: 9 September 2023

Requesting agency: None listed

Background: US evangelical Christian magazine; blocking order dated 9 September 2023 (https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2897); site had published Russian-language article on Russian troops destroying Ukrainian churches, which was blocked on 7 September 2023.

Name: Christians Against War

Address: <https://shaltnotkill.info>

Date of block: 9 September 2023

Requesting agency: "State agency not given"

Background: anti-war project chronicling prosecutions of clergy and believers opposing the war in Russia and Belarus, as well as the sacking and defrocking of Moscow Patriarchate priests; blocking decision dated 7 September 2023 (https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2897).

Name: IslamTsentr

Address: <https://islamcenter.ru>

Date of block: 7 September 2022

Requesting agency: General Prosecutor's Office

Background: directory of mosques, halal food outlets, and other services for Muslims in Russia; the site's "About the project" page contains a banner stating "No to war [Net voyne]" with a red cross drawn through the pro-war Z symbol; decision on 31 August 2022;

(The banner links to a YouTube video of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's address to the peoples of the Caucasus and Siberia and "other native peoples" of Russia, uploaded on 29 September 2022 by the Ukrainian TSN news outlet – according to Google image search, the banner has been present on the page from 31 March 2022 (unknown what if anything it linked to at this point).)

Name: Katolik.life

Address: <https://katolik.life>

Date of block: unknown

Requesting agency: unknown

Background: site does not appear in Unified Registry but some users in Russia have reported being unable to access it since June 2024 (other users say they have no problems).

(Several users in Moscow have reported that the site fails to load, the site administrator told Forum 18 on 25 September 2024. There is no specific message about a block, and Roskomsvoboda claimed to Forum 18 on 3 September that it is possible that the problems may be local. However, site visitor statistics show that over the last few months there have been no visits from Russia but a large increase in visits from Norway (now up to more than 70 per cent). This suggests the use of VPNs.)

Ukrainian religious websites

Roskomnadzor has specifically blocked several Ukrainian religious websites, but others appear to be inaccessible from within Russia simply because of their .ua domain name (it is unclear whether this is a Russian or Ukrainian restriction, or both).

Name: Religious Information Service of Ukraine

Address: <https://risu.ua>

Date of block: 9 March 2022

Requesting agency: General Prosecutor's Office

Background: religious news, culture, and analysis website, hosted by the Institute of Religion and Society of the Ukrainian Catholic University in Lviv; blocking order dated 24 February 2022 (https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2741), the first day of the full-scale invasion.

Name: Orthodox Church of Ukraine

Address: <https://pomisna.info>

Date: 5 January 2024

Requesting agency: "State agency not given"

Background: website of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (successor to the Kyiv Patriarchate, made autocephalous in 2019); blocking decision dated 3 January 2024 (https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2886); Roskomnadzor suggests (<https://roskomsvoboda.org/ru/post/site-pcu-blocked/>) block could be because of either "military censorship" or a ban on "information on the collection of donations by religious organisations if they have not received the right to conduct such collections".

Name: Islam in Ukraine

Address: <https://islam.in.ua/>

Date of block: 20 January 2023

Requesting agency: none listed

Background: Ukrainian Islamic news and information portal, associated with Religious Administration of Muslims of Ukraine (Dukhovne upravlinnya musulman Ukrainy); blocking decision dated 7 January 2023 (https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2817).

Name: Ukrainian Lutheran Church

Address: <https://ukrlc.org>

Date of block: unknown

Requesting agency: unknown

Background: not listed in Unified Registry; marked as 0 per cent accessible, "context deadline exceeded" on Globalcheck.

Name: Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organisations

Address: <https://vrciro.org.ua/>

Date of block: 27 January 2023

Requesting agency: none listed

Background: Ukrainian public association for interfaith cooperation, comprising representatives of Christian, Muslim, and Jewish organisations; blocking decision dated 23 January 2023 (https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2817).

Name: Religion in Ukraine

Address: <https://www.religion.in.ua>

Date of block: 31 August 2024

Requesting agency: none listed

Background: independent Ukrainian religious news website; blocking decision dated 9 August 2024.

(Religion in Ukraine stated on 17 September 2024

(<https://www.religion.in.ua/main/51300-religiya-v-ukrayini-destabilizuye-suspilno-politichnu-obstanovku-v-rosijskij-federaciyi-gen-prokuratura-rf.html>) that Roskomnadzor had notified its hosting provider that it had violated the Law on Information:

"It follows from the message that the General Prosecutor's Office of the Russian Federation did not like our work very much, [and has] included our domain in the list of 'Russophobes' who publish 'informational materials aimed at destabilisation of the socio-political situation in the Russian Federation'.

"We were 'given a chance to rehabilitate ourselves' in the eyes of 'Russian justice' by removing the destabilising materials from the site, but since we were not even told what specifically worried them so deeply, we will assume by default that EVERYTHING did. All our analytical materials, our news presentation, after all, our values are the promotion of the idea of church reconciliation and unity and the destruction of the influence of the Moscow Patriarchate on Ukrainian Orthodoxy, not through revenge, hatred and religious war. This is what, in the opinion of Roskomnadzor and the General Prosecutor's Office of the Russian Federation, destabilises the socio-political situation in the Russian Federation and 'creates a threat of a mass violation of public order and/or public safety or a threat of creating obstacles to the functioning or stopping the functioning of life support facilities'.

"We consider the verdict of the General Prosecutor's Office of the Russian Federation a compliment and recognition that we are working effectively.

"How does it threaten us and our readers? For everyone who does not live in Russia - nothing. We continue to work in the same spirit. Unfortunately, Russian readers who are interested in us will be able to read us at best through a VPN. But in order to be able to follow our updates from Russia (and they read us there), 'Religion in Ukraine' plans to start a Telegram channel.

"We thank our admirers and even enemies who have created incredible advertising for the portal".)

Social media accounts of individuals who have opposed the war on religious grounds

Name: Anna Sergeyevna Chagina

Address: https://vk.com/anna_chagington

Date of block: 3 September 2022

Requesting agency: General Prosecutor's Office

Background: Chagina was convicted under Criminal Code Article 280.3, Part 1

(https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2852) (repeat "discreditation" of the Russian Armed Forces) and fined 150,000 Roubles on 7 August 2023 for anti-war posts on VKontakte and displaying a placard reading "Blessed are the peacemakers [Matthew 5:9]" at an anti-war protest in Tomsk in March 2022.

Name: Father Ioann Kurmoyarov / Orthodox Virtual Parish

Address: <https://dzen.ru/id/5f9bebec369a816b324b5df6>

Date of block: 9 March 2022

Requesting agency: General Prosecutor's Office

Background: now-defunct Yandex Zen channel hosting videos also posted on YouTube; blocking decision dated 24 February 2022; Fr Ioann (formerly of the Moscow Patriarchate, now a member of a branch of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia) posted videos critical of the Russian government and the Moscow Patriarchate before Russia's invasion of Ukraine, then began to condemn the war and the actions of Russian troops; he was prosecuted under Criminal Code Article 207.3 (dissemination of "false information" about the Armed Forces) and sentenced to three years' imprisonment (https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2756), from which he was released on 1 August 2024 (https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2925).

Name: Lena Sokolova

Address: <https://vk.com/id694689962>

Date of block: after 1 September and before 3 December 2022

Requesting agency: General Prosecutor's Office

Background: blocking decision dated 1 September 2022; page does not appear in Unified Registry and remains accessible within Russia, but with content blocked by VKontakte from the view of Russian users.

(Lena Sokolova is a Russian Christian who opposes the invasion of Ukraine. She set up the Telegram channel "Those scattered by persecution" (https://t.me/christians_together "Rasseyavshiyesya ot goneniya") in March 2022 to maintain communication between Christians in Russia and Ukraine, and has been consistently critical of the war both there and on her VKontakte page, where she continues to post, despite the block:

"You don't need to have any special empathy or wisdom to be against war while living in Russia. History has already shown that among the active opponents of war there have been poorly educated grandmothers who barely remember yesterday, as well as children and teenagers, and housewives. You just need to be fair, or righteous according to the Synodal [Bible]. Impartial. Judge and act righteously, fairly. And not partially, shielding 'your own'. God requires this of us even in the Old Testament.

"Everything is simple and accessible even to a child. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. This is a principle for the whole world, the whole world knows it. And unbelievers often, to the shame of believers, are more successful in it" (12 July 2024).

Sokolova does not appear to have faced administrative or criminal prosecution.

On 3 August 2024, she responded to a Telegram subscriber who commented that they had stopped using VKontakte: "On the contrary, I began to write there actively with the beginning of the war. We must be the light, and not hide in a Christian bunker".)

Name: Archbishop Viktor Pivovarov

Address: <https://www.youtube.com/@eshatologia>

Date of block: 25 June 2024 – access restored on 26 June 2024

Requesting agency: unknown

Background: channel with videos of sermons taken down with no notification from either Roskomnadzor or YouTube – reinstated the following day after an appeal to Google, but the company offered no explanation; Archbishop Viktor, who has openly and vehemently condemned the Russian invasion of Ukraine in his sermons and writings, was fined 150,000 Roubles (https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2904) under Criminal Code Article 280.3 (repeat "discreditation" of the Armed Forces) in April 2024 and his church in Krasnodar Region, which is not affiliated with the Moscow Patriarchate, has been threatened with demolition (https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2911); the church website <https://eshatologia.org> appears never to have been blocked.

(On 20 May 2024, independent Russian news outlet Agentstvo noted that YouTube had blocked three videos (<https://www.agents.media/youtube-has-begun-blocking-opposition-content-at-the-request-of-the-russian-authorities>) about avoiding military mobilisation on the "Dozor v Volgograd" and "Shkola prizyvnik" channels, and had informed OVD-Info of a possible block on its whole channel. Agentstvo commented that this may indicate a change in YouTube's approach to requests from the

Russian authorities.

YouTube restored direct links to the videos the day after Agentstvo's article, Radio Liberty reported on 22 May 2024 (<https://www.svoboda.org/a/ostalsya-tenevoy-ban-kak-youtube-blokiroval-oppozitsionnyy-kontent-/32958050.html>), but the videos still did not appear in searches and probably not in recommendations – a "shadow ban", according to Yevgeny Kochegin of "Dozor v Volgograd".

In 2023, Google fulfilled more than 50 per cent of Roskomnadzor requests, mostly about YouTube; more than 30,000 requests were based on political reasons – Google does not say in its report how many requests in this category it upheld (other requests were regarding copyright infringement, fraud, suicide, and illegal drugs).)

Media / NGO websites

Blocked for opposition to war / criticism of Russian government / violations of "foreign agent" law – covered freedom of religion or belief violations among other topics;

Name: OVD-Info

Monitors detentions and prosecutions of people who criticise the Russian government or who are targeted for their beliefs, including Jehovah's Witnesses, Muslim Nursi readers, and individuals who have opposed Russia's war in Ukraine on religious grounds; provides legal advice and support;

Address: <https://www.ovdinfo.org>

Date of block: 25 December 2021

Requesting agency: Lukhovitsky District Court, Moscow;

Background: formerly OVD-Info's main website; blocking decision dated 20 December 2021 (<https://ovd.info/express-news/2023/06/07/rkn-zablokiroval-sayty-ovd-info>) and apparently based on the fact that "OVD-Info's activities were allegedly aimed at promoting terrorism and extremism in Russia"; unblocked on 7 April 2023 after ruling overturned for procedural reasons.

Address: <https://ovd.info>

Date of block: 14 February 2024

Requesting agency: Justice Ministry

Background: OVD-Info's new main website; blocking decision dated 7 February 2024 (<https://ovd.info/express-news/2024.02.14/roskomnadzor-snova-zablokiroval-sayt-ovd-info>) and based on alleged violations of the "foreign agent" law.

Addresses: <https://ovd.legal> and <https://ovd.news>

Date of block: 7 June 2023

Requesting agency: Justice Ministry

Background: OVD-Info's legal advice platform and news feed; both sites blocked by same decision, dated 2 June 2023 (<https://ovd.info/express-news/2023/06/07/rkn-zablokiroval-sayty-ovd-info>); reasons for block unclear. Now at <https://ovdinfo.legal> and <https://ovd.info/express-news>

Address: <https://vk.com/ovdinfo>

Date of block: after 1 July and before 11 August 2022

Requesting agency: General Prosecutor's Office

Background: OVD-Info's group on VKontakte social network; blocking decision dated 1 July 2022 (<https://ovd.info/express-news/2022/08/11/soobshchestvo-ovd-info-vo-vkontakte-zablokirovali-na-territorii-rossii-po>) and based on alleged presence of "false socially significant information about the special military operation" (ie. the war in Ukraine), including about Russian attacks on Ukrainian civilians and civilian infrastructure, and Russian military casualties.

Name: Conscript School (Shkola prizyvnik)

Address: <https://netprizyvu.ru>

Date of block: 4 April 2024

Requesting agency: none listed

Background: organisation advises young men subject to conscription into the Russian armed forces, including on how to apply for alternative civilian service on the basis of religious or philosophical beliefs; blocking decision dated 2 April 2024.

Name: Memorial Human Rights Centre

Address: <https://memohrc.org>

Date of block: 28 May 2022

Requesting agency: General Prosecutor's Office

Background: reports on human rights abuses in Russia and Memorial's involvement in court cases, including at the European Court of Human Rights, plus list of political prisoners, including Jehovah's Witnesses and Muslim Nursi readers; blocking order dated 28 May 2022.

Name: Memorial Human Rights Centre

Address: <https://memorialcenter.org>

Date of block: 19 March 2024

Requesting agency: none listed

Background: new site; blocking decision dated 9 March 2024.

Name: Memorial Support for Political Prisoners

Address: <https://memopzk.org>

Date of block: 30 April 2024

Requesting agency: none listed

Background: new site for list of political prisoners; blocking decision dated 20 April 2024; also blocked in " www." form (same IP address) on 15 August 2024.

Name: International Memorial Association

Address: <https://memo.site>

Date of block: 30 September 2024

Requesting agency: "State agency not given"

Background: English- and Russian-language information about political repressions, both current and historical, advice on supporting political prisoners, and interviews with their relatives, including many reports on trials of Ukrainian POWs; blocking decision dated 26 September 2024.

Name: Urals Memorial

Address: <https://ekmemorial.org>

Date of block: 13 November 2023

Requesting agency: Justice Ministry

Background: site run by members of unregistered volunteer group which documents the history of Soviet-era political repressions in Urals and runs expeditions to the sites of Gulag camps – news pages also report on present-day political prisoners, including in Russian-occupied Ukraine; reason appears to be "foreign agent" law; blocking decision dated 8 November 2023 (<https://ekmemorial.org/novosti/1068-roskomnadzor-nas-zablokiroval.html>).

(END)

More reports on freedom of thought, conscience and belief in Russia (<https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?country=10>)

For background information see Forum 18's Russia religious freedom survey (https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2897)

Forum 18's compilation of Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) freedom of religion or belief commitments (https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1351)

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