

# On Violations of the Rights of Russian Citizens and Fellow Citizens in Foreign Countries

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of the Russian Federation

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Countries are listed in accordance with the alphabet of the Russian language

\* After the NATO aggression against Serbia in 1999, the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija does not fall under control of Belgrade. At the same time, the UN SC resolution 1244 confirms the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Serbia as regards Kosovo.

## **Introduction**

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation is consistently paying close attention in its work to violations of the rights of Russian citizens and compatriots in foreign countries and within the scope of the authority of its diplomatic missions makes efforts to protect the interests of Russian citizens. This report comes in continuation of the Ministry's efforts to keep tabs of this problem.

We note with regret that the problem of violation of the rights of Russian citizens and compatriots abroad still has no signs of any improvement so far and, moreover, the negative trends continue due to the efforts of the "collective West."

There persists and only exacerbates the barbaric discrimination of Russians in a number of countries, especially in Europe and North America. This large-scale violations of the rights of Russians add to other known notorious problems that our compatriots have been faced for many years.

All such violations of the rights of Russians, such as denial of a wide range of services (educational, medical, banking, etc.), the introduction of measures against Russian business and seizure of property of Russian citizens, suspension of Russians from sports and culture events, hypocritically forcing them to public repentance and condemnation of the actions of Russian authorities (here one should also point out double standards applied by international sports organizations against Russians and representatives of some other countries in similar situations). Furthermore, there are continuing reports of attacks, threats and insults against Russians, deliberate damage of their property and all sorts of discrimination in everyday life ranging from dismissal from employment on ethnic grounds to eviction of Russian families from flats in violation of rental contracts, among other things.

In recent years, an unchanging negative trend has become that Russia's special military operation (SMO) to denazify and demilitarize Ukraine and protect the civil population of Donbass is used as a justification of such despicable attitude to our compatriots.

This negative trend is supplemented by the fact that in many countries engaged in a sanctions war against Russia, the facts of discrimination and persecution of Russians do not receive any significant attention from their official leadership. That is why the persons who faced discriminatory attitude do not report the authorities the cases of violation of their rights, realizing that there is no point to wait for any reaction from that national authorities to find the perpetrators and hold them accountable.

In the light of the support for the neo-Nazi regime in Kiev demonstrated by the “collective West”, Poland, the Baltic states, Ukraine itself and some other countries pursue the most Russophobic course. The common feature for all of them was, under the pretext of “condemning Russian aggression,” to fight against monuments and memorials commemorating the Red Army soldiers who perished in the battles for the liberation Europe from Nazism. That fight they, as the genuine followers of the ideology of Nazism, brought almost to paranoia and manic persecution of any symbol commemorating fighters against fascism. We would like to note in this regard, that, in addition to this report, the above-mentioned actions, which contradict the decisions of the Nuremberg Tribunal, are also covered in the Ministry's report on the manifestations of the glorification of Nazism in the world (published in September 2024).

A number of states do not limit their historical revisionism only by the fight against monuments and memorials. Along with this, persecutions of compatriots and anti-fascist activists living abroad continue and further intensify, especially in relation to their efforts to preserve the genuine historical memory and protect memorials and monuments commemorating Soviet soldiers. In a number of countries (first of all in the Baltic states, the United States, Canada and Ukraine), members of the Russian-speaking community who promote the preservation of cultural, linguistic and historical ties with Russia and advocate constructive relations with our country face pressure and repression on the part of the authorities. In addition, the authorities in Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Ukraine intensified their efforts to squeezing the Russian language out of all educational

institutions, thus trampling on the right of the residents (and citizens among them) to education in native language. Furthermore, the threat of mass deportation of Russian-speaking residents by the authorities of the Baltic states is still maintained: the first attempts on their part to solve, once and for all, the "Russian problem", as well as the unprecedented – especially for the 21<sup>st</sup> century – issue of widespread statelessness in their territories, have already been recorded. These illegal actions affected several thousand people, including elderly people, who lived their whole lives and worked for the benefit of the states that are expelling them.

Finland and Moldova try to catch up with the "leaders" of the Russophobia and now are limiting education in Russian language and imposing various restrictions, (in Moldova the ruling regime acts according to the same "manuals" that the Western curators have prepared for Ukraine).

Along with the above-mentioned, there persists the problem of detentions and politically motivated prosecution of Russians, including upon the request of third countries, the majority of such requests coming from the United States (the "hunt" for our compatriots launched by the U.S. authorities continues all over the world ).

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia, for its part, continues to take all possible diplomatic steps to protect the rights of Russian citizens imprisoned abroad. Russian diplomatic missions closely monitor such cases and, where necessary, bring them to the attention of the highest levels. Diplomatic officials provide Russian citizens with consular support within the scope of their authority, seek unconditional respect for their legitimate rights and interests, and work on alternatives to detention and returning the citizens to their homeland for serving sentences there.

We continue to record cases of foreign authorities' obstructing the activities of Russian journalists and persons representing Russian media. In the foreign media environment, there is a consistent and increasing trend towards mounting information campaigns against foreign politicians and public figures engaging in cooperation with Russian media. We would like to emphasize: all such actions

demonstrate the desire of the Western countries to eradicate alternative points of view and prevent the realization of one of the basic rights of their citizens, i.e. the right to freedom of expression, which includes the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of state borders.

This report has been prepared based on the information and analytical materials provided by Russia's missions abroad using data from both Russian and foreign media and other open sources, including the conclusions and recommendations of the international human rights organizations and mechanisms. It takes stock of and systematizes the reports of hundreds of compatriots about the infringement of their rights abroad, including those received through hotlines organized by diplomatic missions.

We also continue to exchange information with Russian specialized non-governmental organizations that conduct relevant monitoring within their purview.

The following is an analysis of specific situations in individual countries.

## Australia

According to the last census, held in August 2021, the Green Continent is home to about 98,000 natives of Russia, which is about 0.4 per cent of the country's population. Most of all compatriots live in the states of Victoria and New South Wales – up to 40,000-45,000 people.

Russophobia fueled by the Australian authorities and the Ukrainian community (including the Australian Federation of Ukrainian Organizations) has certainly added to the burden on Russian citizens and compatriots living in the country. The Russian Embassy in Canberra has received reports of isolated instances of hostility or animosity towards them.

The country's major media issue anti-Russian content on a regular basis. Expressing any alternative views has become virtually impossible. In March 2022, Stan Grant, the host of a popular Q+A talk show expelled a young audience of Russian descent from the studio for his attempt to voice an opinion in support of Russia's actions.

In March 2023, SBS Russian,<sup>1</sup> a Russian branch of Australian public broadcaster SBS, issued an article about a Russian young man called Ruslan, whose application to Deakin University, one of the country's leading universities, was rejected. The University cited as a reason the discriminatory decision it adopted in March 2022 to cease cooperation with new students from Russia (including those with a residence permit in Australia) and foreign citizens residing in the territory of Russia.

In November 2023, according to the Australian media, the University of Tasmania accused its employee, a Russian-born academic, Vadim Kamenetsky, of allegedly exposing the University to "high risk" of foreign "interference" by receiving funds from Russian institutions and conducting research with the Russian Science Foundation and the Russian Academy of Sciences.

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<sup>1</sup> Discriminatory: Australian university's Russian student boycott draws criticism. SBS. 24 March 2023. <https://www.sbs.com.au/language/russian/en/article/un-australian-melbourne-university-slammed-over-russian-students-course-rejection/aile3px1m>



In October 2023, the government of South Australia canceled the Kalinka Russian Ensemble composed of local children and young people of Russian heritage from the line-up of an annual Multicultural Festival in Adelaide in November under pressure from the Ukrainian community. The Russian Embassy in Australia, in turn, published a statement in its social media demanding to stop discrimination against Russians in South Australia reminding Canberra of its obligations under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The statement also noted that the ideology of ethnic hatred which forms the essence of the Kiev regime is now aggressively imposed in Australia with the connivance of the Australian authorities. A demarche was taken by the embassy.

In November 2023, it became known that the management of one of the country's largest educational centres offering the study of Russian language and culture – Macquarie University (Sydney) – decided to abandon the teaching of five languages, including Russian. As of March 2024, there were approximately 100 students from across Australia enrolled in the course, including online. A petition was launched by students in defence of the Russian language department at Macquarie. Despite the fact that it collected 1,365 signatures, enrollment in the Russian language department will be halted as early as September 2025.

The Australian Tennis Federation has extended the ban imposed in 2023 on the display of Russian and Belorussian flags at the Australian Open Tennis Championships in Melbourne in January 2024.

For two consecutive years the Australia Day Council of South Australia has banned the members of the Russian Cultural Center and the athletes of the local sambo federation from taking part in the traditional 26 January parade. In 2024, notification of the removal of Russian compatriots from the list was sent only four days before the event.

It is worth noting that the authorities do not prevent the Victory Day celebrations. On 4 May 2024, an Immortal Regiment march took place in Sydney CBD. On 9 May in Sydney's Waverley Park, the Russian Ambassador to Australia

and citizens honouring the heroic deeds of the Soviet army laid wreaths at the memorial plaque to the Soviet soldiers-liberators.

## **Austria**

According to the Austrian Statistical Office data as of 1 January 2024, 37.3 thousand Russian citizens (2 per cent of the total number of foreign citizens) live in that country. According to unofficial estimates, about 100 thousand compatriots have settled in Austria. The majority of them (up to 90 per cent) represent the "third wave" of emigration (those who left Russia after 1991). A significant number of compatriots have acquired Austrian citizenship.

The core of the Russian-speaking diaspora in Austria is made up of people of reproductive age, increasing is the number of young people and children. According to the Austrian Integration Fund, 38.3 per cent of Russians in Austria are under 25 years old, while just 4.5 per cent are over 64.

After having drastically aggravated with the start of a special military operation to denazify and demilitarize Ukraine and protect the civilian population in Donbass (SMO) by Russian armed forces on 24 February 2022, the overall situation around Russian citizens in Austria looks relatively stable in 2024.

The Austrian authorities at the federal and state levels continue to pursue a course of complete "freezing" of cooperation with Russia and its official representatives in almost all areas, making pinpoint exceptions for cooperation in the memorial sphere. The country's top leadership is still sticking to anti-Russian rhetoric.

Compatriots in Austria, who were subjected to pressure, threats and harassment for their pro-Russian utterances after the SMO had started, currently report nothing like this.

In connection with the sanctions imposed by the EU against our country, as well as Russian NGOs and foundations, Austrian banks have imposed a number of restrictions on Russian citizens living in Austria, as well as Austrian citizens with Russian roots, including additional checks on the owners of already active accounts and their closure without explanation, and also resist the opening of new accounts, including those of Russia-linked public organizations. The Embassy of

the Russian Federation in Austria encountered difficulties in making bank transfers for the needs of Russian compatriots' organizations.

Attempts to "cancel" Russian culture after 24 February 2022 have been unsuccessful, continuing sporadically through effort of the Ukrainian Ambassador in Vienna only.

Many domestic creative persons live in Austria, working under contract or having received a residence permit or Austrian citizenship. Among them are a number of famous cultural figures – Russia (USSR) natives: A. Netrebko, V. Atlantov, M. Meshcheryakova, N. Ushakova, G. Kremer, E. Leonskaja, O. Misenberg.

Our compatriots perform main and leading parts in the Wiener Staatsoper, Volksoper Wien, Wiener Philharmoniker and other opera and ballet companies. The Russian ballet school is widely represented at the Vienna State Opera (prima ballerinas and soloists Olga Esina, Maria Yakovleva, Lyudmila Konovalova, Vladimir Shishov).

In the media space, pressure is still being exerted on public figures, particularly in the cultural sphere, with calls to unequivocally condemn the SMO and distance themselves from Russia.

The 2024 study of legal situation of Russian compatriots in Austria found no serious violations of their rights and freedoms. The Russian Embassy has received no information about new specific cases when the rights of Russian citizens and compatriots in Austria were violated that would require a targeted quick response.

The majority of Russian citizens living in Austria profess Orthodoxy, a smaller part (of Caucasian and Jewish origin) belong to Islam and Judaism respectively. There are five parishes of the Russian Orthodox Church Moscow Patriarchate (ROC MP) in the country – in Vienna, Graz, Linz, Laa-an-der-Thaya and Innsbruck, as well as one parish of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia (ROCOR) in Salzburg (Salzburg). St. Nicholas Cathedral in Vienna (about one thousand parishioners) is the main centre of spiritual life of Russian-speaking Orthodox believers.

Two Russian Language and Culture Centres operated in Austria with the support of the "Russkiy Mir" Foundation until March 2022 – at the universities of Salzburg and Innsbruck, but as the SMO had started the universities announced the termination of cooperation with the Foundation and reformatting of the Centres into East European ones. In this regard, the Vienna Schottengymnasium refused the exchange program, Russian funding for its projects and holding events with the participation of Russian officials.

Austria adopted amendments to its Law on Audiovisual Media, providing for a ban on RT and Sputnik broadcasting in the country under the pretext of SMO propaganda coverage. After the EU sanctions had been adopted, any dissemination of their materials on television, radio, streaming platforms, social networks (including reposts and quotations) was prohibited in Austria under threat of an up to 50 thousand euro fine.

In April and June 2024, the Austrian authorities revoked the permanent accreditation of TASS correspondents Ivan Popov and Arina Davidyan under trumped-up pretexts; they were then informed of the termination of their registration and ordered to leave that country within two weeks. Ms. Davidyan appealed this decision, and the consideration of her case is ongoing. The MIA Russia Today correspondent continues to work in the normal mode.

Austria generally conscientiously fulfils its commitments to care for Soviet military cemeteries, most of which are in good condition. The Federal Ministry of Internal Affairs, in cooperation with state authorities, continues, granted budgetary possibilities, activities to renovate Red Army memorials that require repair. Annual notes of the Russian Embassy to the Austrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs with a list of cemeteries in need of restoration, compiled following the regular inspections of Red Army burial places, lay the basis for this work.

In 2024, a project was launched to perpetuate the names of Red Army soldiers buried at the Soviet Military Cemetery (SMC) in Mannswörth-Schwechat (Lower Austria), whose names became known in 2022 during large-scale archival and research work with Russian Embassy engagement. Oral confirmation was

received that the names of all soldiers would be written in Russian. The work is tentatively scheduled to be completed by April 2025.

Local authorities at all levels are promptly and professionally involved in stopping incidents related to SMCs and memorials, primarily in terms of desecration consequence management. In 2024, three cases of hooliganism were recorded.

In 2023-2024, the Austrian side continued to deny the Russian Ambassador and diplomats the right to participate in memorial events to mark the anniversaries of the end of World War II in Europe (a ceremonial event at the Federal Chancellery (Bundeskanzleramt), a memorial event at the memorial complex on the former Mauthausen concentration camp site).

In April 2024, the International Mauthausen Committee once again "asked" Russian representatives not to attend celebrations to mark an anniversary of the liberation of the Mauthausen concentration camp – the "Festival of Joy" in Vienna (8 May) and the annual event on the former camp premises (5 May). Public officers' official addresses focused exclusively on the problem of anti-Semitism and responsibility for the Holocaust keeping completely silent about the sacrifice and heroism of the Soviet people. The Austrian Black Cross (Österreichisches schwarzes Kreuz), a war grave care union, expressed regret at the curtailment of intensive cooperation with the Embassy alleging European sanctions.

At the same time, changes for the better are recorded at the regional level.

The Russian Embassy in Vienna regularly receives invitations to participate in memorial events from activists and authorities at the level of federal states and municipalities. On 13 April 2024, on the occasion of a Vienna liberation anniversary, at the invitation of the Communist Party of Austria Vienna Floridsdorf district branch, Embassy staff took part in a memorial ceremony at the Jedleseer and Stammersdorf-Zentral cemeteries. On 13 October, at the invitation of the Upper Austria Union of Anti-Fascists, they honoured the memory of the Austrian Red Army anti-fascists, father and son Racovec, during an event on the Mauthausen premises.

The topic of Nazi ideology prevailing among Ukrainian refugees, who are trying, among other things, to disrupt memorial events held by Russian diplomatic missions in Vienna, is essentially ignored and misses the due assessment by local authorities.

## **Albania**

After the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation started the special military operation for demilitarization and denazification of Ukraine and protection of Donbass civilians, there has been a surge in Russophobia in Albania. The Albanian government expressed their full solidarity with the collective West in evaluation of Russia's actions, condemning Moscow's "unprovoked and unjustifiable aggression".

Albania strongly supports all EU sanctions against Russia, maintains an anti-Russian stance in international organizations, including the UN. As a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council in 2022-2023, together with the United States, Albania worked on the "Ukrainian dossier".

Manifestations of Russophobia in the country also include numerous anti-Russia attacks of the Albanian leadership, materials in mass media with harsh criticism of Russia, as well as individual cases of "bullying" of our compatriots via Internet.

At the same time, official Tirana has so far refrained from adopting any laws or regulations aimed at restriction of rights of Russian or Russian-speaking residents of the country and Russian citizens.

In 2024, the Embassy of the Russian Federation received no reports on violation of the rights of compatriots and Russian citizens.

There have been few cases of discrimination by the owners of small shops, cafes, beauty salons who refuse to provide services to Russians in solidarity with the Kiev regime. There were reports of refusals to provide banking services to Russians and Albanian citizens because their spouses had Russian passport.

The Albanian authorities have demonstrated full support for the activities of the Embassy of Ukraine in Tirana that since February 2022 organized a number of anti-Russian actions and meetings with participation of representatives of the Ukrainian expatriate community, including in front of the Russian diplomatic mission office. In some cases, students of the Tirana State University took part in



such events and notably, as is known, that the agitation campaigns among them were held by professors coming from Ukraine. All these actions received wide coverage in the local media.

The Albanian authorities prefer to ignore the facts of clear manifestations of Nazism and Fascism. Relevant materials provided by the Russian Embassy in Tirana to be used further remain in editorial offices without being published.

## **Belgium**

According to estimates (there are no official statistics on ethnic background in Belgium), the Russian-speaking diaspora in Belgium numbers 70,000 people out of a total population of 11.6 million. According to the statistical office of the Ministry of Economy of Belgium, the number of Russian citizens living in the country in 2023 is approximately equal to 11,500 people (we are talking only about those who do not have Belgian citizenship).

Approximately half of Russian-speaking compatriots live in Flanders, most of them in the province of Antwerp, about 30 per cent in Wallonia and 20 per cent in the Brussels-Capital Region. The places of their compact residence are cities such as Brussels, Antwerp, Ghent, Liege, Mons, Namur, Ostend, and Charleroi.

Representatives and descendants of several generations of Russian immigration live in Belgium. The first migration flow is more than 10,000 Russians from the "white movement" whose families preserved their cultural identity – founded several Orthodox churches, taught their children the Russian language, strengthened humanitarian ties between the two countries, and preserved the continuity of generations. Many descendants of Russian noble families openly express pro-Russian views, which cause criticism of them by the Belgian media. The second migration flow is Soviet citizens who were taken away by Hitler during World War II for forced labour. Many of them started families and remained in the country after 1945. The third migration flow is citizens of Russia and other CIS countries who arrived in Belgium in the 1990s. A significant part of them were natives of the North Caucasus, as well as representatives of scientific and creative intelligentsia from the republics of the former USSR.

After the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation launched the special military operation to demilitarize and denazify Ukraine and protect the civilian population of Donbass, there has been an increase in unfriendly attitudes towards citizens and natives of Russia in Belgium. From April 2022, Belgian authorities suspended the issuance of tourist visas to Russian citizens.

According to the Inter-Federal Centre for Equal Opportunities (UNIA), it received about 40 complaints from Russian citizens in 2022. They mainly concerned the denial of certain banking services, scholarships, and nationality-based harassment in educational institutions.

The Information and Legal Centre of Russian Compatriots in Brussels received more than 300 applications in 2022 (an average of 6 per week). At the same time, there is an increase in requests concerning the lack of direct air transportation with the Russian Federation and "sanctions restrictions" against Russian companies and banks.

A prime example of discrimination is ING Bank, which notified in November 2023 that it would cease banking services to the Belgian Federation of Russian-speaking Organizations from February 2024. And this is despite the fact that the bank itself suffered significant losses from the sanctions imposed at the EU level against Russia. In addition, the ban imposed by the European Union as part of the 14th package of anti-Russian sanctions on financing the activities of European political parties, foundations and NGOs from Russian sources, including non-state ones, makes it virtually impossible for the Russian embassy to support the activities of Russian compatriots' organizations.

Belgium, where the international securities depository Euroclear is located, is the leader in terms of frozen Russian assets (€272 billion), including those belonging to individuals and organizations.

In Belgium, access to Russian state portals, RIA Novosti and VGTRK news resources was blocked, and satellite broadcasts of Russian-language TV channels were cut off. Belgian media regularly publish materials aimed at intimidating and exerting psychological pressure on the Russian diaspora and organizations of Russian compatriots.

Governments of certain regions of Belgium also take discriminatory actions against Russian citizens. In particular, such a decision was taken by the government of Flanders, which closed to Russian applicants the opportunity to take part in the Mastermind program providing for the provision of grants (up to

8,400 euro per study year) to foreign bachelor students wishing to upgrade their professional level within the Master units of Flemish universities. At the same time, young people who were already in Flanders were able to continue their studies. However, the specialized bodies will not consider new applications for scholarships "until the end of hostilities in Ukraine". This was announced by the Minister of Education of Flanders Ben Weyts (representative of the New Flemish Alliance party) on his social network page.

At the same time, the councils of rectors of Belgian universities of the French and Flemish communities, short-sightedly being guided by the political current political situation, decided to suspend cooperation with Russian universities in any form. At the same time, during the reporting period, the Embassy of Russia did not receive any appeals or complaints from Russian students of Belgian universities related to their expulsion or inappropriate treatment by the management of educational institutions or fellow students.

The Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) has been present in Belgium since 1862. Orthodoxy was recognized as an official denomination in 1985. Recently, the number of parishioners visiting ROC churches has increased significantly, including due to refugees from Ukraine. In this regard, calls to stop state funding of ROC parishes in Belgium are of particular concern. Thus, this proposal was made in September 2024 by Willy Fautré, journalist and director of the organization Human Rights without Borders.<sup>2</sup>

The commune of Seraing (a suburb of Liège) has filed a lawsuit with the Belgian Council of State (a body competent to assess the legality of decisions of public authorities) demanding to revoke the permit issued by the regional authorities for the construction of an Orthodox church near the site of a concentration camp for Soviet prisoners of war during the World War II.

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<sup>2</sup> "The outcome is a foregone conclusion." The West has found Russia's vulnerable point. RIA Novosti. 29 September 2024.  
<https://ria.ru/amp/20240929/uyazvimaya-1975115568.html>

## **Bulgaria**

In recent years, the Bulgarian authorities have been increasingly active in spreading and enforcing Russophobic sentiments in the country. There is a consistent policy of Bulgaria's ruling elites to rewrite the common pages of history – attempts are made to downplay the role of the Soviet Union in World War II and the victory over Nazism.

One of the areas of this activity is the fight against the Soviet legacy. The cases of desecration of Soviet graves with anti-Russian slogans are getting more frequent. Vandals, as a rule, manage to avoid punishment. The damage is repaired by political organizations that maintain a constructive approach, Russophile associations, anti-fascist NGOs and the Russian Embassy in Bulgaria.

It is worth emphasizing the fact that the policy of the official authorities does not receive a wide response from Bulgarian citizens, who honour the feat of the Soviet Army and remember its contribution to the liberation of the country from the "brown plague". There have been no open manifestations of discrimination against Russians and Russian-speaking residents on the part of the Bulgarian population.

At the same time, in 2024, the Sofia municipality and the mayor of Sofia banned the march of the "Immortal Regiment". The indifferent residents of the capital held the march regardless and honoured the memory of the fallen in the fight against Nazism.

In Sofia, events were also held at the mass grave of Soviet soldiers and at the pedestal of the Soviet Army Monument, the sculptures of which were demolished in December 2023 upon the authorities' decision. A rally-concert was held at the Alesha Memorial in Plovdiv to commemorate the heroic deeds of the liberators. Similar events were organized in Burgas, Ruse, Stara Zagora, Varna and other settlements.

In early February 2023, based on the Regulation of the Council of the European Union, the broadcasting of Channel One and NTV, and in 2022 that of

Russia-1, Russia-24, Russia Today and Sputnik TV channels was discontinued. These steps caused public discontent. In February 2023, several dozen people took part in a protest in front of the European Commission office in Sofia. The protest was held under the slogans of stopping information terror and censorship in the country.

At the end of October 2023, the Bulgarian authorities suspended the accreditation (with subsequent extradition) of Rossiyskaya Gazeta correspondent A. Gatsak. On 1 November, the Russian journalist left the country.

It comes as no surprise that the Russophobic course of the Bulgarian leadership has affected Russia's Ambassador to Sofia. In violation of the right to freedom of expression, on 16 December 2023, the Programme Board of Bulgarian National Radio banned the broadcast of a previously recorded interview of the Russian Ambassador to Bulgaria E. Mitrofanova.

The pressure on patriotic activists has intensified. A vivid example to this is the persecution of Z. Dovlenski, Chairman of the Plovdiv branch of the National Movement "Russophiles" in Bulgaria, who was detained in July 2024 by Bulgarian security services on suspicion of "disclosure of secret information". He was later released on bail. The investigation is ongoing and he faces up to 8 years of imprisonment.<sup>3</sup>

The Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) is also subjected to the oppression from the Bulgarian authorities. Thus, on 21 September 2023, the Bulgarian State Agency for National Security expelled from the country three priests of the Church of St. Nicholas the Wonderworker, a mission of the Russian Orthodox Church in Sofia, headed by the rector, Archimandrite Wassian. For this purpose, a far-fetched pretext was used to counter "the hybrid strategy of the Russian Federation to exert a targeted influence on social and political processes in Bulgaria in favour of Russian geopolitical interests".

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<sup>3</sup> Maria Zakharova comments on the persecution of the Head of the "Russophiles" organization in Bulgaria. RIA Novosti. 18 July 2024. <https://ria.ru/amp/20240718/zakharova-1960521266.html>

## **Bosnia and Herzegovina**

According to the 2013 Bosnia and Herzegovina census, 276 individuals identified themselves by nationality as Russians (less than 0.01 per cent of the total population). The majority of the fellow citizens live in the cities of Banja Luka, Sarajevo, Trebinje, and Zenica.

In 2003, the Law on the Protection of the Rights of Citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina Belonging to National Minorities was adopted at the state level. Under the law, there are 17 ethnic communities (including Russian) in the country, the representatives of which are guaranteed the freedom of ethnic self-identification, the freedom to establish associations and to assemble in order to express and protect their cultural, religious, educational, social, economic and political rights, as well as the freedom to use symbols and their native tongue.

There are no reported incidents of discrimination against fellow citizens in BiH on the grounds of citizenship, race, language, gender, religion, political and other beliefs. At the same time, certain politicians and media outlets opposed to Russia sometimes seek to accuse Russian citizens staying in BiH for various reasons of spreading the so-called "harmful Russian influence".

Recently, the memorial cemetery in Ugljevik (Republika Srpska (RS)), where several Soviet partisans who fought on the territory of present-day BiH on the side of the Yugoslav underground resistance during the fascist occupation are buried, has become a traditional venue for the annual Victory Day commemorations, organised by the Russian Embassy in cooperation with the RS authorities.

Studying Russian language has become popular in the RS. Since June 2023, the Centre of Open Education in Russian and Russian Language Teaching, established with the assistance of the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation, has been operating on the premises of the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of East Sarajevo, where, with the resources of the Tula State Pedagogical University (TSPU) named after Leo Tolstoy, Russian programmes are

taught free of charge both to full-time and online students. In October 2023, the TSPU and the University in Banja Luka signed an agreement on cooperation which provides, among other things, for opening an office of the Centre in Banja Luka. In addition to the TSPU, other major Russian universities, including the Ural Federal University, the Nizhny Novgorod Dobrolyubov State Linguistic University and the Financial University (Moscow), have signed cooperation agreements with universities of the Republika Srpska.

Since September 2023, the Music Academy of the University of East Sarajevo has been offering the first educational program in Russian in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in the Balkans. The professors of the academy, 80 per cent of whom are fluent in Russian, have certified teaching in Russian for the following specialities: violin, viola, harmonica, piano, and solo singing.

In recent years, the twenty-year downward trend in the teaching of Russian in Republika Srpska schools has reversed. In addition to 79 schools, mainly in small towns and villages, where Russian had been taught before (in 2022 the total number of those learning Russian amounted to 9,000 compared to 30,000 in 2004), from the beginning of the 2023-2024 school year, studying Russian as a second foreign language has been introduced in 29 more schools in the RS cities of Banja Luka, Bijeljina, Gradiška, Doboj, Pale, Prijedor, Teslić, Trebinje.



## **United Kingdom**

According to the UK's Office for National Statistics (results of the 2021 census), Russian-speaking population of the UK totals 91.3 thousand people, among them 56.3 thousand hold the citizenship of Russia or the citizenship of one of the CIS countries; 26.7 thousand are citizens of the UK and 8.3 hold the citizenship of one of the EU countries. Meanwhile, around 10 thousand Russians are staying in Britain on work and study visas.

Learning Russian is very popular in the UK. For instance, as of 2021, Russian ranked eighth among the most popular languages in the UK. According to the British Association of Russian Language Teachers, the majority of children who have Russian-speaking parents also speak Russian.

Russian fellow citizens are well integrated into British society and in general have not faced systemic rights violations or discrimination on grounds of nationality, ethnicity or religion. At the same time, since February 2022, following the launch of the special military operation to demilitarize and denazify Ukraine and protect the civil population of Donbass, incidents of bullying of Russian and Russian-speaking citizens have been registered across the country. There was also an increase in targeted police pressure on fellow citizens who are activists or leaders of diaspora structures, mainly with the aim to contain their pro-Russian patriotic activities.

After the launch of the Special military operation, amidst a surge in russophobia, the number of active fellow citizens associations in the UK has decreased. Due to objective reasons, they ceased to serve as a public diplomacy channel for strengthening the interaction between the two countries.

British politicians are fuelling Russophobia. For instance, on 24 February 2022, Tom Tugendhat, a Conservative MP and the Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee, suggested Russians (including the Ambassador of the Russian Federation to the UK) should be expelled from the country in order to protect the interests of the British people and of the international partners. Another Tory MP,

Roger Gale, echoed his position and urged on 28 February 2022 to send home every Russian living in the UK. Keir Starmer Keir Starmer, the then Prime Minister, leader of the Labour Party, has made similar statements.

David Cameron, Foreign Secretary at the time, also repeatedly made hostile anti-Russian statements. On 3 May 2024, in an interview to Reuters, he stated that Ukraine had the right to strike Russian territory using British weapons.<sup>4</sup>

In this context, it is not surprising that, according to Ofcom, British regulator for the communications services, Russia's special military operation should be covered in an exclusively pro-Western manner. The refusal to describe these developments as an invasion of a sovereign state's territory cost RT its broadcasting licence in the United Kingdom. In order to justify its decision, Ofcom invoked 29 concurrent investigations into this media outlet aimed at examining the due impartiality of its coverage of the events in Ukraine.<sup>5</sup>

The environment in which the Russian media have to work in the UK remains challenging. Primarily, this is due to the constant pressure exerted on them by the country's authorities. Our correspondents are facing difficulties in obtaining information and in networking. There have been incidents when journalists have to wait for a long time for the authorities' decision to renew their visas, which hinders them in full exercise of their professional activities. The lengthy decision-making on the initial issuance of visas to Russian journalists makes matters worse.

Owners of public places have commonly distributed leaflets with the slogan "GOOD Russian = DEAD Russian".

The Consular Section of the Russian Embassy to the United Kingdom was attacked by hooligans who broke windows of the reception hall for citizens. Contrary to the UK's obligations under international law, Russian diplomats saw their rights to work, to just and favourable working conditions, to access to any

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<sup>4</sup> Britain's Cameron, in Kyiv, promises Ukraine aid for "as long as it takes". Reuters. 3 May 2024.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/britains-ukraine-aid-as-long-it-takes-2024-05-02/>

<sup>5</sup> Ofcom revokes RT's broadcast licence. Ofcom. 18 March 2022.

<https://www.ofcom.org.uk/news-centre/2022/ofcom-revokes-rt-broadcast-licence>

public service, and to personal security and to protection by the receiving State impaired.

Through 2022, all local authorities suspended twinning activities with Russia to suit the government's general policy of supporting Kiev.

On 18 January 2023, representatives of Manchester City Council refused to take part in memorial events organized by the Embassy and Russian fellow citizens to mark the 80th anniversary of the break of the siege of Leningrad, despite the fact that Manchester and Saint Petersburg had been developing twin city relationship since 1962.

In 2023-2024, the British side did not invite representatives of Russia to participate in commemorative events dedicated to the common history. At the same time, the British authorities did not obstruct the laying of wreaths at war memorials and burial places in London, Manchester, Aldershot, Dundee, Lendalfoot, Errol and at the Orkney Islands, including events attended by the Russian Ambassador to the United Kingdom and the Consul General of Russia in Edinburgh, as well as inspections of military burials of the pre-revolutionary and Soviet period located in the country.

Culture and sports have not been spared the anti-Russian hysteria. For instance, the British auction houses Christie's, Sotheby's, and Bonhams refused to hold auctions of Russian art.<sup>6</sup> The Royal Birmingham Conservatoire suspended its Russian graduate from participation in a music competition in Dublin.<sup>7</sup> The Cardiff Philharmonic Orchestra, for its part, decided not to host a concert dedicated to the work of Pyotr Tchaikovsky.<sup>8</sup> The Royal Ballet and Opera cancelled the Bolshoi Ballet tour in London.<sup>9</sup> The National Gallery decided to rename Edgar Degas'

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<sup>6</sup> Sotheby's, Christie's and Bonhams call off Russian art auctions in response to war in Ukraine. The Art Newspaper. 16 March 2022. <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2022/03/15/sothebys-christies-call-off-russian-art-auctions-ukraine-war>

<sup>7</sup> Controversy as young Russian pianists banned from international music competitions. Classic FM. 10 March 2022. <https://www.classicfm.com/discover-music/instruments/piano/young-russians-banned-international-competitions/>

<sup>8</sup> Cardiff Philharmonic removes Tchaikovsky performance over Ukraine conflict. The Guardian. 9 March 2022. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/mar/09/cardiff-philharmonic-orchestra-removes-tchaikovsky-over-ukraine-conflict>

<sup>9</sup> Bolshoi Ballet run cancelled by Royal Opera House. The Times. 26 February 2022. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/bolshoi-ballet-run-cancelled-by-royal-opera-house-mk5vsftqh>

Russian Dancers as Ukrainian Dancers at the request of a Ukrainian artist Mariam Naiem.<sup>10</sup>

Russian racing teams and racing drivers were banned from all competitions in the UK. In particular, Nikita Mazepin, a Russian Formula one racing driver, was suspended from the British Grand Prix.<sup>11</sup> Russian tennis players faced suspension threats as well. For instance, it was required of Daniil Medvedev to publicly condemn the Russian special military operation, thus conditioning his participation in Wimbledon.<sup>12</sup> Eventually, all Russians and Belarusians were banned from the competitions under the pretext of a contribution to the large-scale efforts of the UK government to limit Russia's influence worldwide. This absurd decision of the All England Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club (AELTC) was opposed by the world's leading tennis players and specialized sports associations.

In February 2023, the United Kingdom expressed its disagreement with the option to allow Russian and Belarusian athletes to participate in the Olympic Games in a neutral status, which was considered by the International Olympic Committee (IOC). Moreover, having surrounded themselves with a coalition of the like-minded actors made up from 35 countries, the British authorities issued a joint statement calling the IOC, which counts 193 member states, to ban athletes from Russia and Belarus from competing in France in 2024.

The refusal of the British journal Nature to publish Russian scientists' work mentioning the Moscow Institute of Physics and Technology is yet another example of nationalism and Russophobia. Previously, the journal refused to publish Russian physicists in a specialized journal Nature Physics until they removed the mention of the institute placed under blocking sanctions by the United States and some other Western countries.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> London's National Gallery renames "Russian Dancers". Rossiyskaya Gazeta. 5 April 2022. [https://rg.ru/2022/04/05/londonskaia-nacionalnaia-galereia-pereimenovala-russkih-tancovshchic.html?utm\\_source=yxnews&utm\\_medium=desktop](https://rg.ru/2022/04/05/londonskaia-nacionalnaia-galereia-pereimenovala-russkih-tancovshchic.html?utm_source=yxnews&utm_medium=desktop)

<sup>11</sup> Motorsport UK announces actions in response to the situation in Ukraine. Motorsport UK. 2 March 2022.

<https://www.motorsportuk.org/news/motorsport-uk-announces-actions-in-response-to-the-situation-in-ukraine/>

<sup>12</sup> Daniil Medvedev could be banned from Wimbledon unless he denounces Vladimir Putin. The Independent. 16 August 2022. <https://www.independent.co.uk/sport/tennis/daniil-medvedev-putin-russia-wimbledon-b2037376.html>

<sup>13</sup> Zakharova: Nature displayed nationalism. TASS. 9 July 2024. <https://tass.ru/politika/21312443>

The Russophobia issue hardly receives any marked attention from the British authorities, the media and NGOs. By way of exception, on 3 March 2023, the findings of a Sky News journalistic investigation were released, which indicated a rise in incidents of discrimination against Russian fellow citizens since February 2022. The investigation noted that the discrimination had occurred with no connection to a person's position on the special military operation, and was based on nationality only.<sup>14</sup>

Among the most egregious criminal offenses recorded by British law enforcement officials are beatings, death threats and threats of grievous bodily harm, vandalism and damage to property, sending mail containing white powder and telephone terrorism. Shockingly, according to the publication, discrimination and attacks on the basis of nationality and ethnicity often targeted children of primary school age. And these attacks, in the words of one of the interviewed experts, are only the tip of the iceberg. In fact, such incidents are much more common: from demanding businessmen to cut all ties with Russia to imposing restrictions on Russian Orthodox Church parishes in the UK.<sup>15</sup>

The 2024 presidential election was no exception. During the voting at the polling station at the Embassy of the Russian Federation in London, a protest action was held outside the diplomatic mission premises, with protesters chanting anti-Russian slogans, thus the voters' passage to the polling station was to some extent obstructed. Just before the election, Russians living in the UK were receiving threats.<sup>16</sup> Thanks to the active civic position and manifestation of genuine patriotism by Russians, attempts to sabotage the elections failed. The voter turnout hit a record high: about 2.7 thousand Russian citizens exercised their constitutional right in the UK.

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<sup>14</sup> Russians assaulted, threatened and abused in UK as hate crimes linked to Ukraine war surge. Sky News. 3 March 2023. <https://news.sky.com/story/russians-assaulted-threatened-and-abused-in-uk-as-hate-crimes-linked-to-ukraine-war-surge-12821923>

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Russian Ambassador: several hundred people try to disrupt the polling at the Embassy in London. TASS. 17 March 2024. <https://tass.ru/politika/20260873>

## **Hungary**

The situation of the Russian citizens residing in Hungary does not cause any concern; no cases of their biased prosecution have been reported.

Since February 2022, local opposition has expressed disapproval of our country's foreign policy, although without mass support. The Russian Embassy in Budapest is aware of cases of refusal to provide Russians with various services, mainly in the banking and telecommunications sectors (opening new and blocking previously opened accounts, restrictions on foreign exchange transactions, purchasing SIM cards, providing Internet services, increasing mortgage interest rates, purchasing property, etc.). It is of particular concern that Russian students who have come to Hungary to receive education in that country's universities are facing similar problems.

At the same time, starting from mid-2019 already, there were cases of refusals to extend residence permits for Russian citizens and their further deportation referring to an alleged threat to the country's national security. The Russian Embassy in Hungary has noted more than ten cases of deportation of Russians and banning them from entering the Schengen countries for a period of 5 years and over. Our citizens' lawyers had no opportunity to study the case files in full, as the extradition was initiated by the Constitution Protection Authority of Hungary that restricted access to the investigation files. At the same time, in 2024 the Embassy received no information about the deportation of Russian citizens from Hungary.

Generally, Budapest strictly complies (especially in the pan-European context) with the provisions of the bilateral intergovernmental Agreement on the perpetuation of the memory of fallen military personnel and civilian victims of wars and on the status of burials of 6 March 1995, although since only the beginning of 2024 cases of desecration of Soviet military memorials for clearly anti-Russian purposes have been increasing (4 episodes in total). The Russian Embassy in its contacts with the authorities calls on the Hungarian side to take

effective measures to counter such acts of vandalism, often committed by intentionally odious opposition political activists.

## Greece

There were no systematic violations of the rights of Russian citizens by the Greek state prior to Russia's recognition of the independence of the Donetsk People's Republic and the Lugansk People's Republic and the start of the special military operation (SMO) by the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation on 24 February 2022, to denazify and demilitarize Ukraine and protect civilians in Donbass.

With the beginning of the SMO, the Greek authorities embarked on a policy of winding down bilateral cooperation, including in cultural and humanitarian areas.

On 1 March 2022, Minister of Culture and Sports of Greece Lina Meldonis announced the decision to "postpone all events involving Russian cultural organizations, cooperation with them and discussion of any joint plans". The Russia-Greece Cross Year of History under the patronage of President of the Russian Federation and Prime Minister of Greece was terminated. A number of cultural events have been cancelled. Recently, however, the ban imposed by the Ministry of Culture has begun to weaken in relation to Russians performing "in their personal capacity". Thus, in February 2023, a violinist Vadim Repin and a pianist Mikhail Pletnev performed at the Megaro Moussikis concert hall in Athens.

The right to freedom of religion of Russian citizens in Greece is not being violated. Greece counts several Russian-speaking Greek Orthodox Church (GOC) parishes. After the Moscow Patriarchate broke off Eucharistic communion with a number of dioceses of the GOC, including the Archdiocese of Athens, as a result of the recognition of the Ukrainian schism by the Greek Church (October 2019), some of the laity moved to other parishes in protest against the legalization of the "Orthodox Church of Ukraine".

After the start of the SMO, a campaign to discredit Russia, unprecedented for this country and the former high level of bilateral relations, was launched in the Greek media, fuelled by official anti-Russian statements. The access of the public



in Greece, including Russians, to objective information about the events in Ukraine and neighbouring new Russian regions, as well as about Russian approaches to the situation, is seriously hampered with rabid Russophobic coverage dominating the media landscape. The outreach work of the Russian Embassy in Athens and the Consulate General in Thessaloniki is under attack.

Greece has joined the discriminatory decisions of the European Commission to ban Russian TV channels broadcasting, outlaw Russian news agencies, newspapers and their subsidiaries in the EU. At the same time, pro-government media have more than once offered a platform to Kiev-controlled diaspora organizations in Greece, which promoted a distorted picture of the situation near Mariupol and other liberated territories.

There have been records of acts of vandalism and desecration of monuments associated with Russia and the countries that were part of the USSR and did not renounce their historical heritage.

For the first time in many years, a memorial site associated with the anti-fascist struggle was desecrated. On 19 March 2022, in Callithea district of Athens, unidentified persons spray-painted the name and symbols of the Ukrainian "Azov" battalion on the Monument to Soviet soldiers who fell for freedom and independence of Greece in 1941-1944.<sup>17</sup> The Greek Foreign Ministry condemned the action. On 25 March 2022, the monument to Admiral Fedor Ushakov on the island of Corfu was splattered with paint, and the Russian flag was torn off.<sup>18</sup> Initiative groups of Russians with participation of municipal authorities quickly put the monuments in order.

In the city of Rethymno (Crete) the Russian flag was repeatedly torn off the flagpole near the building of the Honorary Consulate of Russia in Greece. Local authorities took measures and installed a 24-hour surveillance camera. The acts of vandalism stopped. Also, in March 2022, offenders took down the information

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<sup>17</sup> <https://ria.ru/20220319/pamyatnik-1779066642.html>

<sup>18</sup> <https://ria.ru/20220326/pamyatnik-1780239271.html>

plate on the monument to Alexey Orlov's navy squadron on the island of Lemnos and stole the Russian flag from the flagpole.

The Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation started criminal investigations into all relevant cases. Local law enforcement authorities launched an investigation into these incidents, with no results so far.

With the beginning of the SMO and the Greek authorities at idle, Russophobic representatives of the Ukrainian diaspora living in the country intensified their activities. Along with activists from the Georgian community, they regularly hold small (15-20 people) anti-Russian rallies in the central square of Athens, in Thessaloniki and other cities of Greece.

There have been cases of everyday Russophobia. Russians and Russian-speaking citizens faced aggression and bullying, mainly from nationalistically indoctrinated people from Ukraine.

On 3 April 2022, a group of Ukrainians attacked participants of the automobile race "For Peace! For Russia! For Greece!" held in the Greek capital. As a result, a seven-year-old girl from Russia was injured. The Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation started a criminal investigation into case.<sup>19</sup>

On 24 April 2022, Ukrainians attacked a Russian woman on a beach in Athens.<sup>20</sup>

In a Greek school, a sixth-grade schoolgirl was beaten by her classmates in a hate crime and was hospitalized after receiving injuries.<sup>21</sup>

In social networks, Ukrainians continue with anti-Russian propaganda, call for violence against Russians and Russian-speaking citizens, and glorify neo-Nazi fighters in the Armed Forces of Ukraine and national battalions. In one of the social networks, the "Grekobanderovtsy" community is collecting money to help the Armed Forces of Ukraine. The Greek authorities do not respond to such activities in any way.

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<sup>19</sup> <https://ria.ru/20220403/napadenie-1781582293.html>

<sup>20</sup> <https://ria.ru/20220426/paskha-1785484413.html>

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.holocausteducenr.gr/executive-summary/>.

The Russian Embassy in Greece continues operating a hotline for incoming requests from citizens who have suffered from manifestations of Russophobia. No high-profile attacks on Russians have been recorded recently.

Russian citizens permanently residing in Greece have encountered difficulties with banking services; their accounts, which are often their main and only sources of income<sup>22</sup>, have been blocked. The restriction of access was motivated by the provisions of Council Regulation (EU) 2022/328 of 25 February 2022.

Russians accused of migrant smuggling from the Middle East and North Africa are being held in Greek penitentiary institutions. Given that this type of offense is classified as particularly serious in Greece, most of them have been sentenced to long prison terms. The Russian Embassy has not heard any complaints from our citizens about the conditions of detention, their health, or improper treatment by prison authorities. They receive the necessary assistance through consular channels. If case of need, humanitarian aid is provided as well.

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<sup>22</sup> <https://ria.ru/20220323/banki-1779646928.html>

## Denmark

Since the beginning of the special military operation by the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation to denazify and demilitarize Ukraine and protect the civilian population of Donbass (SMO), the Danish authorities have taken an extremely anti-Russian position. Amid the ongoing SMO, many of our fellow citizens living in Denmark have begun to complain about the "unfavourable media coverage", infringement of their rights and psychological pressure. Some Russian citizens say they occasionally fall victim to Russophobic campaign, the policy of "weeding out" everything Russian, including the mention of this word in the names of non-profit organizations.<sup>23</sup>

There have been cases of bullying and provocation in Danish schools against children and teachers of Russian origin, including by Ukrainian refugees, and discrimination against our fellow citizens on ethnic grounds.<sup>24</sup> A number of Russian citizens have faced hate speech and threats, causing them to hide their origin from others and refrain from speaking Russian in public places.<sup>25</sup> Those Russians who refuse to support the neo-Nazi Kiev regime have been attacked on social media.<sup>26</sup>

Cases of vandalism were recorded in Denmark against the buildings of the Russian Embassy and the Russian Centre for Science and Culture (RCSC), the St. Alexander Nevsky Church in Copenhagen, against memorials to soviet soldiers in Copenhagen, Aarhus and Alling, Bornholm, and monuments to Russian cultural figures.

There have been cases of the Danish authorities failing to promptly inform or avoiding notifying the Russian Embassy of incidents involving the detention of

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<sup>23</sup> <https://nyheder.tv2.dk/samfund/2023-02-28-russere-i-danmark-det-er-blevet-mere-ubehageligt>.

<sup>24</sup> <https://nyheder.tv2.dk/samfund/2023-02-28-ukrainske-elever-udviste-ifoelge-skole-grov-adfaerd-over-for-dansk-russisk-laerer-meget-meget-ulykkelig-sag>;  
<https://aarhus.lokalavisen.dk/samfund/ECE13836748/elever-med-russisk-baggrund-i-fare-for-mobning-vi-naevner-ikke-at-hendes-mor-kommer-fra-rusland/>;

<https://nyheder.tv2.dk/samfund/2023-02-28-russere-i-danmark-det-er-blevet-mere-ubehageligt>.

<sup>25</sup> <https://nyheder.tv2.dk/samfund/2023-02-28-russere-i-danmark-det-er-blevet-mere-ubehageligt>;  
<https://www.bt.dk/samfund/irina-skjuler-nu-hun-er-fra-rusland-episode-i-dansk-butik-gjorde-udslaget>.

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.tv2ostjylland.dk/aarhus/dansk-russer-i-opraab-ukraine-er-ogsaa-skyld-i-krigen>.

Russian nationals. Although the Danish law enforcement authorities officially provide consular access to detained Russian nationals, they regularly delay the deadline for arranging such visits.

At the same time, the Danish authorities do not impede overt recruitment by the Ukrainian Embassy in Denmark of Danish subjects and citizens of other countries to take part in combat operations in the SMO zone on the side of the AFU. The aggressive activities by the Ukrainian Embassy which violate the provisions of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations of 1961 are not limited to recruitment of mercenaries. The information resources of this diplomatic mission are also used to disseminate photos and videos of torture, ill-treatment and brutal killings of the Russian military in Ukraine. The authorities prefer to disregard illegal activities of the Ukrainian diplomatic mission.

In January 2024, Jyllands-Posten newspaper published a series of articles<sup>27</sup> containing groundless accusations against parishes of the Russian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate in Denmark. These publications were a targeted campaign to discredit the activities of Orthodox parishes and incite hatred on the grounds of religion or nationality. The Danish government and parliament were urged to add the ROC to the "blacklist" of extremist organizations (which currently includes several extremist organizations) and to legitimize restrictions preventing parishes from receiving funding from the Moscow Patriarchate.<sup>28</sup> This would make it impossible for them to continue their activities. There has been no response from the Danish Institute for Human Rights (DIHR) or other human rights organizations of the Kingdom regarding the newspaper's provocative publications.

In June 2024, as part of a coordinated provocation by a number of Western media, involving special services, the Danish television and radio company, DR, published an inaccurate "journalistic investigation" into the Russian Foundation for

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<sup>27</sup> <https://jyllands-posten.dk/politik/ECE16761723/hemmeligt-dokument-afsloerer-loekke-brugte-hidtil-uset-greb-for-at-frede-putins-forlaengede-arm-i-hobro-koebenhavn-og-paa-baagoe/>

<sup>28</sup> <https://jyllands-posten.dk/politik/ECE16790502/afsloering-danskrussiske-kirker-samlede-penge-ind-til-kontroversiel-praest-nu-anklages-han-for-at-levere-vaaben-til-fronten/>

the Support and Protection of the Rights of Compatriots Living Abroad, aimed at discrediting the organization, severing the ties between Russian compatriots and their homeland and making it as difficult as possible to protect their legitimate interests. Based on this material, a Russian woman engaged in Russian diaspora activism was unjustly detained in Denmark in June 2024, under the far-fetched pretext of "espionage", without any evidence.

As part of the campaign ahead of the European Parliament elections in Denmark in June 2024, a number of Danish candidates of Russian origin were accused of having "links to Russia" and subjected to pressure and threats, which forced them to withdraw their candidacy for the European Parliament.<sup>29</sup> Cases have been recorded where Danish citizens of Russian origin were dismissed from their jobs and subjected to police investigations.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> <https://www.dr.dk/nyheder/seneste/alternativet-kandidat-traekker-sig-fra-eu-valg-efter-historier-om-russiske>;  
<https://www.dr.dk/nyheder/indland/venstre-kandidat-traekker-sig-efter-afdaekning-af-russiske-forbindelser>.

<sup>30</sup> <https://nyheder.tv2.dk/2024-09-03-23-aarig-fyret-af-forsvaret-paa-grund-af-familierelation>.

## **Ireland**

Seeking to demonstrate its frontline role in orchestrating sanctions pressure on Russia, and advocating a "maximalist approach" in this regard, Dublin has fully supported all fourteen EU anti-Russian restriction packages, enthusiastically advocating their further expansion in order to strangle the Russian economy and defeat the rights of Russian individuals and entities.

Dublin took a number of unfriendly actions against Russia on a bilateral basis, including the expulsion of four Russian Embassy staff and a campaign to reduce the Russian diplomatic presence in Ireland. At the same time, the retaliatory measures, in particular Russia's placing 52 Irish politicians on the list of persons barred from entering our country in November 2022, provoked almost hysterical reactions in the Irish political establishment and mainstream media.

Due to the beginning of the special military operation (SMO) for the denazification and demilitarisation of Ukraine by the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, preparation and holding of the events related to the Victory Day took place in a hostile atmosphere from a part of the Ukrainian diaspora and some representatives of the Irish society.

In 2022, the administration of the Phoenix Park in Dublin, where the most massive rally of the "Immortal Regiment" has traditionally taken place, refused to provide a site.

At the instigation of the authorities, Irish media widely broadcasted statements of a number of Irish politicians on the inappropriateness of celebrating the Victory Day in relation with the situation in Ukraine.

Despite the Russophobic campaign in the media, the Coordination Council of Organizations of Russian Compatriots (CCRC) in Ireland organized a mass motor rally on 8 May 2023. The column of 100 vehicles, mostly driven by nationals of Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and the Baltic States, transited through the territories of several counties of Ireland without incident. There were Irish law enforcement patrols placed along the route of the rally at the request of the

organizers. The event culminated in the traditional Immortal Regiment procession.

In 2024, the CCRC also organized mass celebration of the Victory Day, including a traditional rally and the Immortal Regiment march. On 6 May, about 200 vehicles started from Dublin with Victory banners and St. George's ribbons and drove to a place in the Drogheda area, which is 50 km far from the capital. The scope of the event was great, the attendance was high (according to the CCRC estimates, 800-1,000 people took part therein),<sup>31</sup> and the participants were of different nationalities – citizens from Belarus, Kazakhstan, Baltic States and even Ukraine, as well as Irish people sympathizing Russia participated in the event along with Russians. The organizers managed to establish connection with Donetsk and hold a video conference.<sup>32</sup>

On 4-6 May 2024, local events to mark the Victory Day, including child contests, creative meetings with the performance of poems and songs about the Great Patriotic War, were also held.

There is still a tendency to spread negative attitudes towards Russia in Irish public sphere. The Irish sections of international human rights NGOs, such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Frontline Defenders, work actively in this regard. Meanwhile, there were no cases of explicit discrimination against Russian journalists.

The generally stable legal status of Russian compatriots in Ireland has deteriorated markedly since February 2022. Many Russian-speaking people, including Russian nationals, have faced harassment at work, at school, and in public organizations. This was largely provoked by artificially fuelled Russophobic campaign in Irish media. It was particularly illustrated by the decision of Irish broadcaster Raidió Teilifís Éireann (RTÉ) to rename the popular weekly programme about Russian culture "Russian Hour" on Dublincity 103.2 FM to "Kaleidoscope".

In this regard, the CCRC in Ireland took steps to help the victims to draw up

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<sup>31</sup> <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/20725625>

<sup>32</sup> <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/20725625>



appeals to local security services or members of the Irish representative body. The Coordinating Council also drafted a petition to the Irish Parliament demanding that measures be taken to protect Russian diaspora and the Russian language from discrimination. The document paid special attention to the prevention of harassment of Russian-speaking pupils and students.

Russophobic sentiments also affected the Russian diplomatic mission in Ireland. On 7 March 2022, a truck rammed the gate of the Russian Embassy in Dublin. The police watched what was happening but did nothing to prevent this. This incident severely breaches article 22 of the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations.

Moreover, the Embassy officials have numerous times drawn attention of the Irish authorities to aggressive actions of activists organizing daily protests and throwing eggs and stones at Russian diplomatic vehicles, damaging surveillance cameras and dousing with red paint Russian coat of arms at the gate of the Embassy and the Ambassador's residence fence.

According to the EU anti-Russian sanction legislation, Ireland has blocked access to Russia Today and Sputnik satellite feeds. Meanwhile, there were no cases of censorship against Russian media in Ireland, attempts by state authorities to restrict their activities or explicit discrimination.

In 2024, there were no relevant appeals from Russian citizens about violations of their rights in prisons or custody.

## Iceland

According to "RUS.is", the Russian-language portal of the NPO "Russian Cultural Centre" in Iceland, since the beginning of the special military operation for demilitarization and denazification of Ukraine and protection of Donbass civilians, there has been a rise of Russophobia in Icelandic society incited by national press, declarations of the country's authorities and restricted access to unbiased information.<sup>33</sup>

Iceland has joined all EU's illegal sanctions against Russia, including restrictive measures against Russian media and journalists.

On 27 February 2022, the prime minister of Iceland announced on television the intention to cancel all the visas issued to Russian citizens. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Iceland later corrected prime minister's words and informed that only certain categories of visas would be cancelled.<sup>34</sup>

Since February 2022, Icelandic media have conducted disinformation campaign to discredit Russia's politics amid the situation around Ukraine. Mainstream Icelandic press made a significant number of biased publications of purely anti-Russian nature without indicating alternative sources of information and objectively analysing the situation.<sup>35</sup>

Since the beginning of the special military operation, several meetings were held in Iceland in front of the consular division of the Russian Embassy.<sup>36</sup> On 28 February 2022, it was attacked: a local citizen with mental disorder broke down the gates and tried to knock down the camera.<sup>37</sup> The offender was arrested and brought to the police.

On the night from 14 to 15 April 2022, an unknown person for half an hour was banging with a steel rebar on the metal fence of the consular division of the Embassy and throwing various objects over the fence (toys, chairs, etc.) left

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<sup>33</sup> <https://rus.is/ot-redakcii/>.

<sup>34</sup> <https://rus.is/ot-redakcii/>.

<sup>35</sup> <https://rus.is/ot-redakcii/>.

<sup>36</sup> <https://russian.rt.com/world/news/969364-islandiya-napadenie-rossiya>.

<sup>37</sup> <https://russian.rt.com/world/news/969364-islandiya-napadenie-rossiya>.

outside by the participants of the anti-Russian action held the day before. The police patrol arrived only half an hour later. The citizen (supposedly an Icelandic) had managed to walk a considerable distance from the consular division building but was later arrested, brought to the police station for a conversation. Russian diplomats were constantly insulted and threatened via e-mail and telephone.<sup>38</sup>

In 2022, there were cases of refusal by Icelandic service companies to provide services to Russian citizens living in Iceland.<sup>39</sup>

According to compatriots, since the beginning of the special military operation, some members of Russian expatriate community in Iceland were insulted and threatened in social media by Icelanders, as well as by Balts and Poles. In an interview for the documentary "The West: territory of hatred" of the RT TV channel, Russian citizen, Natalia Stefánsson, reported threats of physical violence and calls to leave Iceland from her local acquaintances.<sup>40</sup> After the film was released, threats of "proceedings" with the Icelandic authorities and calls "to return to the home country" continued.

In March 2022, vandals desecrated the chapel at the construction site of the Russian orthodox church in Reykjavik by drawing two swastikas on it.<sup>41</sup>

Despite Icelandic officials' clearly anti-Russian politics, in 2024, the authorities did not obstruct military memorial events organized by the Russian Embassy and compatriots living in the country, secured police accompaniment of events and did not prohibit demonstration of St. George ribbon and Victory Banner.

Before the special military operation, the Icelandic government regularly participated in commemorative events dedicated to memorable dates in the history of the war.

The country preserves the memory of its contribution to the formation and maintenance of arctic convoys in 1941-1945 that became an example of combat

<sup>38</sup> <https://russian.rt.com/world/news/969364-islandiya-napadenie-rossiya>.

<sup>39</sup> <https://frettatiminn.is/26/06/2022/russar-fa-ekki-tjonustu-a-islandi/>.

<sup>40</sup> <https://doc.rt.com/filmy/v-zone-otchuzhdeniya-diskriminaciya-rossiyan/>.

<sup>41</sup> <https://russian.rt.com/ussr/article/974510-russkie-emigranty-travlya-specoperaciya>.

cooperation between the navies of the anti-Hitler coalition countries during World War II.

Icelanders maintain in proper condition military memorials (memorial to the sailors who served in Arctic convoys "Nadezhda" in Reykjavik, monuments in Ísafjörður, Bolungarvík and Hvalfjörður, as well as the graves of the Great Patriotic War participant, a sailor Alexander Malley who passed away in the Reykjavik hospital in August 1942, and the veteran of the Great Patriotic War, Maria Mitrofanova).

## Spain

Manifestations of Russophobia in Spain are a matter of concern. Since the beginning of the special military operation by the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation to denazify and demilitarize Ukraine and protect the peaceful population of Donbass, the Spanish government's discourse has changed swiftly, affecting Russian citizens living in the country, especially in the spring-summer of 2022. Russophobic propaganda in the media, the mass influx of refugees from Ukraine (in 2022-2024, the Spanish authorities granted the EU temporary protection status to about 210,000 Ukrainians), as well as the activities of a number of Ukrainian nationalist organizations played an important role in this regard. Moreover, the unconcealed Russophobic rhetoric expressed by several Spanish officials also made a negative contribution (for example, Madrid Mayor José Luis Martínez-Almeida in a conversation with pranksters in June 2022 agreed with the need to "punish the Russian bastards").<sup>42</sup>

In 2022, the negative attitudes towards our compatriots in everyday life increased, as did the spread of Russophobic statements on social media. Russian-language chats in Spain often included messages about fighting "Russian World promoters," which, in violation of local law, called to collect information about Russians and their personal data on a specially created website. There have also been mass blockings of bank accounts and bank cards belonging to Russian citizens without explanation in the first half of 2022 (which have subsequently become occasional), as well as isolated cases of bullying of Russian-speaking children and adolescents in Spanish educational institutions and psychological harassment of Russians living in Spain. Among other things, cases of such discriminatory treatment of children were reported to the Russian Embassy by our compatriots. The Legal Assistance Centre for Legal, Judicial and Social Assistance to Russians in Spain, established on the basis of a compatriot association, has received about 700 requests since March 2022 (160 requests in 2024).

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<sup>42</sup> <https://ria.ru/20220810/madrid-1808614871.html>

However, the situation has generally normalized between 2023 and 2024 and remains stable and calm. Today, the Russian Embassy does not record any flagrant or mass violations of the rights of Russians. Cases of discrimination against compatriots on ethnic, linguistic or religious grounds are rather rare and not systemic.

Nevertheless, about 450 assets (movable and immovable property and funds) allegedly belonging to EU sanctions-listed Russian individuals or entities with a total value of over EUR 1 billion remain frozen in Spain.

The presence in Spain of a large number of Ukrainians (more than 300,000 in legal status) remains a negative factor since Russians and Russian-speaking citizens periodically face manifestations of aggression and harassment, mainly from nationalist Ukrainians.

Serious concern is caused by the total cleansing of the Spanish media space of Russian media (the broadcasting of the RT and RT en español TV channels, the "broadcasting activities" of the Sputnik news agency, the *RIA* Novosti, Izvestia, Rossiyskaya Gazeta publications, etc.) and the imposition of strict anti-Russian censorship. As a result, there is virtually no alternative information about Russia's policies, which is especially serious in the context of propaganda pressure from the collective West inspired by Anglo-Saxon practices. An information blockade has been imposed on the Russian Embassy by the main Spanish media.

In addition, the local authorities, having ignored numerous appeals from the Russian Embassy, continue to condone an aggressive anti-Russian picket held by Ukrainians on a daily basis in front of the diplomatic mission, whose participants use criminal Bandera symbols, insults and threats of violence on ethnic grounds.

In this context, it is worth noting, despite the current foreign policy, that the associations of compatriots, with the support of friendly Spanish organizations, managed to successfully hold a number of events in May 2024, dedicated to the celebration of Victory Day in the Great Patriotic War and aimed at preserving historical truth and memory, as well as consolidating our diaspora. The Immortal Regiment (Alicante, Almería, Barcelona and Madrid) was the focal point of the

event, with a total of around 2,000 people taking part. Patriotic actions were also organized in Bilbao, Vigo, Pamplona, San Sebastian, Gran Canaria and Tenerife.

## Italy

In the first half of 2022, against the background of beginning of the special military operation by the Russian Federation to denazify and demilitarize Ukraine and protect the civilians of Donbass, politically motivated large-scale discrimination against Russian citizens and compatriots became widespread in Italy.

This mass hysteria had a significant impact on Russian citizens and Russian-speaking people from the former Soviet republics living in the Apennines. The situation in Italy was characterized by a particularly strong escalation of anti-Russian sentiments from February to April 2022. The Russian Embassy and consular offices received numerous messages from compatriots with threats against them. Members of the numerous Ukrainian diaspora in Italy, which is one of the largest in Europe, became the main source of this aggression with the connivance of the authorities in Rome.

Since the end of February, Russian citizens have been discriminated against by major banks refusing to service their bank cards and open new accounts. Their access to medical care was restricted. Russian students studying in Italy (as a rule, those arriving as part of exchange programmes) were seriously affected: it is estimated that there were about 350 of them in the Apennines at the end of February 2022. Following the blocking of Russian bank services and freezing of accounts, they were virtually deprived of their means of subsistence and had to either terminate their studies early and return to Russia or to seek other ways out of the situation.

The large-scale campaign launched in Italy against Russian culture and its members has led to a number of unpleasant incidents. Thus, Giuseppe Sala, Mayor of Milan and Head of La Scala Theatre, demanded on 28 February 2022 that the world-famous conductor Valery Gergiev publicly condemn Russia's actions in Ukraine under the threat of the termination of cooperation with him and, in particular, his suspension from participation in the opera "Queen of Spades" by



Piotr Tchaikovsky.<sup>43</sup> Having received no response to the ultimatum, the authorities in Milan announced that the La Scala Theatre "refuses to cooperate further with the Russian conductor."

In February 2023, the Mayors of the Italian cities of Brescia and Bergamo banned Denis Matsuev, Russian pianist, from performing at the 60th International Piano Festival.

In March 2024, municipal authorities of Capoterra (Sardinia region), under pressure from the Ukrainian Consulate, cancelled the Pancake Day, organized annually by Lada, the cultural association of Russian compatriots.<sup>44</sup> In August 2024, a group of unknown persons raided a second-hand bookshop in the historic centre of Genoa, which sold, among other things, works by Russian authors.<sup>45</sup>

There are problems in the area of ensuring freedom of the press, in particular cases of harassment of the Russian media. According to the decision of the EU Council, a ban on the broadcasting of the Russian RT and Sputnik media has been imposed on the territory of the European Union since 27 February 2022, which has had an extremely negative impact on the ability of citizens of the Republic of Italy to access reliable information. The latter is particularly relevant in the context of propaganda pressure from the collective West and the explicit anti-Russian campaign in the Italian media. Information about events taking place in the world is presented solely on the basis of Western or Ukrainian sources and fake news.

The situation of Russian citizens in Italian prisons is still rather poor. There had been cases of death of Russian citizens in the penitentiary institutions. On 4 July 2020, Mr. Nosenko, a Russian citizen, committed suicide at the Sergio Cosmai prison in Cosenza (Calabria region). This negative trend relates to the problems noted by human rights defenders in the Italian penitentiary system. In 2023, 68 prisoners committed suicide in places of detention (85 prisoners in 2022). There is often no investigation into these cases.

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<sup>43</sup> <https://www.classicalmusicnews.ru/news/la-scala-removed-valery-gergiev-from-queen-of-spades/>

<sup>44</sup> <https://www.unionesarda.it/news-sardegna-provincia-cagliari/ce-la-guerra-in-ucraina-stop-al-carnevale-slavo-incidente-diplomatico-a-capoterra-g9g132yb>

<sup>45</sup> [https://www.lantidiplomatico.it/dettnews-banderismo-a-genova-raid-contro-i-libri-russi-in-una-libreria-del-centro/52492\\_56221/](https://www.lantidiplomatico.it/dettnews-banderismo-a-genova-raid-contro-i-libri-russi-in-una-libreria-del-centro/52492_56221/)

The living conditions of prisoners in Italian prisons, which often pose a threat to their health and life, raise serious concerns. On 9 May 2023, Russian citizen Mr. Pereshchako died of cardiac arrest in the penitentiary institution of Augusta (Sicily). He had been on hunger strike due to the Italian authorities' failure to fulfil his request to transfer him to the Russian Federation to further serve his sentence.

Russian citizen Mr. Volkov, who was detained in the Italian capital in August 2023 on an extradition request to the United States, was literally held in inhumane conditions in a Roman prison.<sup>46</sup> Due to the lack of a table in his cell, he and two cellmates had to use a chair to eat for three months, sitting on the floor. The temperature in the room dropped to 12 degrees Celsius at night because the prison authorities did not turn on the heating. Medical examinations and treatment were superficial, and most chronic diseases of Russians went unrecorded. Following persistent requests from the Russian Embassy, the Ombudsman for Prisoners' Rights in Italy conducted an inspection of Mr. Volkov's cell, confirming all the reported facts, as well as those concerning mental and general state of health of the Russian citizen.

In June 2024, Russian citizen Dmitry Chirakadze was arrested at Rome airport and then, in violation of all criminal procedural norms, while in the status of a suspect, was placed in Milan prison in a cell with convicted persons serving prison sentences. Despite this, as well as the serious state of health of the Russian, the Italian judicial authorities, citing groundless arguments about the alleged high probability of escape, refuse to commute Dmitry Chirakadze's preventive measure and transfer him to house arrest pending the completion of the preliminary investigation and the start of court hearings on the merits of the charges against him. Following a surgical operation carried out in September 2024 and a short hospital stay, the Russian citizen was returned to the Milan prison despite doctors' instructions.

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<sup>46</sup> For more information on the deplorable state of affairs in the United States prison system, see the relevant section of the Joint Report of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus on the Human Rights Situation in Certain Countries.



## Canada

In 2024, there were no signs of weakening of Canadian official authorities' Russophobic course, which was deeply rooted long before the start of a special military operation to demilitarize and denazify Ukraine and protect the civilian population of Donbass (SMO). Violations of the rights of Russian citizens and compatriots permanently residing abroad continue to be recorded. The out-of limit level of Russophobia is directly linked to the stranglehold of the descendants of Nazi accomplices in the country, as well as the large Ukrainian diaspora that includes followers of the military criminals Bandera and Shukhevych.

The situation with the infringement of the rights of Russian citizens and compatriots is most difficult in areas where immigrants from Russia and Ukraine compactly reside (Toronto, Edmonton, Calgary, Vancouver), and where since 2022 citizens of Russian origin have often received death and reprisal threats for their active position or for the fact of having preserved ties with our country. Russian children were bullied in Canadian schools and universities. Private Russian-language schools in Canada were forced to switch over to remote work since March 2022. Some of them never resumed teaching in person.

In 2023-2024, the situation with Russian schools in Canada somehow stabilized after a wave of the unprecedented bullying of teaching staff, students and their parents. No serious provocations similar to the 2022 Russophobic actions have been recorded against the main Russian schools in Canada since the release of the previous report.

The Canadian authorities disapprove of the patriotic activities of Russian-speaking diaspora. Russian origin may lead to administrative checks and even interrogations of citizens by law enforcers.

Despite the repressive policies by Canadian authorities, Russian compatriots strive to anchor their national identity, including through preserving the memory of generations about the Great Patriotic War. Annually, strictly observing Canadian legislation, they organize commemorative events dedicated to an anniversary of the

Victory over Nazism. The chronicle of recent years clearly illustrates the gradually tougher attitudes towards such initiatives, including under pressure from the Ukrainian Canadian Congress (UCC).

In 2022-2023, activists of "Immortal Regiment" procession were bullied. On the eve of Victory Day death threats were circulated across social networks against whoever who would be spotted with the St. George Ribbon. In a number of cities, UCC activists organized a massive persecution of Russian compatriots and their family members. The organizers of Toronto patriotic car rally received daily threats of physical violence. The compatriot who was supposed to lead the column got the windshield of his car smashed at night. The police failed to find the perpetrators.

On Russia Day in 2023, the organizers of a festive picnic in Toronto received an anonymous letter warning that if guests gathered outdoors for this occasion, they would be massively beaten. A day in advance the event, the city police department received a request for protection, to which they cynically answered that no preventive measures would be taken, but police would rather be ready to respond to the fact of an offense committed only.

In August 2022, Archbishop Gabriel of Montreal and Canada (Russian Orthodox Church Abroad) was criticized by Canadian authorities and Ukrainian diaspora for speaking out in support of the SMO. In an interview with the "Pravoslavie.RU" portal, Bishop Gabriel also mentioned that he had received threats against himself personally, so during Easter celebration about 30 police officers had to provide security near the temple in Montreal.

Recorded are cases of infringement of the right to work against Russian-speaking community members, including refusals by various IT companies to employ them because of national appurtenance and Russian citizenship. Ukrainian neo-Nazis regularly send letters to Canadian companies demanding that Russians be fired from their jobs.

The dismissal of a Russian compatriot, who subsequently found herself "in the street" with two minor children for having once visited the Russian Embassy as

a guest can be cited among the most high-profile cases. Another girl was fired from her job when her employer opened an office locker with her personal belongings, among which was a badge with the Russian flag.

Serious administrative and public pressure on businesses associated with Russia is noticeable. Aggression against everything Russian forces private company owners to remove all references to Russia and Russians.

Laws are either not applied, or applied selectively and one-sidedly here regarding Russian compatriots. When protection is sought from law enforcement agencies, they either non-act, or openly declare that they see no elements of a crime of inciting nationality-based hatred anywhere.

Canadian migration services pursue a discriminatory policy against Crimeans who are Russian citizens. Russians staying in the country were suggested to urgently exchange at the Russian Embassy their foreign passports received at Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs Crimean branches, under threat of visa cancellation and deportation.

The authorities have blocked bank transfers to and from the Russian Federation. Even in cases of humanitarian force majeure, Russian compatriots are deprived of any opportunity to send or receive funds. Many Russian students whose education at Canadian universities was paid for by their relatives from Russia were affected. As a result, mass expulsions of compatriot students for non-payment began. The older generation of our citizens has no longer the opportunity to receive Russian pensions.

The Embassy regularly receives requests for assistance in returning the illegally blocked non-cash transfers to Canada from Russian economic operators and individuals not falling under Trudeau cabinet sanctions. The Canadian Ministry of Foreign Affairs ignores appeals from affected Russian citizens and companies. Even humanitarian considerations are not taken into account.

Violations of the rights of Russian citizens and compatriots in the banking sector are recorded. Thus, in October 2023, a Canadian bank verbally refused withdrawing cash to a family of compatriots who had been living for 25 years in

Canada and expressed a desire (due to the increased harassment and nationality-based discrimination) to reunite with their historical homeland. This happened as our compatriots mentioned their desire to leave Canada and move to Russia when asked by the bank to describe in detail further purpose of the funds. Bankers ignore repeated requests to provide a written response justifying the refusal to issue funds.

In September 2023, Canadian mobile operators, alleging Trudeau cabinet sanctions, stopped interacting with the largest Russian mobile operators (Megafon, MTS, Beeline and Tele2) in the provision of roaming services. The restrictions resulted in Russian citizens losing the opportunity to receive SMS messages to Russian numbers (for example, to log in to government service websites or confirm banking transactions).<sup>47</sup>

Within the suppression of freedom of the media and deprivation of its citizens and Russian compatriots living in the country of access to alternative information, Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (the media regulator) took the official decision to ban RT and RT France channels in the territory of the country on 16 March 2022. Simultaneously, local cable TV providers announced the exclusion of all Russian TV channels from their networks.

The sphere of culture also fell under restrictions. The Canadian side cancelled the concerts and programs of a number of Russian performers in Vancouver and Montreal. The Canada Council for the Arts refuses to fund creative projects with participation of patriotically minded Russian or Belarussian cultural workers until "the Russian military leave the territory of Ukraine".

On 11-12 February 2023, a Russian film "Cheburashka" was supposed to be screened in Ottawa, but it was cancelled at the last moment under pressure from the UCC, whose representatives sent many letters to the organizers alleging that this film glorifies "Russian fascism".

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<sup>47</sup> Russian subscribers of the Big Four to be left without roaming in Canada. RBC. 2 September 2023. [https://www.rbc.ru/technology\\_and\\_media/02/09/2023/64f202f89a794758fdd0d9b2](https://www.rbc.ru/technology_and_media/02/09/2023/64f202f89a794758fdd0d9b2)

On 26 November 2023, the Russian folk group "Kalinka" was supposed to perform at a multicultural festival in Ottawa, but the organizers cancelled their performance 5 days before the event under UCC pressure. The Council of Cultural and Educational Organizations of Russian Compatriots in Canada urgently contacted the Canadian organizers explaining that such a ban meant discrimination on the basis of nationality and contributed to the incitement of hatred towards the Russian people. Kalinka's performance took place in the result.

On 26 February 2023, the Slavic Maslenitsa festival was scheduled to be held in Ottawa's Lansdowne Park. However, in mid-February UCC activists began to massively harass the organizers and their family members, simultaneously sending demands to the City Hall and Ottawa Police Department to ban the event. Particularly zealous Bandera followers appealed to the federal government in a collective e-mail to recognize the organizers of this event as a threat to the state system and expel them from the country. As a result, the fest was disrupted.

In September 2024, the organizers of the Toronto International Film Festival were forced to suspend the screening of the documentary film "Russians at War" by Anastasia Trofimova, Canadian director of Russian origin, due to protests by Ukrainian community radical members and a threat to public safety.<sup>48</sup> Supporters of the Kiev Nazi regime organized a witch hunt in the information space against the author of this anti-war movie tasked by Canadian film companies, accusing her of justifying "Russian aggression".

There is a positive note to it: in 2024, the authorities did not interfere with the holding of Russian compatriot solemn events to mark the Victory Day. On 9 May, "Immortal Regiment" marches, holiday picnics and car rallies were held in Vancouver, Victoria, Windsor, Calgary, Ottawa and Toronto. In Ottawa, a group of compatriots visited the War Museum, where the legendary T-34 tank is exhibited.

The Montreal authorities have agreed to troop the "Immortal Regiment" along the city's central streets. Thus, after an involuntary five-year break, at least

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<sup>48</sup> TIFFF suspends screening of film on Russian soldiers after threats. CBC News. 12 September 2024. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/entertainment/russians-at-war-paused-1.7321915>



1.5 thousand people took part in it in 2024. Afterwards, a traditional festive motor rally took place.<sup>49</sup> At the same time, a marginal group of radically minded Ukrainians tried to interfere with the procession in every possible way, launching their own anti-Russian "rally" and shouting the slogan of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalist Nazis "Glory to Ukraine".

Nationalistically minded pro-Ukrainian activists could not skip the wreath-laying ceremony on the premises of the Embassy of the Russian Federation in Ottawa either. In front of the Embassy building, several radically minded individuals tried to disturb public order by shouting Nazi and Russophobic slogans.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> More than 1,500 people participate in the Immortal Regiment action in Montreal. TASS. 10 May 2024. <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/20757929>

<sup>50</sup> Russian Embassy in Canada honored the memory of Great Patriotic War heroes. TASS. 9 May 2024. <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/20756425>

## Cyprus

According to various estimates, 120,000 to 150,000 Russians live on the island, which is around 10 per cent of the population of Cyprus. At the same time, Russian citizens and compatriots without losing close relations with their home country have smoothly integrated into the Cyprus society and enjoy well-deserved authority in various areas of economic, socio-political and cultural life of the island.<sup>51</sup>

Despite the high level of integration of Russian expatriate community into the local society, the unity of culture and rich history of Russian-Cypriot relations, after the Russian Federation started the special military operation for demilitarization and denazification of Ukraine and protection of Donbass civilians in 2022, there were recorded increasing manifestations of discrimination against Russians in Cyprus.

There were reported cases of psychological pressure in educational institutions, in schools in particular, against Russian-speaking children, including those from mixed families, exerted by their classmates. Nationalistically minded representatives of Ukrainian expatriate community tried to exert moral and physical pressure on Russians living on the island so as to force them to publicly renounce the patriotic stance. Personal data of participants of pro-Russian actions were made public and accompanied by calls for violence. There were anti-Russian protest actions where members of the House of Representatives (Parliament) of Cyprus were present.

In March 2022, the state flag of the Russian Federation was torn off the flagpole in front of the office of the honorary consul of Russia in Limassol.

Another outrageous incident was an attack carried out in Larnaca in August 2022, by Irina Krivous, a Ukrainian citizen armed with a knife, against Lyudmila

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<sup>51</sup> The article by the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Russian Federation to the Republic of Cyprus Murat Zyazikov "Russophiles of Cyprus: at the forefront of countering Russophobia". Diplomatic Service and Practice 3 (15) 2024. [https://cyprus.mid.ru/ru/press-centre/news/statya\\_posla\\_rossii\\_na\\_kipre\\_murata\\_zyazikova\\_rusofily\\_kipra\\_v\\_avangarde\\_protivodeystviya\\_rusofobii/](https://cyprus.mid.ru/ru/press-centre/news/statya_posla_rossii_na_kipre_murata_zyazikova_rusofily_kipra_v_avangarde_protivodeystviya_rusofobii/)

Chuikova, a Russian citizen. After the Russian Embassy addressed the government of the country and local law enforcement structures, the authorities enhanced control to prevent similar incidents. The aforementioned Ukrainian citizen was found guilty (including in stirring up racial enmity and hatred) and in March 2023 was sentenced to six months of imprisonment but was released early in late July 2023 by the decision of the Court of Appeal of Cyprus.

Due to Nicosia's joining unlawful anti-Russian restrictive measures imposed by the European Union as well as the United Kingdom and the United States, Russian citizens face difficulties in the financial sector. Broad interpretation of restrictions by the Cypriot side repeatedly led to blocking of transfers even from the non-sanctioned Russian banks. Since the beginning of the special military operation a major financial institution of the island, the Bank of Cyprus, closed around 20,000 accounts of 7,000 Russians.<sup>52</sup>

The official Nicosia continues to follow the policy of the collective West towards suppressing the sources of alternative information. On 5 October 2023, Rossiyskaya Gazeta correspondent Alexander Gasyuk was arrested and later expelled from the country under a contrived pretext. As a result of the use of brute force by the Cypriot government bodies, he and an official of the Russian diplomatic mission who was at the place of incident, got injured. All the official inquiries that the Russian side had timely sent to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Interior of Cyprus were ignored. The Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation initiated a criminal case on the matter. The Russian Foreign Ministry has taken retaliatory measures against the officials of the migration service of Ministry of Interior of Cyprus who were involved in the provocation against Russian representatives.

The spread of "hunt" by US intelligence services for unwanted Russians to Cyprus gives rise to concerns. In particular, on 26 August 2023, the Russian citizen Artur Petrov was detained in the Larnaca airport based on the inquiry made by the

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<sup>52</sup> Bank of Cyprus closes the accounts of 7,000 Russian citizens. Vedomosti. 5 October 2024. <https://www.vedomosti.ru/finance/news/2024/10/05/1066725-bank-of-cyprus>

United States in connection with the alleged circumventing of the anti-Russian sanctions (including exporting of US-made microelectronics to our country).

Throughout the year, the Russian citizen remained in custody in a Cypriot prison. Despite the evidence of Artur Petrov's innocence presented by the defence lawyers, in April 2024 the Court of Appeal of Nicosia consented to his extradition to the United States.<sup>53</sup> That happened despite, among other things, public information about the poor state of the US penal institutions whose unacceptable conditions raise questions not only among experts from relevant international human rights institutions but also among Americans themselves. In April 2024, the Russian citizen was extradited to the United States.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Cyprus agrees to the extradition of Russian citizen Petrov to the United States, a source said. RIA Novosti. 25 April 2024. <https://ria.ru/20240425/ekstraditsiya-1942257900.html>

<sup>54</sup> Petrov, a Russian detained in Cyprus, extradited to the United States. TASS. 9 August 2024. <https://tass.ru/proisshestiya/21572261>

## Latvia

The Republic of Latvia (RL) has emerged among the countries where Russian-speaking residents and Russian citizens are exposed to the worst discrimination ever. Riga keeps pursuing its policy of building a mono-ethnic model of the State. To that end, Latvian authorities are purposefully falsifying history to construct a parallel historic reality. It is used to justify Latvia's blasphemous glorification of Latvian SS legionnaires, the Nazi collaborators who are brought to the level of participants in "national liberation movements". The same reasons underlie an open fight against commemorating the Red Army soldiers who liberated Latvia from Nazism and a ban on celebrating 9 May and other memorial dates of the Great Patriotic War.<sup>55</sup> All these efforts go hand in hand with a trend of excluding everything that is Russian from public life and depriving the country's Russian-speaking population of its rights.

After the beginning of the special military operation of the Russian Federation to denazify and demilitarize Ukraine and protect the civilian population of Donbass (SMO) in February 2022, Latvia adopted the most anti-Russian policy compared to all other Baltic States, and a surge of Russophobia started in the country, as well as violations of the rights of national minorities grew more frequent. Therefore, the Ukrainian crisis came up as a convenient occasion for the Latvian politicians to achieve their Russophobic ambitions. Under the pretext of fighting against the symbols of "Russian aggression", the authorities are implementing the next stage of struggle against historical memory and Russian-speaking residents, thus trying to divert attention from the rapid deterioration of socio-economic situation in the country. This approach has been clearly reflected in the statement of former Latvian Prime Minister Krišjānis Kariņš on the way the Baltic States have shown by their own example that "it is more important to

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<sup>55</sup> Detailed information on Latvia's efforts to glorify Nazi accomplices, falsify history of WWII and Great Patriotic War and on the unleashed war on monuments and memorials to the Red Army soldiers who were killed in action striving for liberating Latvia from Nazism are provided in the corresponding section of the Russian Foreign Ministry's Report on the situation with Nazism glorification, spread of neo-Nazism and other types of practices that contribute to escalation of modern forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance (see the official website of the Ministry [www.mid.ru](http://www.mid.ru)).

support Ukraine rather than think about a momentary wealth, leaving some ties with the Russian Federation open".<sup>56</sup>

Latvia turned out to be cynical enough to choose the fight against monuments to soldiers who liberated it from Nazism and a ban on celebrating 9 May as major measures aimed at suppressing rights of Russian residents of the country, thus denying a significant part of the population the right to preserve memory and depriving them of the opportunity to honour their ancestors.

Many years of Latvian authorities' revanchist aspirations and years-long efforts by Riga to rewrite history culminated in the legislative bans on celebrating 9 May (in fact, making the Victory Day "an outlaw practice"), displaying in public the symbols of Victory over Nazism and arranging public events next to Soviet war memorials. Recently, the Latvian authorities have adopted a number of law amendments that prohibit wearing the St. George ribbon (2021)<sup>57</sup>, organizing the events in a 200-meter radius from any monument that "glorify the Victory and memory of the Soviet Army or its soldiers in Latvia (2022).<sup>58</sup> The legislative initiatives of 2022 and 2023 declared the day of 9 May a mourning day characterized by the prohibition to conduct any public events or festivities, first on an occasional basis<sup>59</sup>, and then restrictions were imposed on public assemblies on that day (marches, meetings or pickets).

Along with that the authorities made practical steps to prevent people from laying flowers to the Monument to the Liberators in Riga's Victory Park on 9 May 2022: they blocked access to the memorial. On 9 May 2022, exactly on the Day of Victory, the law enforcement agencies detained 35 people and initiated 49 administrative cases, most of them for "using the symbols glorifying military aggression and war crimes"<sup>60</sup>, meaning the St. George ribbon. Early on 10 May

<sup>56</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/10122022-premer-latvii-rasskazal-kakie-strany-bolshe-vsekh-postradali-ot-antirossiyskikh-sanktsiy/>

<sup>57</sup> Latvian Saeima website: <https://www.saeima.lv/lv/aktualitates/saeimas-zinas/30326-aizliedz-georga-lensu-izmantosanu-publiskos-pasakumos>

<sup>58</sup> Latvian Saeima website: <https://www.saeima.lv/lv/aktualitates/saeimas-zinas/30860-publiskos-pasakumos-aizliedz-izmantot-militaru-agresiju-un-kara-noziegumus-identificjosa-stilistika-izmantotus-simbolus>

<sup>59</sup> Latvian Saeima website: <https://www.saeima.lv/lv/aktualitates/saeimas-zinas/30909-sogad-9-maija-latvija-piemines-krievijas-agresijas-ukraina-upurus>

<sup>60</sup> <https://lv.sputniknews.ru/20220510/v-latvii-9-maya-byli-zaderzhany-35-chelovek-i-nachato-49-ugolovnykh->

2022, the authorities barbarically cleared the flowers-covered square next to the Monument by a power-shovel.

The RL law enforcement authorities came after the locals for celebrating the 9 May online as well. Thus, on 19 July 2023, referring to Articles 13 and 131 of the Law on Administrative Penalties for Offenses in the Sphere of Administration, Public Order and Use of the State Language, the RL Police imposed fines on a massive scale on residents of the Republic who had published congratulations on Victory Day in their social media accounts.

In 2023, the Latvian authorities also took pre-emptive measures to prevent the Russian Embassy from organizing public events on the occasion of the 78th anniversary of the Victory in the Great Patriotic War. In particular, representatives of the Latvian Foreign Ministry handed over a note to the Russian Charges d'Affaires *ad interim* warning that, if arranged by the diplomatic mission, "collective public events" will be considered contrary to the law on the Ban on Holding Certain Public Events on 9 May. On 26 April 2023, Latvian State Security Service (VDD) issued a statement calling on people to report "provocations" planned for 9 May, referring to attempts by local residents to organize the flower-laying at the dismantled memorials.

In addition, the Latvian authorities prevented the celebration of 9 May in any form by all means available to them. For example, on Victory Day, law enforcement officers on duty outside the Russian Embassy detained a veteran of the Great Patriotic War who was leaving the diplomatic mission after attending a Victory Day reception "for displaying Soviet symbols".

Latvian law enforcers also persecuted the locals for trying to celebrate 9 May online. On 19 July 2023, the Latvian police, referring to Articles 13 and 131 of the Law on Administrative Penalties for Offenses in the Sphere of Administration, Public Order and Use of the State Language, launched mass-scale administrative proceedings against Latvian residents who had published Victory Day greetings in their social media accounts.

The Latvian authorities did not limit themselves to bans on celebrating Victory. Along with that they intensified efforts on eliminating Soviet memorial heritage and falsification of history. On 12 May 2022, deputies of the Saeima of Latvia urgently legitimized the dismantlement of the Monument to the Liberators in the Victory Park and suspended Article 13 of the 1994 Russia – Latvia Intergovernmental Agreement on the Social Protection of War Pensioners that obliged Latvia to protect Soviet memorials in its territory.<sup>61</sup> When substantiating this cynical decision, the authors of the amendments, members of the Saeima Foreign Affairs Commission, openly stated that "Latvia's commitments under Article 13 of the Agreement did not extend any more to such structures as the Monument".

Latvian radicals focused main efforts within the Soviet memorials demolishing campaign on the major symbol of the Victory over Nazism. i.e. the Monument to the Liberators of Riga from the German Fascist Invaders.

The dismantling of the monument was accompanied by insulting speeches of the first persons of the Republic. In particular, Latvian President Egils Levits distinguished himself by publicly calling the memorial a "thorn in the soul of Latvians"<sup>62</sup>. Former president Vīķe-Freiberga, whose family together with her fled from Latvia in 1944 away from the advancing Red Army to Nazi Germany and later settled in Canada for many decades, called the monument "a pillory from the feudal times".<sup>63</sup> Former Latvian Prime Minister Kariņš, for his part, said that "thanks to the demolition of the Monument, Latvia had finally freed itself from the consequences of the occupation, as well as from the feeling that it was not master in its land".<sup>64</sup> The then-Foreign Minister Edgars Rinkevich directly threatened to expel all foreigners from the country, regardless of citizenship or nationality, who

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<sup>61</sup> <https://www.saeima.lv/lv/aktualitates/saeimas-zinas/31022-saeima-aptur-latvijas-un-krievijas-divpuseja-liguma-darbibu-attieciba-uz-memorialajam-buvem-un-pieminekliem>

<sup>62</sup> <https://mixnews.lv/latviya/2022/05/03/eto-zanoza-v-dushe-latyshey-levits-vyskazalsya-za-snos-pamyatnika-v-pardugave/>

<sup>63</sup> <https://rus.tvnet.lv/7591608/vike-feyberga-tak-nazyvaemyy-pamyatnik-pobedy-vsegda-byl-pozornym-stolbom>

<sup>64</sup> <https://rus.delfi.lv/news/daily/latvia/karinsh-demontazh-pamyatnika-sovetskoj-armii-zasluga-vseh-zhitelej.d?id=54676918>



would be caught in "illegal and unauthorized actions" during the dismantling of the memorial.<sup>65</sup>

Latvian authorities started demolishing the Monument on 23 August 2022, on the 33rd anniversary of the Baltic Way, and on 25 August 2022, the last element of the memorial, a 79-meter stele, was dismantled.

Numerous appeals of the Russian side to Riga authorities to assist in evacuating the Monument to the territory of Russia and to prevent its destruction had been intolerantly rejected.

It is also indicative that the Latvian authorities, in the nationalist frenzy of the campaign to demolish the Monument to the Liberators of Riga, completely ignored the opinion of international human rights mechanisms and their obligations under international treaties. On 26 August 2022, the UN Human Rights Committee (HRCttee) addressed the Latvian Foreign Ministry in connection with complaints received regarding violations of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (attempt of public activists to suspend the dismantling of the Monument to the Liberators of Riga and Latvia). The Committee's appeal did not prevent the demolition of the Monument but the Latvian government was ordered to provide the HRCttee experts with an explanation of the situation by 26 February 2023. Commenting on the appeal received by the Latvian authorities from the HRCttee, the press secretary of the Latvian Foreign Ministry Diana Eglite stated the following, "[t]he Committee is not a court, and its findings are not legally binding for the country".

The Monument to the Liberators of Riga was one of the first victims of vandalism against monuments to Red Army soldiers who had liberated the country from Nazism during World War II, which has spread throughout Latvia since the beginning of the special military operation to demilitarize and denazify Ukraine.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Foreign Minister Rinkevich's account in Twitter (now X):

[https://twitter.com/edgarsrinkevics/status/1561758450819932162?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetemb ed%7Ctwterm%5E1561758450819932162%7Ctwgr%5Ed4ee205f51e54b8cf1869317465444b78207c4cl%7Ctwcon %5Esl\\_&ref\\_url=https%3A%2F%2Fbb.lv%2Fstatja%2Fpolitika%2F2022%2F08%2F22%2Fsnos-pamyatnika-osvoboditelyam-glava-mid-latvii-predupredil-inostrancev](https://twitter.com/edgarsrinkevics/status/1561758450819932162?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetemb ed%7Ctwterm%5E1561758450819932162%7Ctwgr%5Ed4ee205f51e54b8cf1869317465444b78207c4cl%7Ctwcon %5Esl_&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fbb.lv%2Fstatja%2Fpolitika%2F2022%2F08%2F22%2Fsnos-pamyatnika-osvoboditelyam-glava-mid-latvii-predupredil-inostrancev)

<sup>66</sup> Detailed information about the barbaric destruction by Latvia of monuments and memorials in honour of the Red Army soldiers who died in the battles for the liberation of Latvia from Nazism is given in the corresponding section

Moreover, to justify their efforts on demolishing the evidence of historical truth, the Latvian authorities adapted their actions to the legislative base. On 16 June 2022, the Saeima expeditiously passed the Law on the Prohibition of Exhibiting and Displaying Objects Glorifying the Soviet and Nazi Occupation Regimes in the Territory of the Republic of Latvia<sup>67</sup>, which imposed an obligation on local authorities to demolish Soviet memorials before 15 November 2022. Roughly 300 Soviet memorials to Red Army soldiers who liberated Latvia from Nazism are covered by this Law. As of November 2024, Latvian authorities demolished about 150 monuments.

President Levits, who lived most of his conscious life in Germany until 1991, publicly supported this act, noting that it was dictated by the desire to prevent "any glorification of Russia's imperial ideology in the public space".

Of serious concern are the increasing cases of reburial of Soviet servicemen's remains in circumvention of the current Russian-Latvian Agreement on the Status of Burial Sites of 2007 that obliges the Parties to ensure "the arrangement, maintenance and protection of burial sites on the territory of the States" and to rebury remains from burial sites where the original burial took place "only with the consent of the other party".

Noteworthy is the fact that Latvian law enforcement agencies and the Latvian authorities in general do not pay due attention to numerous cases of desecration of the graves of Soviet soldiers, while isolated actions regarding burials and monuments in honour of SS legionnaires receive a reaction from Latvian law enforcement officers.

Besides, the representatives of the Latvian authorities of different levels not only justify the destruction of monuments in honour of the Red Army soldiers who liberated Latvia from the Nazis but also make blasphemous statements about these monuments, comparing them with garbage and promising to properly destroy

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of the report of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the situation with the glorification of Nazism, the spread of neo-Nazism and other practices that contribute to the escalation of modern forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance (see the official website of the Ministry [www.mid.ru](http://www.mid.ru)).

<sup>67</sup> <https://www.saeima.lv/lv/aktaalitates/saeimas-zinas/31190-saeima-pienem-likumu-padomju-un-nacistisko-rezimu-slavinosu-objektu-demontazai>

them. For example, the head of the Jekabpils Regional Council Raivis Ragainis, as mentioned above, allowed himself to publicly call the dismantled monuments from the fraternal war grave and the adjacent memorial "concrete pieces that have no historical value". Head of the Ogre Municipality Council Egils Helmanis, who actively supported the demolition of four monuments in honour of the Soviet soldiers and officers fallen during the liberation of Latvia from the Nazis and the monument to diplomatic courier Theodor Nette, cynically stated that the monument in Madliena would be used for road construction works.<sup>68</sup> Mayor of Riga Mārtiņš Staķis also "distinguished oneself" by declaring that no parts of the Monument to the Liberators would be preserved after its demolition and promising to recycle the monument completely, claiming it had no artistic value.<sup>69</sup> As the media pointed out, the Riga City Council turned its press conference on the demolition of the monument into a TV series to satisfy the vindictive urges of Russophobes.<sup>70</sup>

The neo-Nazi attitude is also convincingly illustrated by the fact that the official Riga widely applies repression to those who oppose their course of memorials destruction. Latvian security services initiate investigations and disciplinary inspections against those city governors who try to oppose or "sabotage" (delay) the demolition of memorials to Red Army soldiers. In particular, on 9 November 2022, Mayor of Daugavpils Andrejs Elksnins was summoned to the Latvian State Security Service for explanations because of his interview with a local TV channel, in which he condemned the dismantling of Soviet memorials in Latvia and called Crimea part of Russia.

In November 2023, Alexander Bartashevich was removed from the post of Mayor of Rezekne that he had been occupying for 14 years on a far-fetched pretext. The Mayor stood openly against demolishing the last of the large monuments to Soviet soldiers on the territory of the country, i.e. the monument

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<sup>68</sup> <https://lv.sputniknews.ru/20220511/v-poslke-tome-snesli-pamyatnik-legendarnomu-latyshskomu-razvedchiku-21766017.html>

<sup>69</sup> <https://lenta.ru/news/2022/08/03/monument/>

<sup>70</sup> <https://lv.sputniknews.ru/20220804/ne-razbirat-po-chastyam-no-i-ne-vzryvat-kak-budut-snosit-pamyatnik-osvoboditelyam-22415313.html>

known as "Alesha" that was located in Rēzekne. Fallen into disfavour, the Mayor was excluded from the Soglasie Party as well. The Latvian Prosecutor's Office charged him with disclosing restricted information to his wife Olga. At the same time, the Anti-Corruption Bureau accused Bartashevich of concealing transactions worth almost 270,000 euros under another criminal procedure.<sup>71</sup>

By 2023, most of the memorials to Red Army soldiers had been demolished. Afterwards, the Latvian nationalists came out with another initiative. At the end of October 2023, several committees of the Latvian Parliament received proposals from members of the National Bloc faction (A. Kiršteins, E. Shnore, N. Puntulis, I. Indriksone, A. Butans, J. Vitenbergs and J. Dombrava) to liquidate all remaining monuments and memorials to Soviet soldiers located in crowded places in the country. The remains buried under these monuments were proposed to be transferred to fraternal cemeteries in hard-to-reach places, similar to what happened in Estonia in 2022.<sup>72</sup> A co-author of this bill Elizabeth Schnore stated the following, "[t]hese burial places are turning into propaganda sites. The Russian embassy takes care of many of them. We want to eliminate them".<sup>73</sup>

In 2023, another monuments-related trend emerged in Latvia, namely the fight against Russian historical memory. A vivid proof of this was the demolition in Riga, in May 2023, of the monument to Great Russian poet Alexander Pushkin and, in October 2023, of the monument to Academician Mstislav Keldysh, one of the authors of the Soviet outer space program, who was born in Riga.<sup>74</sup> It is indicative that vice-mayor of Riga Linda Ozola called the demolition of the Pushkin monument the "removal" of it from Kronvalda Park and deposit for storage to be handed over later on to the Museum of the Latvian Union of Artists.<sup>75</sup>

In July 2024, the news broke that Deputy Mayor of Riga Edvards Ratnieks handed over a list of eight monuments related to Soviet and Russian past that needed to be demolished to the Centre for Public Memory, whose main task was

<sup>71</sup> [https://pravfond.ru/press-tsentr/otstranennogo-po-politicheskimi-motivam-mera-rezekne-bartashevicha-obvinyayut-v-dvukh-prestupleniyakh/?sphrase\\_id=4883](https://pravfond.ru/press-tsentr/otstranennogo-po-politicheskimi-motivam-mera-rezekne-bartashevicha-obvinyayut-v-dvukh-prestupleniyakh/?sphrase_id=4883)

<sup>72</sup> <https://iz.ru/1597381/viktor-nedelin/nechestivoe-plemia-v-latvii-khotiat-raskopat-mogily-sovetskikh-soldat>

<sup>73</sup> [https://vk.com/wall-134162128\\_714335](https://vk.com/wall-134162128_714335)

<sup>74</sup> <https://iz.ru/1597381/viktor-nedelin/nechestivoe-plemia-v-latvii-khotiat-raskopat-mogily-sovetskikh-soldat>

<sup>75</sup> <https://iz.ru/1520664/2023-05-30/v-rige-zaiavili-o-perevozke-pamiatnika-pushkinu-iz-kronvaldskogo-parka>

the "de-Sovietization" of Latvia. The list for destruction included monuments and memorial stones to Commander Michael Andreas Barclay de Tolly, Alexander Pushkin, Valentin Pikul, Maris Liepa and others. According to Ratnieks, the mentioned monuments reminded of the "pain of the past and of occupation". The vice-mayor also called them "instruments of propaganda" that were used to explode Latvia.<sup>76</sup>

This initiative was put into practice. At the end October 2024, Riga authorities removed the monument to Barclay de Tolly. Vice-Mayor Ratnieks initiated this barbaric action. He said that the statue symbolized the "glorification of the Russian Empire and praise of Russification".<sup>77</sup>

The conduct of SMO by Russia was used by the Latvian authorities to launch a widespread "culture of cancelling Russia" expressed in the change of topographic names indicating connections with our country. In June 2022, a request approved by the State Language Centre was submitted to the Riga City Council to rename the streets of the capital that were named after Russian scientists and cultural figures. There is no doubt that this initiative will be implemented. In particular, due to the fact that Latvian authorities are sympathetic to the "civic activism" of nationalist forces that present such ideas. In July 2022, the Centre for Public Memory collected 78 names "glorifying" the USSR and Russia, which, in their opinion, should be changed. Most of them, i.e. 16 are in Riga, nine in Daugavpils and six in Yurmala. In addition to the names of Russian figures and names associated with Russia, this list included many names of Latvians – Soviet era writers and public figures.<sup>78</sup>

On 19 June 2023, President Levits called on the Saeima to adopt a law on the Renaming of Toponyms introduced by the Communist Totalitarian Regime and during the Policy of Russification. The municipal authorities are taking similar steps. Thus, in February 2024, the Riga City Council put forward an initiative to change the names of the following streets: Maskavas (Moscovskaya, or named

<sup>76</sup> <https://ruskiymir.ru/news/327180/>

<sup>77</sup> <https://rg.ru/2024/10/31/geroj-ne-ugodil-potomkam-v-rige-snesli-pamiatnik-barklaiu-de-tolli.html>

<sup>78</sup> <https://lv.sputniknews.ru/20220715/issledovateli-sostavili-spisok-ulits-proslavlyayuschikh-sssr-22248323.html>

after Moscow) to Latgales, Lomonosov – to Valerijas Seiles, Gogol – to Emilijas Benjaminas, Pushkin – to Karlis Milenbachs, Lermontov – to Vilis Pludonis and Turgenev – to Wilhelms Purvitis. Vice-Mayor of Riga Edvards Ratnieks said that returning the name of Latgales to Moskovskaya Street would be the "restoration of historical justice". In spring 2023, talks started about renaming Moskovskaya Street in Riga – one of the longest in the Latvian capital. Moskovskaya Street in Riga has had its name since 1859, and under the name Latgales it existed for only two years, from 1938 to 1940, then the name Moskovskaya was returned to it again.<sup>79</sup> On 16 February 2024, this initiative was approved.

Russophobia is deeply rooted among Latvian politicians, who began to allow discriminatory statements against Russians. Such statements often only exacerbated the interethnic confrontation. Thus, on 26 May 2022, Saeima member Janis Iesalnieks noted at a parliamentary session that "there are two societies in Latvia – Latvians and occupiers", and "as long as the occupiers walk on our land and bless their monuments, our children will live in hate". In July 2022, member of the European Parliament representing the National Alliance Inese Vaidere expressed indignation over the fact that flights were announced in three languages (Latvian, English and Russian) at the Riga airport, and its website could be read in Russian. National Alliance member Andrejs Faibusevics forbade speaking Russian in his bar in the Russian-speaking city of Daugavpils. Moreover, he published a racist post against Mairis Briedis, a Latvian boxer who speaks Russian. The deputy, apparently not daring to express his "complaints" in personal communication with the boxer, wrote that if Mr. Briedis had not known Russian, he "would have remained a normal Latvian, instead of having turned into a cotton jacket. The problem is the ability to consume Russian information. Figuratively speaking, walking through a pigsty, it's quite difficult not to get your feet dirty".<sup>80</sup> On 24 August 2022, President of Latvia Levits mentioned the rise of "a part of Russian society disloyal to the state" as a negative impact of the "war in Ukraine"

<sup>79</sup> <https://www.dp.ru/a/2024/02/16/v-rige-reshili-pereimenovat?ysclid=lugzi7r18l271507692>

<sup>80</sup> <https://lv.sputniknews.ru/20220724/kult-otmeny-izobreli-v-latvii-latviya-davno-otmenila-svoikh-russkikh-22310354.html>

and hence, "the task is to subdue and isolate it." On 16 December 2022, Aleksandrs Kiršteins, a Saeima member, proposed deporting 250,000 Russian-speaking residents from the country. Earlier, on his social network page, he spoke out that the Russian nation did not exist, and "the Russian language arose as a dialect when the Mongol-Tatars tried to speak Ukrainian".<sup>81</sup> In January 2024, the utterance became public by the Latvian Saeima deputy Janis Dombrava that the residents of Latvia were still forced to communicate in the "language of colonists". Latvian politicians also speak out against Russian citizens living in the country. Thus, former Minister of Defence Artis Pabriks said that Russian citizens should either integrate or return to their homeland.<sup>82</sup>

Anyone who has the courage to take part in events held in the Russian territory is persecuted in Latvia. In February 2024, the Latvian Hockey Federation suspended the licenses of Latvian athletes who had taken part in the international Games of the Future in Russia.<sup>83</sup>

Besides, the Latvian authorities took illegal measures to confiscate the property of the Russian State on the territory of the country. In November 2023, the Latvian "secret police" initiated a politicized criminal case on "sanctions violation" against the House of Moscow Cultural Business Centre located in the centre of Riga (open in May 2004 upon the agreement of the mayors of capitals of the two countries Mikhail Luzhkov and Gundars Boyars) and its head having conducted searches and seizures of documentation and electronic storage media in December.<sup>84</sup> Later in December 2023, the constitutional majority of deputies of the Latvian Saeima urgently adopted a law on the confiscation of the Russian centre. The law came into force on 13 December. The Parliament explained the "urgency" of its adoption by the activities of "forces hostile to Latvia, which threatened the security of the country and denied Latvia's right to exist". The Russian Embassy to the Latvian Republic called the transfer of the House of Moscow to the Latvian

<sup>81</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/16122022-v-posolstve-rossii-v-latvii-raskritikovali-initsiativu-deputata-deportirovat-russkoyazychnykh/>

<sup>82</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/28012024-zhiteley-latvii-prizvali-zabyt-yazyk-kolonistov-i-vygnat-grazhdan-rf/>

<sup>83</sup> <https://tass.ru/sport/20065701>

<sup>84</sup> <https://lt.sputniknews.ru/20231222/spetssluzhby-latvii-zapodozrili-rukovodstvo-doma-moskvy-v-narushenii-sanktsiy--31470855.html>

state ownership an act of lawlessness and robbery and declared that counter measures would be adopted against organizers of the trick which was unprecedented from the viewpoint of hostility. The Latvian authorities put the illegally seized property owned by Russia up for sale in August 2024, announcing that the proceeds were planned to be sent to Kiev. However, after no buyers were found for this property within a month, the property was put up for auction again, and the price was reduced by 20 percent. On the day of the repeated auction – on 1 October – the Russian Embassy in Riga sent the second warning to the potential buyers concerning the legal implications of the purchase of the House of Moscow confiscated by Latvia from Russia. The repeated auction ended on 31 October 2024 also without results, since not a single participant applied for it. At the same time, it became known that the Latvian authorities intended to auction for the third time the House of Moscow they had confiscated, reducing its price by another 10 percent.<sup>85</sup> Thus, if the initial cost of the object at the start of the first auction in August 2024 was 3.57 million euros, by the third attempt it would drop to 2.5 million euros.<sup>86</sup>

The situation with the Soviet memorial heritage in Latvia came to the attention of Russian competent authorities. In February 2024, the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs put some 60 Latvian politicians on a wanted list in the case of the destruction of graves (Article 243.3 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation). The wanted list includes 15 out of 38 Riga City Council members who have decided to demolish monuments to Soviet soldiers, including current Mayor of Riga Vilnis Kirsis and his predecessor Mārtiņš Staķis, as well as 59 out of 68 Saeima members who have voted in favour of terminating the Russian-Latvian agreement on preserving Soviet monuments. Also wanted are some cabinet members – Latvia's Agriculture Minister Armands Krauze, Finance Minister Arvils Ašeradens and Justice Minister Inese Lībiņa-Egnere – and Mariya Golubeva, who held the post of the Interior Minister until May 2022.<sup>87</sup>

<sup>85</sup> <https://lt.sputniknews.ru/20241031/latviya-popytaetsya-prodat-dom-moskvy-v-trety-raz-35109658.html>

<sup>86</sup> <https://ria.ru/20241031/latviya-1981189789.html>

<sup>87</sup> <https://nashrezekne.lv/snos-pamyatnikov-rossiya-obyavila-v-rozysk-bolee-60-deputatov-sejma-latvii/>



In September 2022, the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation reported that officers were working on 16 investigations into 143 cases of desecration or destruction of, or damage to war graves, monuments and memorials to Soviet soldiers; 173 foreign nationals from Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Poland and Ukraine were indicted in absentia for the said offences.<sup>88</sup>

The efforts of the Russian-speaking community to preserve the memory of the heroic deeds of the Red Army that liberated Latvia from Nazism are facing a harsh reaction from the Latvian authorities who already persecute on the constant basis the community activists by putting pressure on them and conducting demonstrative "punitive actions". As a rule, they are accused of "anti-state activities", "assistance to a foreign state in its activities against Latvia", "organization of mass disturbances" and "espionage".

Over the past years, the Latvian authorities, under far-fetched pretexts, have been criminally prosecuting and bullying the famous human rights activist and public figure, co-chairman of the United Congress of Russian Communities and head of the Congress of Non-Citizens public organization Alexander Gaponenko. On 17 December 2020, the Latvian court declared him guilty of "inciting hostility and hatred based on race, ethnicity and nationality". He was given a one-year suspended sentence for his statements that in the 1930s and 1940s many Latvians had voluntarily cooperated with Nazi Germany. On 8 February 2022, Gaponenko was sentenced to one and a half years of suspended imprisonment on a similar charge for criticizing the Latvian policy of glorifying the Waffen SS. The court's verdict was appealed by the defence. On 4 December 2023, he was sentenced to one year of suspended imprisonment and one year of probation by attending preventive conversations with an inspector. On 12 March 2024, Gaponenko was given a new sentence for criticizing the deployment of the American troops in Latvia. He was given a suspended 11-month prison sentence and two years' probation.

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<sup>88</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/12092023-sk-rossii-zaochno-obvinil-grazhdan-stran-baltii-i-polshi-v-oskvernenii-sovetskikh-pamyatnikov/>

Criminal proceedings have been initiated against Alexander Filey, Russian language and literature teacher and member of the Board of the Russian Union of Latvia and permanent author of the Russian analytical portal Rubaltic.ru (for glorification of the "Soviet occupation"). The reason was a post that he published on 17 June 2019 on social networks with congratulations on the annexation of Latvia to the USSR in the summer of 1940. On 6 November 2023, the Riga District Court issued a guilty verdict under Article 74 of the Criminal Law ("denial of genocide, crimes against humanity and peace, and war crimes"), sentencing him to 10 months of suspended imprisonment with a ban on leaving the country and police supervision.<sup>89</sup> On 28 May 2024, the Prosecutor's Office of Latvia protested the court verdict on a suspended prison sentence and demanded that a real prison term be applied to Filey.

The (then)-European MP Tatyana Zhdanok, a well-known human rights activist, has been subject to serious pressure by the government (proceedings initiated in August 2020 against her and a number of other Russian community activists in connection with the organization in 2018 of the All-Latvian Parents' Meeting were terminated; later on, the trial against Vladimir Linderman, a well-known public figure in Latvia, was resumed – from 21 June to October 2022 he was in custody and was released on bail of 6,000 euros).

In March 2024, the information appeared that the Latvian authorities initiated a criminal case against Zhdanok. The reason was that she was accused of collaborating with Russian intelligence services.<sup>90</sup> In February, Zhdanok herself said that she was summoned for interrogation by the VDD, but the department forbade her to disclose the details of the interrogation.<sup>91</sup> At the end of July 2024, VDD conducted searches at the facilities associated with Tatyana Zhdanok, as a result of which data carriers, records and documents were seized. Earlier, VDD reported that it was analysing information on the alleged cooperation of

<sup>89</sup> <https://www.pravfond.ru/press-tsentr/sud-v-latvii-priovoril-k-uslovnomu-sroku-za-post-v-sotsseti-uchitelya-russkogo-yazyka-i-literatury-a/>

<sup>90</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/16032024-sluzhba-gosbezopasnosti-latvii-nachala-ugolovnyy-protsess-protiv-evrodeputata-zhdanok/>

<sup>91</sup> <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/6578192>

Mrs. Zhdanok with Russian special services from 2005 till 2013. The European Parliament, which is known, with rare exceptions, for his Russophobic charge, also joined the pressure campaign on Mrs. Zhdanok and began an investigation in connection with the accusations brought against her by the Latvian authorities of connections with Russian special services.<sup>92</sup>

Veteran of the Latvian Ministry of Internal Affairs Oleg Burak was virtually killed in prison. His complaints and appeals to all kinds of authorities over his torture in prison remain unattended. In August 2020, he was sentenced to 15 years of imprisonment (while, as noted by the Latvia mass media, it was seven years in average that is given in Latvia for a murder). At the same time, Burak was convicted on a very shaky evidence base – he was charged with espionage and transferring information containing state secrets to the Russian special services. The Russian Union of Latvia party that received unconditional help from Mr. Burak, carried out a numerous protest meetings to demand an unbiased investigation, but the Latvian authorities did not pay attention to them. Mr. Burak himself said that the criminal case against him was a revenge of the former management of the Information Centre of the Latvian Ministry of Internal Affairs. Mr. Burak informed that he faced problems based on ethnicity as being of Russian nationality during his service. Besides, Mr. Burak informed the management and anti-corruption bodies on the corrupt practice exercised by the head of the Information Centre Yanis Ritins and, these actions left unheard, he made this information public.<sup>93</sup> After exhausting all possible legal venues and means of defence in Latvia, Oleg Burak and his lawyers began to prepare an application to the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR). However, he immediately faced serious opposition and sabotage from the prison authorities, who tried to prevent him from filing a complaint with the Court within the prescribed time limit.<sup>94</sup> Besides, during his imprisonment, Burak's existing health problems worsened.

<sup>92</sup> <https://baltija.eu/2024/07/24/slyjba-gosbezopasnosti-latvii-provela-obyski-y-tatiany-jdanok/>

<sup>93</sup> <https://regnum.ru/article/3918595>

<sup>94</sup> <https://baltija.eu/2023/09/14/alla-berezovskaya-proshlo-pyat-let-so-dnya-aresta-pensionera-eks-polkovnika-mvd-latvii-olega-buraka/?ysclid=lm468e4bl916931588>

Burak did not have time to appeal against the unlawful acts of the Latvian authorities. On 23 September 2024, he died in prison.<sup>95</sup>

Publicist and public figure Yuri Alekseev has been persecuted for many years. On 29 October 2021, he was sentenced to 14 months of deprivation of liberty based on falsified charges of stirring up interethnic discord. On 30 January 2023, the Latvian Court of Appeal dropped one of the charges (possession of ammunitions) following an appeal against the verdict, but the sentence was reduced by only one month.<sup>96</sup> On 30 January 2023, under a far-fetched pretext, Mr. Alekseev was sentenced to one year and one month in prison for "incitement of hatred" and "trafficking in child pornography".<sup>97</sup> In 2024, the pressure on the journalist grew. On 23 May 2024, the Senate of the Supreme Court of Latvia decided to review the previously dropped charges against Mr. Alekseev in the case of possession of ammunitions.

In connection to this biased verdict, the Russian community of Latvia published a statement noting that this sentence, as well as the decision of the Constitutional Court of Latvia that justifies the liquidation of education in Russian, historically traditional for Latvia, the whipped-up hysteria regarding "Russian spies", and criminal prosecution of Russian-language journalists, pointed to the intention of the Latvian government to take political reprisals against the Russian-speaking community. It was stated that the Latvian judicial system had long ago lost the trust of Russian-speaking Latvian residents.

Besides, the criminal case against Mr. Alekseev regarding the IMHO Club discussion Internet platform that he launched remains outstanding. In this context, he is charged with anti-government activities. Due to such activities, the journalist faces from five to 15 years in prison, the trial began on 13 April 2023. Mr. Alekseev is accused along with Pyotr Pogorodniy and Dmitriy Sustretov (Sumarokov).<sup>98</sup>

<sup>95</sup> <https://aif.ru/society/baltnews-v-tyurme-latvii-umer-obvinennyy-v-shpionazhe-v-polzu-rf-oleg-burak>

<sup>96</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/30012023-apellyatsionnyy-sud-latvii-vynes-prigovor-zhurnalistu-yuriyu-alekseevu/>

<sup>97</sup> <https://russkiymir.ru/news/309846/>

<sup>98</sup> <https://lv.sputniknews.ru/20240402/pochemu-zhurnalist-yuriy-alekseev-ne-boitsya-tyurmy-27619496.html>

Fleeing repression, on 28 October 2024, Yuri Alekseev headed from Latvia to Belarus where he asked for political asylum. In an interview given in Belarus, the journalist said that in Latvia the entire Russian-language press was intimidated by government repressions. The Latvian associations of journalists did not want to speak against the authorities' arbitrary conduct.<sup>99</sup>

Among those who were subjected to persecution in Latvia were also public figures and journalists who openly promoted alternative opinions contrary to Riga's Russophobic policy, such as Alexander Yakovlev, Ruslan Pankratov, Vladimir Dorofeev, Lyudmila Pribylskaya, Sergei Melkonov, Alexander Malnach, Andrey Solopenko, Alla Berezovskaya and others. As is known, Mr. Pankratov and a few others, who have been persecuted for essentially political reasons, have had their social security numbers cancelled by the Latvian Ministry of the Interior, making it impossible for them to have a bank account, register at their place of residence and receive medical care, including emergency one.<sup>100</sup>

The country's largest veteran organisation, the Republican Veterans Association of Latvia, came under considerable pressure from the authorities and was closed down by court order on a formal pretext (violation of accounting rules). On 6 October 2020, the chairman of this organization, Russian retired military serviceman Vladimir Norvind, was separated from his family and forcibly expelled from Latvia, in spite of the fact that he had suffered a heart attack. His residence permit was cancelled by the Latvian authorities.

The beginning of the special military operation did nothing but to add additional impetus to the persecution of Russian-speaking activists in this post-Soviet state.

Since the end of February 2022, the State Security Service and the State Police have actually started "hunting" dissenters inside the country. There was an outbreak of summoning activists for "preventive conversations" to these agencies all over Latvia. For example, Yuri Alekseev, former member of the Riga City

<sup>99</sup> <https://ukraina.ru/20241030/1058461185.html>

<sup>100</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/article/politika-i-obshchestvo/20230911-rusofoby-sdali-nazad-popytka-vydavit-grazhdan-rossii-iz-latvii-provalilas/>

Council, who was threatened with a new criminal case by Latvia's special services for active citizenship, reported on such summoning on his social network page. Information is available that Latvia's special services summoned contributors from practically all Russian-language media of the country to such "conversations", including such large ones as Segodnya (Today) newspaper, Telegraph magazine, Latvian News weekly, Saturday, Seven Super Secrets, Baltcom radio as well as mixnews.lv, pross.lv, bb.lv websites.

Over the past several years, Latvian national legislation has been adapted to criminalize any manifestation of support for Russia and its special military operation. For example, there is an Article in Criminal Law of Latvia stipulating responsibility "for the justification and glorification of crimes" committed by Russia on the territory of Ukraine.

On 31 March 2022, the Saeima adopted a law on amending the criminal legislation to criminalize the use of letters "Z" and "V" in public space "with the aim to support the aggressor" (such prohibition on using symbols implies also St. George ribbon that had been prohibited in Latvia before). All such acts are punishable by up to five years in prison.

Since February 2022, VDD has initiated dozens of criminal proceedings related to "glorification of genocide and war crimes", "incitement of national discord", etc., mostly for comments or other online activities. The charges are mostly brought under the infamous article of the Criminal Law of the LR on "justification of genocide, crimes against humanity, crimes against peace and war crimes" (which is understood to mean support in any form of Russia's SMO). Between February 2022 and February 2023 alone, VDD initiated over 40 criminal cases on these charges. A pre-trial detention measure was applied to several citizens of the Republic of Latvia. For the entire 2023, VDD opened 173 such criminal cases, and in the first three months of 2024 alone there were 49 of them.

In July 2023, following the results of social media monitoring conducted by the special services, hundreds of Latvians received notices of administrative

proceedings against them for posting about Victory Day celebrations and even for liking such posts.

As practice has shown, in order to obtain the status of a "suspect" in Latvia under a criminal or administrative article, it is enough to demonstrate Russian or Soviet symbols, including the letters "Z" and "V", in public space or online. In addition, in September 2023, the Latvian State Police announced that inscriptions on cars reading: "I am Russian", i.e. demonstrating ethnic self-identification, would be treated as "glorification of military aggression" and constitute an administrative offence.<sup>101</sup>

Symptomatically, Latvian law enforcement agencies and courts try not to publicize politicized criminal cases and cover up procedural violations and evidence of torture of victims of these repressions. Nevertheless, the following cases have received public response.

In light of the ban by the Latvian authorities from laying floral tributes at the then-existing Monument to the Liberators of Riga in Victory Park and the closure of public access to it, the most resonant case was the arrest of Latvian citizen Aleksander Dubyago, who came to the Monument with a Russian flag to honour the memory of Soviet military personnel. Despite the fact that the young man did not proclaim political slogans, law enforcers charged him without any grounds under Paragraph 1, Article 74 of the Criminal Code – "Justification of genocide and war crimes", which provides for punishment of up to five years in prison and detained him.

He was held in the same cell with HIV patients until June 2023, when he was finally released on his own recognizance. On 30 December 2022, due to the absence of body of a crime, the trial was terminated and the proceedings were transferred to those administrative under Article 13 of the Law on Administrative Offenses (in the sphere of public order and use of the state language). The reason for the "favour" was mainly the student's appeal to the ECtHR (a separate closed

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<sup>101</sup> <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/18838935>

session of the Latvian Cabinet of Ministers in April 2022 was dedicated to this issue).

Along with him, Viktoria Matule, who also came to the monument to the Liberators of Riga on 10 May and stood next to Dubyago, was persecuted by the Latvian authorities. They did not know each other before. After the action, Mrs. Matule had to flee Latvia because she heard that the VDD employees instigated surveillance and had plans to detain her.<sup>102</sup>

DVS Urantia activist Aivis Vasilevskis was the first to be arrested on politically motivated charges of "justifying war crimes". His dad Ventis Vasilevskis and manager of the organisation Skaidrite Alekseeva were also arrested together with him. Onle Aivis Vasilevskis was held in detention during the investigations into this case (for three months in row to be admitted to bail later to the amount of 20,000 euros). In May 2023, the court decision on the matter became known: Aivis Vasilevskis was fined 11,160 euros, Ventis Vasilevskis – 6,820 euros, and Skaidrite Alekseeva was sentenced to 216 hours of community service.<sup>103</sup>

In March 2022, blogger Kirill Fedorov (Latvian citizen), who in his videos spoke favourably about Russia's special military operation, was detained by VDD in Riga with the use of electric shock torture. He was charged under Article 74.1 – "justification of genocide, crimes against humanity, crimes against peace and war crimes", and Article 78 – "incitement to national, ethnic or religious hatred or enmity" of Criminal Law (he faced up to five years in prison).<sup>104</sup> Prior to being released on bail (in the amount of EUR 55,000) in June 2022, the activist was held in a detention centre by the special services, where he was tortured and beaten. He was subsequently forced to pay a hefty fine of over EUR 27,000.

Several activists managed to elude the fabricated persecutions of Latvian authorities.

<sup>102</sup> <https://lv.sputniknews.ru/20230317/viktoriya-matule-eto-ya-administrator-antifashistov-pribaltiki-24472740.html>

<sup>103</sup> <https://baltija.eu/2023/05/22/podderzhavshie-putina-latyschi-osuzhdeny-i-poluchili-solidnye-shtrafy/>

<sup>104</sup> <https://lv.sputniknews.ru/20220322/vrag-gosbezopasnosti-v-rige-arestovan-russkiy-voenny-blogger-kirill-fedorov-21030768.html>



In April 2022, Russian-speaking activist Alexander Tsvetkov, born in the Latgale city of Rezekne, who in recent years lived in Daugavpils and took an active part in defending the rights of the Russian-speaking community to use the Russian language, was persecuted: he filed requests to all Latvian government authorities, including the Saeima and the VDD to ask them to stop pressure on the Russian-speaking population of Latvia. As a result, he turned into a fair game for the Latvian special services himself. On 6 April 2022, a search was carried out in Tsvetkov's house, and he himself was unceremoniously taken to the Daugavpils police department. He was liberated after two days in detention. Afterwards, the activist had to flee Latvia.<sup>105</sup>

Due to support for Donbass, Latvian citizen Sergey Vasiliev, who previously ran a commercial company in Helsinki, was subjected to repression. It was through it that he began sending humanitarian aid to Donbass. He was accused of "sponsoring terrorism" as well as under Articles of money laundering and evading payment. The case against Mr. Vasiliev was considered in two countries at once – Finland and Latvia on the same basis and with the same accusation. The Finnish court even ruled on his case. The consideration of Vasiliev's case was accompanied by numerous violations: he was forbidden to get acquainted with the case materials, analyse the materials on the merits during the judicial investigation, ask questions to the prosecution and make the last word. After the Latvian activist was summoned to court with the same accusation he was sentenced in Finland, he had to flee the country.<sup>106</sup>

On October 2022, musician and composer Mikhail Kasper had to leave Latvia. He was also in disagreement with the position of Latvia on the Ukrainian crisis, helped Donbass, visited rallies to support the Russian language, and took active part in protecting the monument to the Liberators of Riga.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> <https://pravfond.ru/press-tsentr/stati/proshu-politicheskogo-ubezhishcha-v-rossii-iz-latvii-sbezhal-eshche-odin-aktivist/>

<sup>106</sup> <https://lv.sputniknews.ru/20220915/iz-rigi-sbezhal-russkiy-aktivist--v-latvii-ego-zhdala-tyurma-22794139.html>

<sup>107</sup> <https://lv.sputniknews.ru/20221013/vzval-sumku-i-uekhal-pochemu-russkiy-muzykant-sbezhal-v-rossiyu-23041993.html>

In the same month, Latvian authorities expelled from the country the Lithuanian programmer Konstantin Gorshkov, who actively participated in activities to protect Soviet monuments, including filing lawsuits and appeals to the court and the UN in support of the monument to the Liberators of Riga. He was not provided the reason for his expulsion.<sup>108</sup>

In December 2022, activist and blogger Sofya Vasilievskaya, who has Latvian citizenship, was also forced to flee Austria, where she had lived for the previous four years. Because of her pro-Russian position and the materials she published on social networks, Mrs. Vasilyevskaya was persecuted by Latvian nationalists. They published information about Mrs. Vasilievskaya on social networks, indicating her personal information, including place of residence, place of work, and called on employers to refuse the girl a job. After this, she was fired from her job without explanation, and then her rental contract was terminated. At the same time, employees of the Latvian VDD came to the house of Mrs. Vasilievskaya's relatives, interrogated and intimidated them.<sup>109</sup>

However, many civil society activists were subjected to the strongest pressure from the Latvian authorities, and not all cases of persecution ended well for them. On 8 May 2022, Igor Kuzmuk, former member of the Riga City Council, public figure and teacher of Riga Gymnastics School, was brutally detained and beaten by armed special operations forces.<sup>110</sup> The reason was that he had made "pro-Russian" posts on his Telegram channel, featuring a bank account number to support the author. He was charged under Article 77.2 of Criminal Law of the Republic of Latvia – "indirectly aiding terrorists", which provides for up to 10 years' imprisonment. In October 2023, under pressure from VDD, he was suspended from work for three months without pay. January 2024 saw the first court hearing in the case, where the prosecutor requested that Igor Kuzmuk be sentenced to two years' imprisonment. On 13 February 2024, Kuzmuk was

<sup>108</sup> <https://ruskiymir.ru/news/306359/>

<sup>109</sup> <https://lv.sputniknews.ru/20221229/iz-avstrii-v-belarus-pochemu-grazhdanka-latvii-sbezhala-iz-evropy-23766629.html>

<sup>110</sup> <https://eadaily.com/ru/news/2022/06/03/byvshego-deputata-municipaliteta-rigi-zaderzhali-za-prorossiyskie-posty-v-socseti>

acquitted on all charges. However, later the judge who considered this case openly stated that he would have pronounced a guilty verdict if not for the poor work of the prosecutor.

From August 2022 to January 2023 (released on bail), another former Riga City Council member Ruslan Pankratov, detained by VDD, was held in custody as part of criminal proceedings under Article 74.1 of Criminal Law, which was later replaced by Article 78 by the defence. He was accused of spreading "groundless" publications on the situation with Russians in Latvia and statements "inciting hatred and distrust towards Ukrainians and refugees from Ukraine" through information resources that are used for the "purposes of aggressive Russian propaganda". Besides, in January 2023 another criminal investigation was launched against the politician under Article 80 – "undermining of the democratic order and attempted violent overthrow of power" and Article 81 of Criminal Law – "working for a foreign state".<sup>111</sup> Facing arrest, the politician was forced to seek asylum in Russia.

According to the available public data, at least 6 people have been accused of "carrying out anti-state activities in support of the interests of Russia as an aggressor state" as part of a high-profile criminal case regarding the establishment of a criminal group, which has been fabricated by VDD since the beginning of 2023.

The first victim in this Russophobic campaign became representative of the Russian-language diaspora Tatyana Andriets, a student of St. Petersburg State University. She was arrested on 6 February 2023, on VDD-brought charges of involvement in moderating the Anti-Fascists of the Baltic States Telegram channel, which, according to the special service, glorified "aggression".<sup>112</sup>

Initially, the public activist was charged under two articles of the Criminal Law: 81.1 – "Assisting a foreign state in activities directed against the Republic of Latvia" and 84 – "Violating sanctions established by international organizations

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<sup>111</sup> <https://lv.sputniknews.ru/2023/11/10/v-latvii-osmelivshiesya-prodemonstrirovat-simpatiyu-rf-popadayut-v-ruki-rgb-delo-pankratova-26506309.html>

<sup>112</sup> <https://rg.ru/2023/02/10/grazhdanku-latvii-tatianu-andriec-arestovali-za-prorossijskie-vzgliady.html>

and the Republic of Latvia". In June 2023, the prosecution replaced Article 81.1 with a harsher one – 89.1 (part 1) – which provides for a sentence of 8 to 17 years, with possible confiscation of property and probation for up to three years, for "forming and participating in a criminal organization of at least five persons for the purpose of committing particularly serious crimes against humanity or peace, war crimes, genocide or particularly serious crimes against the state".

In the same month, however, it emerged that the VDD had again reclassified the charges against Tatyana Andriets and other defendants – from Part 1 to Part 2 of Article 89.1 of the Criminal Law – which provides for life imprisonment or a prison sentence of 10 to 20 years, with probationary supervision for up to three years and possible confiscation of property, for "leading a criminal organization and participating in crimes committed by such an organization". On 4 October 2023, the Riga City Court released Tatyana Andriets from custody on her own recognizance.

The Latvian authorities used physical and psychological methods against Tatyana Andriets during her detention. Her health has deteriorated due to the appalling conditions in the Latvian prison.<sup>113</sup>

Local public activist Alexander Zhgun, who had (like Tatyana Andriets) actively protected the Monument to the Liberators of Riga and Latvia from vandals until it was demolished, was also unofficially named among the defendants in this trial. He was detained from April until August 2023, when he was released on bail.

In August 2023, Sergey Sidorov, a Russian-speaking taxi driver, was arrested by the VDD under Article 85, Part 1 of the Criminal Law ("illegal collection and transfer of information to foreign intelligence service") which provides for up to 10 years of imprisonment. He is being charged with activities "against the interests of Latvia's national security". Specifically, this refers to the transmission of information to the administrators of the Telegram channel "Baltic anti-fascists".<sup>114</sup> Sergey Sidorov, who is raising his son alone, is being persecuted

<sup>113</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/04082023-sud-v-rige-prodlil-srok-soderzhaniya-pod-strazhey-aktivistke-tatyane-andriets/>, <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/05062023-arestovanny-v-latvii-aktivistke-andriets-uzhestochili-obvinenie/>

<sup>114</sup> <https://ruskiymir.ru/news/316817/>

for his activism against the closure of Russian schools and the demolition of Soviet monuments. He also took part in cleaning the graves of Red Army soldiers and helped the needy by delivering food during the coronavirus pandemic.<sup>115</sup> On 20 December 2023, the court changed his pre-trial restriction measure from custody to a non-custodial measure.<sup>116</sup> However, after his trial began, the man was arrested again on 13 May 2024. On 1 November 2024, it was reported that Sergey Sidorov was found guilty of espionage in favour of Russia and sentenced to seven years in prison and two years of administrative supervision. Journalist Alexey Stefanov said that Sidorov's case was trumped up and noted that the case materials were classified even for defence lawyers, and "espionage did not even need to be proved". According to the journalist, in Latvia, incitement of hatred can be understood as "any discontent expressed towards Ukrainians". It is also reported that the prosecutor representing the state prosecution said that the punishment for S. Sidorov should be "a lesson for the rest of us".<sup>117</sup>

On 20 October 2023, the Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Latvia charged six residents of the Republic (Tatyana Andriets, Alexander Zhgun, Stanislav Bukayn, Sergey Vasiliev, Victoria Matule and Roman Samul) under the Article of the Criminal Law of the Republic of Latvia entitled "leadership of a criminal organization and participation in its crimes". They could face prison sentences of 10 to 20 years or even life imprisonment.<sup>118</sup>

On 9 November 2023, former member of the 6th, 7th, 10th, 11th, 12th and 13th convocations of the Latvian Parliament, Latvian Interior Minister (November 1994-1995) Jānis Adamsons was sentenced to 8.5 years in prison on charges of spying for Russia. As Minister of the Interior, Adamson is remembered for his successful fight against organized crime. In particular, he made considerable efforts to neutralize the group headed by the "king of Latvian racketeering". As a deputy, he became known for investigating high-profile scandals involving Latvia's

<sup>115</sup> <https://rusскиymir.ru/news/316817/>

<sup>116</sup> <https://pravfond.ru/press-tsentr/obvinyaemogo-v-shpionazhe-sergeya-sidorova-vypuskayut-iz-latyshskoy-tyurmy/>

<sup>117</sup> <https://pravfond.ru/press-tsentr/sergey-sidorov-osuzhdyen-v-latvii-na-7-let-po-obvineniyu-v-shpionazhe-v-polzu-rossii/>

<sup>118</sup> <https://www.pravfond.ru/press-tsentr/latviyskaya-prokuratura-predyavila-obvinenie-avtoram-telegram-kanala-antifashistam-pribaltiki/>

top officials. For example, Prime Minister Andris Šķele was forced to resign after Adamsons accused him, along with Justice Minister Valdis Birkavs and State Revenue Service chief Andrejs Sončiks, of paedophilia.<sup>119</sup>

Since 2019, the VDD has been prosecuting Benes Ayo, a Russian citizen (he held Latvian citizenship until February 2021), who has been involved in the armed conflict in South-Eastern Ukraine, and since February 2022 in the special military operation, under Article 77.1 of the Criminal Law – "participation in an armed conflict directed against the territorial integrity and inviolability of a foreign state".

The Latvian authorities are persecuting Jeļena Kreile, a Latvian citizen and ethnic Latvian living in Riga, by bringing far-fetched criminal cases. On 27 February 2022, she walked alone to the Russian embassy with a banner saying "Russia, I am with you". She was then followed and her telephone conversations were tapped. On 16 March 2022, during the traditional procession of Latvian SS legionnaires in Riga, she was the only one from the whole of Latvia who came there not to support the neo-Nazi action, but to express her protest, which was expressed by sewing a small image of the Russian flag to her jacket. Kreile was taken to the police station for this action, detained for two days in a temporary detention centre, an administrative case was opened against her and a fine was imposed. In her interview, Kreile said that Latvian security services had previously questioned and searched her husband, who runs a military history club dedicated to the First and Second World Wars and also has a private museum. They have also often taken part in historical re-enactments.<sup>120,121</sup>

In 2023, Jeļena Kreile hung a Russian flag and posters in support of our country in the window of her flat, wore the Russian tricolour on her jacket and the letter "Z" on her bag, and held pro-Russian solitary pickets. On 2 November 2023, she was sentenced to a year's probation "for glorifying and justifying Russia's war crimes". In total, more than 30 administrative cases were brought against our

<sup>119</sup> <https://baltija.eu/2023/11/09/byvshego-deputata-sejma-latvii-yanisa-adamsonsa-prigovorili-k-85-goda-lishe-niya-svobody-po-obvineniyu-v-shpionazhe-v-polzu-rf/>

<sup>120</sup> <https://lv.sputniknews.ru/20230615/v-poslke-tome-snesli-pamyatnik-legendarnomu-latyshskomu-razvedchiku-25293720.html>

<sup>121</sup> <https://telegra.ph/Rossiia-ya-s-toboj---kak-prizyvny-k-miru-i-dobrososedstvu-obernulis-dlya-pozhiloj-latyshki-turmoj-Istoriya-odnoj-obychnoj-no-och-04-12>

fellow citizen, mainly for "public use of symbols glorifying military aggression and war crimes", and four criminal cases, later merged into one, under Article 74.1 of the Penal Code, for which she faces up to five years' imprisonment, community service and a fine. The activist was repeatedly detained and searched. She remained under arrest from March to May 2023. On 2 November 2023, the Riga District Court sentenced her to one year of suspended imprisonment.<sup>122</sup>

On 16 March 2024, she was fined for appearing in the centre of Riga in what Latvian police described as the attire of a "Soviet-era commissar" – the activist was wearing a leather coat, boots, a blue beret with a five-petaled red flower, and carrying an officer's bag. According to the activist, the complaints did not target any of the items taken separately. Latvian law enforcement officials confiscated her clothes and bag, claiming that they were "instruments of administrative offense".<sup>123</sup> In 2023, the Latvian security services arrested Kreile and put her in a temporary detention centre for two days to prevent her from coming to the Latvian SS legionnaires' march on 16 March.

On 7 January 2024, unidentified vandals attacked Jelena Kreile's flat. They threw bricks at her windows, and the woman was injured. Although she filed a police report, the police refused to open a criminal investigation into the attempted murder.

In addition, while Jelena Kreile was on trial for supporting Russia, several other cases were brought against her. One of them went to trial. On 4 April 2024, a Latvian court arrested the activist for two months and she was placed in Ilgucieme Women's Prison. According to media reports, the Latvian authorities tried to prove Jelena Kreile guilty of "publicly glorifying and justifying aggression and war crimes" after searching the activist's flat and finding boxes and folders in the colours of the Russian flag, rolls of white adhesive tape, homemade flags of the Russian Federation and the Russian Empire, posters saying "Putin is my friend", "I am a Russian-Latvian-Soviet person" and "Dievs, sarga Latvija" ("God save

<sup>122</sup> <https://www.pravfond.ru/press-tsentr/rizhskiy-sud-prigovoril-antifashistku-elenu-kreyle-k-1-godu-lisheniya-svobody-uslovno/>

<sup>123</sup> <https://www.gazeta.ru/social/news/2024/03/16/22564879.shtml>

Latvia"), which had been used to make installations in her window.<sup>124,125</sup> In the opinion of the prosecutor's office, the items and their placement manifest the justification of war crimes, thus warranting the request for an actual prison term of 3.5 years. On 10 July 2024, Kreile was sentenced to three years in prison by the court for the installations.<sup>126</sup>

In addition, Riga has launched a campaign to prosecute 16 Russian-speaking journalists (Andrey Yakovlev, Vladimir Dorofeev, Lyudmila Pribylskaya, Sergey Melkonov, Alexander Malnach, Andrey Solopenko, Alla Berezovskaya, and others) on charges of "violating the EU sanctions regime" (Article 84 of the Criminal Law) for cooperating with Russian news outlets. This case is being tried in court.

In 2023, Yuri Mikhailov, administrator of the Russian-language Facebook group called Criminal Latvia, was convicted under the aforementioned "political" Article 74.1 of the Criminal Law and spent more than two months in prison. The authorities of the Republic of Latvia interpreted the information he posted as "glorifying Russian aggression against Ukraine".<sup>127</sup>

On 14 April 2023, Martin Grikis and Sergei Khodonovich were detained for "spying" for Russia. In October 2023, they were sentenced to five and four years in prison respectively. On 11 March 2024, the Court of Appeal mitigated the sentences: Grikis' sentence was reduced to three years and Khodonovich's to two years and eight months.

In September 2023, the VDD fabricated a criminal case against former MEP and journalist Andrey Mamykin for "glorifying and justifying Russia's crimes in Ukraine".<sup>128</sup> The social activist was forced to move to Russia. On 7 June 2024, the VDD applied to the Prosecutor's Office to open a criminal case against Andrey Mamykin. On 15 July 2024 Latvia put him on an international wanted list.

<sup>124</sup> <https://russkiymir.ru/news/324058/>

<sup>125</sup> <https://pravfond.ru/press-tsentr/latyshskaya-prokuratura-trebuets-3-5-goda-realnogo-zaklyucheniya-dlya-eleny-kreyle-za-installyatsii-v/>

<sup>126</sup> <https://www.kp.ru/online/news/5893850/>

<sup>127</sup> <https://lv.sputniknews.ru/20230925/admin-gruppy-v-sotssetyakh-poluchil-v-latvii-realnyy-srok-za-post-v-opravdanie-svo-na-ukraine-26091756.html>

<sup>128</sup> <https://www.pravfond.ru/press-tsentr/sluzhba-gosbezopasnosti-latvii-nachala-ugolovnyy-protsess-protiv-byvshego-evrodeputata-andreya-mamyk/>



In December 2023, Russian-speaking historian Igor Gusev was compelled to flee to Russia with his family due to the threat of politicized criminal prosecution by the Latvian authorities. He is known for his numerous books and videos about the history of Latvia and Riga, as well as for his fascinating tours of the Latvian capital. He said that he had learned that the Latvian authorities had begun a total and consistent "mop-up" of the Russian cultural element in Latvia. He has been subjected to a principled decision to organize a special political process against him, which should be an intimidating example to all other activists.<sup>129,130</sup>

In August and December 2023, the VDD detained four Latvian citizens and two Russians on trumped-up charges of "espionage" in favour of Moscow. At the same time, on 30 December 2023, amendments to the Criminal Law, introduced on the initiative of Latvian President Edgars Rinkēvičs, came into force, providing for harsher penalties under the "espionage" articles, up to life imprisonment.

As journalist Alla Berezovska notes, in 2024 Latvian police has all but officially proclaimed its new policy to "lock everyone up and let no one in". In practice, this means that anyone who thinks differently, acts differently, speaks differently, writes differently on social media or sings the wrong songs on public transport will be punished.<sup>131</sup>

On 7 March 2024, the VDD opened a criminal case against former Latvian MP Gloria Grevtsova on charges of justifying war crimes and inciting national hatred. The criminal prosecution of Grevtsova was launched after she had published a video on social media in which she stated that in the Occupation Museum in Riga "the facts did not match" and the tour guide had presented "a parallel, fictitious history". She was declared wanted by the Latvian prosecutor's office on 3 April 2024.<sup>132</sup>

On 4 April 2024, the trial of Inga Tukhbatova, who had previously been nominated as a candidate for a seat in the Saeima, began. Latvian special services

<sup>129</sup> <https://pravfond.ru/press-tsentr/izvestnyy-russkiy-istorik-igor-gusev-pokinul-latviyu/>

<sup>130</sup> <https://lv.sputniknews.ru/2023/12/23/iz-latvii-vytravili-poslednego-russkogo-istorika-26862698.html>

<sup>131</sup> <https://baltija.eu/2024/07/06/politicheskaya-uznicza-latvii-svetlana-nikolaeva-moya-blagodarnost-ne-imeet-granicz/>

<sup>132</sup> <https://baltija.eu/2024/04/03/byvshego-deputata-parlamenta-latvii-gloriyu-grevczovu-obyavili-v-rozysk/>

accused her of spying for Russia. I. Tukhbatova failed to appear in court, after which she was officially put on a wanted list.<sup>133</sup> The Latvian media linked Tukhbatova's criminal case to the case of the "Baltic Antifascists", against whom the VDD filed a criminal case on 28 November. The special services accused the Baltic Antifascists Telegram channel of deliberately and systematically using the messenger channels for actions against Latvia's national security interests.<sup>134</sup>

On 9 April 2024, the Kurzeme District Court in Liepāja sentenced Valeriy Lazarev to two years' imprisonment for causing a scuffle with a member of a Russophobic and Latvian-Ukrainian nationalist march in May 2022. Initially Lazarev was sentenced to 200 hours of forced labour; he compensated the victim 6034 EUR for moral damage, but after the victim's side protested, the Latvian prosecutor's office overturned the court's decision and the case was reopened. After the retrial, the court sentenced the activist to two years of suspended imprisonment under Article 55 of the Criminal Law, with a two-year suspended sentence. However, this sentence was also challenged on appeal, leading to a review by the district court and a prison sentence.<sup>135</sup>

In late April 2024, bloggers Dimitriy Mataev and Aigars Augustans were arrested for criticising the Latvian authorities.<sup>136,137</sup>

At the beginning of May 2024, the Rēzekne police detained a man who had brought red and white carnations three times between 15 March and 14 April 2024 near the site of the destroyed monument to Soviet soldier-liberators known as "Alyosha". A criminal case has been opened against him under the article "Justification of war crimes, genocide, crimes against humanity and peace". Under this article, he could face up to five years in prison.<sup>138</sup>

<sup>133</sup> <https://baltija.eu/2024/04/23/eks-kandidat-v-deputaty-parlamenta-latvii-inga-tukhbatova-oficialno-obyavlena-v-rozysk/>

<sup>134</sup> <https://pravfond.ru/press-tsentr/kandidat-v-deputaty-parlamenta-latvii-inga-tukhbatova-predstanet-pered-sudom-za-shpionazh-v-polzu-ro/>

<sup>135</sup> <https://baltija.eu/2024/04/10/zhitel-rigi-valerij-lazarev-osuzhden-na-2-goda-za-napadenie-na-demonstranta-naczionalista-v-2022-godu/>

<sup>136</sup> <https://lv.sputniknews.ru/20240426/za-chto-zatknuli-rot-latviyskomu-blogeru-mataevu-27790269.html>

<sup>137</sup> <https://t.me/alekseystefanov/8942>

<sup>138</sup> <https://pravfond.ru/press-tsentr/zhitelyu-latyshskogo-rezekne-grozit-tyurma-za-tsvety-na-meste-snesyennogo-pamyatnika-krasnoarmeytsam/>

On 4 May 2024, a long-distance lorry driver, Alexander Demidov, was arrested in Liepaja for putting a sticker with the image of the Soviet Order of Victory, without any inscriptions, to the building of the City Museum. Demidov too, shared the opinion that it is inadmissible to demolish Soviet monuments, as his family attached great importance to this matter: during the Great Patriotic War, Demidov's mother was forced into slavery by the Nazis. The Russian citizen was charged under Article 74.1 of the Criminal Law "Justification of genocide, crime against humanity, crime against peace and war crime", as well as Article 81 "Assistance to a foreign state in activities directed against Latvia".<sup>139</sup> His detention in custody has been extended several times.

On 15 May 2024, the Latvian security services arrested Svetlana Nikolaeva, the mother of Aleksander Dubyago, who had raised the Russian flag at the monument to the Liberators of Riga on 10 May 2022 and was subsequently detained for more than a month. Nikolaeva actively campaigned to get her son acquitted, which compromised the public image of the VDD. Nikolaeva had serious health problems; she had to undergo a full medical examination and prepare for surgery. The Latvian court, however, did not take this into account and sent her to prison for 2 months. The Latvian security services have also reportedly filed charges against Nikolayeva for giving money to taxi driver Sergey Sidorov, who is accused of spying for Russia, so that he could pay for a lawyer.<sup>140</sup> On 17 July 2024, the Latvian court left Svetlana Nikolaeva in custody, Human rights defenders are positive that Nikolaeva's arrest was ordered by the Latvian authorities. The espionage charges against her raise serious concerns that such a method is being used to stifle dissent and intimidate those who do not support Latvia's official stance on Russia.<sup>141</sup>

Svetlana Nikolaeva is being held in custody despite the fact that she is suspected of being suffering from cancer. Her health problems began before her

<sup>139</sup> <https://pravfond.ru/press-tsentr/latyshskiy-sud-prodlil-aleksandru-demidovu-srok-soderzhaniya-pod-strazhey-eshche-na-2-mesyatsa/>

<sup>140</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/15052024-v-latvii-arestovali-mat-parnya-razvernushhego-rossiyskiy-flag-v-rige/>

<sup>141</sup> <https://pravfond.ru/press-tsentr/politicheskaya-uznitsa-latvii-svetlana-nikolaeva-ostavlena-pod-arestom-eshche-na-dva-mesyatsa/>

arrest. They worsened in Ilguciem Women's Prison as she was not provided with timely medical care. The woman was briefly sent to hospital only after a delegation from the Latvian Ombudsman's Office visited the prison. Svetlana Nikolaeva has not been hospitalised<sup>142</sup>.

At the end of May 2024, Valeriy Duden, a political prisoner known for his criticism of the Latvian prosecutor's office and police, died in prison under strange circumstances. According to journalist Aleksey Stefanov, this is at least the second such incident in Latvian prisons. Prior to that, in November 2023, Igor Bobyr, who had been arrested on suspicion of espionage, died in Liepaja prison.<sup>143</sup>

On 18 June 2024, two residents of Rēzekne were fined 300 EUR each for singing the Russian song "Katyusha" on a bus. Latvian law enforcers considered that the song "glorified the Soviet army and the occupation regime".

On 26 June 2024, the Latvian security services opened a criminal case against the head of the Liepaja branch of the Latvian Russian Union (LRU), Jelena Osipova, who had previously run for the European Parliament from the LRU. Like other civil society activists, she was charged under Article 74.1 of the Criminal Law on the justification of genocide. The reason was that Osipova published a video dedicated to Victory Day on the party's social media accounts. The video included footage of war newsreels and a shot of party supporters marching with red flags against a backdrop of Baltic landscapes. The activist was summoned for questioning.<sup>144</sup>

In addition to criminal prosecution, Russians in Latvia have faced massive intimidation, insults and threats from individuals. In fact, "unreliable citizens" who express any form of support for Russia or simply hold balanced views have been harassed on social media.

Since autumn 2021, Latvia has the website <https://myrotvorets.team>, similar to the notorious Ukrainian Myrotvorets website. The website publishes personal

<sup>142</sup> <https://lv.sputniknews.ru/20241023/peredavali-informatsiyu-o-figurantakh-del-o-shpionazhe-v-chem-obvinyayut-sidorova-i-nikolaevu-28963019.html>

<sup>143</sup> <https://t.me/alekseystefanov/9182>, <https://ont.by/special/list-data/v-latvijskoj-tyurme-pri-zagadochnyh-obstoyatelstvah-umer-politzaklyuchennyj>

<sup>144</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/27062024-v-latvii-vozbudili-delo-na-ekskandidata-v-evrodeputaty/>

data of people who have supported Russia's special military operation to degasify and demilitarize Ukraine and protect civilians in the Donbass. These include the staff of the Russian Embassy in Latvia, local journalists, activists from the Russian-speaking community (including members of the Latvian Russian Union party) and other "unreliable" citizens who have posted relevant statements on their social media. It is indicative that the Latvian authorities did not consider this website illegal, including in terms of Riga's international obligations, including the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations. The Latvian State Data Inspectorate found no violations and cynically noted that the data presented on the website had been processed in accordance with the right to freedom of expression.

It is well known that pupils from families of Russian citizens are subjected to harassment on grounds of their ethnicity and language in Latvian pre-school and general education institutions. Parents of the affected children are compelled to send them to home schooling. One of the most high-profile manifestations of bullying of Russian-speaking children was a case in a kindergarten in the Jelgava region of Latvia, where pupils were forced to squat for every word spoken in their mother tongue.<sup>145</sup> The identities of those who forced them to do such "exercises" are known.

Latvian law enforcement authorities subject Russian citizens crossing the border to severe pressure. To enter Latvia, they have to sign a declaration of disagreement with the policies of the Russian Federation. If they refuse, they are denied entry on the pretext that they pose a threat to public order and national security.

In December 2022, the State Security Service of Latvia, trying to intimidate citizens with false threats, addressed the residents of the republic with a "request" not to travel to Russia and Belarus during the Christmas and New Year holidays, recalling that special services of Russia and Belarus were "recruiting" Latvian residents in their countries.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> <https://ria.ru/20230928/latviay-1899265469.html>

<sup>146</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/22122022-sluzhba-gosbezopasnosti-latvii-prizvala-zhiteley-vozderzhatsya-ot-poezdok-v-rossiyu-i-belarus/>

The Russophobic hysteria consumed the Latvian authorities to such an extent that in August 2022 the Latvian parliament declared Russia a "state sponsor of terrorism".

Under the fake pretext of fighting "Russian propaganda", all dissent in the Latvian media is being wiped out; as a result, representatives of the Russian-language media are under serious systemic pressure. The persecution intensified from the end of February 2022, when the broadcasting of all Russian channels was gradually banned in Latvia. On 24 February 2022, the channels Russia RTR, Russia 24 and TVC International ceased broadcasting. As of 2 March 2022, the broadcasting of RBC TV was banned, Belarus 24 was suspended and the broadcasting licenses of First Baltic Channel Estonia and First Baltic Channel Lithuania were withdrawn. On 7 March 2022, the Latvian National Council on Electronic Media decided to shut down 18 more Russian channels in the country: TNT Comedy, TNT 4, TNT 4 International, TNT, TNT Music, PYATNITSA International, KHL TV, Kinopremiera, Kinosvidanie, Muzhskoye Kino, La-Minor TV, Auto Plus TV, Nostalgia, Zhivi!, Kto Yest Kto, Malysh TV, Russkaya Noch, Zee TV. In June 2022, the broadcasting of the remaining 80 TV channels was restricted. As of today, Latvia has banned all Russian TV channels and blocked hundreds of online news outlets (including those pertaining to Russian government bodies).

The ban hasn't affected the popularity of the banned channels, and Latvian citizens continue to watch them on "illegal" communication devices. The Latvian authorities have introduced administrative liability and a fine of up to 700 EUR for watching Russian TV programmes via "illegal decoders" and satellite dishes. The distribution of such equipment can be viewed as a criminal offense.

In early December 2022, it emerged that the State Police in Riga had arrested a man on suspicion of installing "illegal television" in homes. He was accused of setting up unlicensed and illegal TV channels. It was also noted that "the detainee has for a long time provided television connection and service to

almost 100 households in the Riga region".<sup>147</sup> Another such case was reported in March 2024 – the authorities arrested a technician, who had helped at least 181 Latvians set up "illegal" Russian channels. Police searched the suspect's home and seized equipment that he had used to receive and transmit the broadcasts.<sup>148</sup>

On 5 March 2024, another man was arrested for setting up Russian TV channels for Latvians in Nitzgale, Augsdauhava region. The man is under investigation.

Under the guise of implementing European Union sanctions, the Latvian regime has taken measures that grossly violate the property rights of Russian citizens.

On 12 September 2023, Latvia closed off the entry of Russia-registered passenger cars. On 15 November 2023, legislation amendments came into force that trample the rights of Russian citizens.<sup>149</sup> The changes mean that Russian-registered vehicles that have been imported into Latvia without being re-registered with the local Road Traffic Safety Directorate of Latvia before 14 February 2024 will be confiscated by the police. Under the law, the decision to expropriate a vehicle can be taken no matter where the owner of the vehicle is. A notice to the person using the vehicle is deemed to be enough. In addition to being authorized to identify the "offenders", the police officers are will be able to impose fines of between 150 and 400 EUR and to use wheel clamps to prevent vehicles from being moved for their subsequent removal.

Exceptions are made only for vehicles used by diplomatic missions and for single transit journeys, provided that the duration of the journey does not exceed 24 hours and that the information regarding the vehicle and its owner is submitted in advance to the competent Latvian authorities.

In February 2024, Latvia made numerous attempts to put pressure on Russian citizens living in the country in order to prevent them from voting in the Russian presidential elections in March 2024. This demonstrates the complete

<sup>147</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/10122022-v-latvii-muzhchinu-zaderzhali-za-ustanovku-rossiyskikh-telekanalov/>

<sup>148</sup> <https://www.rbc.ru/rbcfreenews/65ec9ac59a794738c5039ef5?ysclid=luig63gvs7733257209>

<sup>149</sup> <https://titania.saeima.lv/LIVS14/saeimalivs14.nsf/webSasaiste?OpenView&restricttcategory=389/Lp14>



unwillingness of the Latvian side to fulfil its international obligations and follow the generally accepted international practice to ensure adequate security conditions around polling stations in Riga. The Russian Embassy's requests made in advance in this regard were ignored by the Latvian side for several months, as were the Embassy's requests to ban anti-Russian demonstrations in front of the diplomatic mission on the election day, which have recently become commonplace with the connivance of the local authorities.

On the day of the Russian presidential on 17 March 2024, the persecution against Russian citizens who came to vote at the Russian Embassy in Riga became especially ruthless. The Latvian authorities checked the documents of all the citizens who came to the Embassy. The Latvian security forces cordoned off the streets adjacent to the embassy. There were multiple cases of Latvian identity documents (identity cards with residence permits) being confiscated from Russian voters. Russian citizens with expired permits were required to go to the Migration Service to get an order of departure. In doing so, the Latvian authorities contradicted their previous statements, in particular those of Justice Minister Inese Lībiņa-Egnere, who claimed on 14 March that the authorities of the Baltic state would not prosecute Russians for voting in the Russian presidential election.<sup>150</sup> At the same time, it is known that on 11 March 2024, the State Police and the State Border Guard announced that they were going to check visitors to the polling station at the Russian Embassy to ensure that they have the right to be in Latvia. In addition, the head of the State Police, Armands Ruks, said that visas and residence permits of those travelling to the Russian Embassy will be scrutinized at the checkpoints set up by his department, and if visitors are found to have violated the rules of stay in Latvia, deportation procedures will be immediately initiated against them.

On 18 March 2024, the head of the Latvian police stated that on 17 March the immigration check of all those who took part in the elections was carried out by

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<sup>150</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/17032024-posolstvo-rasskazalo-o-pogolovnoy-proverke-golosuyushchikh-rossiyan-vlastyami-latvii/>



decision of the Minister of Internal Affairs Rihards Kozlovskis. The State Police checked 1,001 voters from among the Russian citizens who came to the polling station at the Embassy. Twenty-four Russian citizens were said to have expired residence permits in Latvia. That meant that deportation proceedings were initiated against them.<sup>151</sup> The police also detained four people for the offences they had allegedly committed. Journalist Aleksey Stefanov shared the following information provided by an eyewitness. At around 19:00, Latvian border guards detained a man near the polling station, put him in their minibus and drove away.<sup>152</sup>

The authorities showed shocking cynicism towards the Russian people when they banned the laying of flowers at the Russian Embassy in Riga for those who wished to commemorate the victims of the horrific terrorist attack at the Crocus City Hall, a concert hall in Krasnogorsk, Moscow Region. The terrorist attack killed 144 people and injured 551. A spontaneous memorial was set up on the side of the street opposite the Russian diplomatic mission.<sup>153</sup>

The Latvian authorities regard the entire Russian-speaking population of the country, not just individual activists, as an alien and destabilising element. As a consequence, the policy of the Latvian leadership, which has a national, or rather nationalistic focus, is aimed at stripping the Russian part of society of its rights. In practice, this takes the form of numerous violations of the rights of this population group. Among other things, they have difficulties receiving pension from the Russian government. Meanwhile, pensions in Latvia are among the lowest in the EU. According to the latest information available from the State Data Agency (SDA), in 2021, 40.5 percent of people over 65 and 22.5 percent of the total population were at the poverty line in 2021. According to Eurostat data, one in four Latvians was at risk of poverty and social exclusion in 2022 (26 percent). The

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<sup>151</sup> <https://regnum.ru/article/3875102>

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/25032024-ombudsmen-otreagirovala-na-zapret-prinosit-tsvety-k-posolstvu-rf-v-latvii/>

media cite even more shocking data: while the average old-age pension is 337 EUR, 15 percent of Latvian retirees receive only 183 EUR per month.<sup>154</sup>

The main problematic aspect is the fact that a significant part of the Russian population in Latvia lacks citizenship. According to the SDA, as of January 2023, there were 175,400 "non-citizens" (9.3 percent) in the country; according to the Latvian Ministry of Internal Affairs' Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs (OCMA) there are 187,400 (approximately 11 percent of the population), 65 percent of whom are ethnic Russians. The Latvian authorities do not recognize "non-citizens" as ethnic minorities and, consequently, have excluded them from the scope of application of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, ratified by Latvia in 2005 with significant reservations.

The rate of obtained citizenship declines every year: 725 individuals "naturalized" in 2020, 419 in 2021, and 518 in 2022. Since the start of the "naturalization" process on 1 February 1995, 148,478 people have been granted citizenship of the Republic of Latvia, with a peak in 2004-2006 in connection with the country's accession to the EU (51,600 people). At the same time, the term "naturalization", apart from its legal aspect, is largely artificial, since in most cases it refers to people who are not migrants but who have always lived there. The number of "non-citizens" is diminishing now only due to the natural decline of this segment of the population and its emigration, and not due to any active measures by the competent local authorities to eradicate this phenomenon that is a disgrace to the European Union.

Eliminating mass statelessness is not currently on the agenda of the Latvian authorities.

The law adopted on 5 November 2019 on the automatic granting of citizenship to children born in families of "non-citizens" has been proven to be ineffective – it concerns only a few dozens of new-borns per year (in 2020, 31 children were granted the status of "non-citizen" in Latvia).

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<sup>154</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/19092023-v-latvii-zaderzhivayut-vyplatu-rossiyskikh-pensiy/>;  
<https://www.rubaltic.ru/article/politika-i-obshchestvo/20230911-rusofoby-sdali-nazad-popytka-vydavit-grazhdan-rossii-iz-latvii-provalilas/>

Non-citizens living in the country are deprived of a broad range of social, economic and political rights. Independent Latvian human rights activists currently distinguish about 80 differences between citizens and "non-citizens". In particular, the latter do not have the right to vote or be elected, to hold civil or military office, to be a judge, etc. As a result, Latvia's Saeima elections on 1 October 2022 were held in the absence of universal suffrage and with a continuing "long-term democratic deficit" (as noted in PACE and OSCE reports in 2002 and 2006 respectively).

The issue of "non-citizens" in Latvia is given considerable attention by Latvian Russian-speaking NGOs, most notably the Latvian Human Rights Committee (LHRC). It systematically cooperates with human rights bodies and other interested structures and prepares alternative reports on the human rights situation for relevant international organizations. This activity is traditionally criticised and persecuted by local authorities and is reflected in the annual reports of the Latvian Security Service.

The Latvian authorities are promoting discriminatory initiatives which target citizens of the Russian Federation. According to the amendments to the Immigration Act adopted by the Saeima in 2022-2023, in order to retain permanent residence permits, residents of the Republic of Latvia from among former "non-citizens" and Latvian citizens who received Russian citizenship after 2003 (about 25,000 Russians – former "non-citizens" and Latvian citizens – fall into this category) will be required to undergo a Latvian language proficiency test within a short period of time (the majority of certificates of knowledge issued by state authorities have been cancelled), to prove that they have a monthly income of at least 600 EUR and to fill in questionnaires with provocative content, proposing to recognize the "annexation" of the Crimea, to condemn Russia's "military invasion" of Ukraine and to approve the dismantling of Soviet monuments in Latvia. In addition, the fee for the examination and the submission of the Commission's opinion has been raised to 70 EUR. This is five times higher than the usual fee for such actions. Given that many of those who have been forced to reconfirm their

residence permits are elderly, usually on small pensions, with no property and relatives in Russia, their future fate raises serious concerns. This is a serious shock to the emotional, psychological and physical health of Russia's pensioners. Several episodes of death of elderly applicants for Latvian residence permits during the Latvian language examination are known. There have even been cases of suicide among Russian citizens who failed language tests.

In September 2023, the VDD reported the identification of 80 "politically unreliable" Russians who, despite having passed the test, were deemed by the agency to be "a threat to national security" in Latvia. These "politically unreliable" individuals were denied permanent residency status by the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs (OCMA) of the Latvian Ministry of the Interior.

Of particular concern is the threat of deportation announced by the local authorities (specifically, the OCMA) for those who fail to pass all the "filtration" procedures (limited deadlines were set for passing the tests, with those who missed the deadline for enrolling facing deportation from 2 December 2023, and those who failed the test after two attempts facing deportation from 28 March 2024). On 2 September 2023, the OCMA sent out notices to several thousand Russian people to "leave the country within three months", despite the authorities' rhetoric about their intention to "soften the regime".<sup>155</sup> As practice has shown, the Latvian authorities later tightened the requirements for Russians living in the country in the spirit of Nazism.

Local human rights activist initiated collective action to the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Latvia to invalidate these odious amendments with more than 300 people joining in. In January 2023, letters were sent to several international organisations (OSCE, Council of Europe, UN) and major international NGOs about the threat of expulsion of thousands of Russian citizens from the country.

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<sup>155</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/19092023-posolstvo-rossii-nablyudaet-za-situatsiey-s-deportatsiey-rossiyan-iz-latvii/>

In September 2024, it became known that a large family of Morozovs had to flee from Latvia to Belarus due to discrimination against Russian-speaking residents of the country. According to the ONT TV channel, which reported these results, before the relocation, the family with 10 children lived in Riga, where they lost part of their rental housing benefits. Later, they were threatened by the guardianship authorities that their minor children would be taken away to an orphanage<sup>156</sup>.

Meanwhile, in February 2024, the Advisory Committee of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (AC FCNM) expressed concern about these discriminatory actions by the Latvian authorities. It pointed out that the temporary residence permit that Russians can receive for the period of the test did not provide access to the same social and medical protection that they had before, and also involved additional costs for each renewal. The AC FCNM has also expressed concern about the possible negative impact on the realization of the right to privacy and family life for the families of Russians taking the test. The Advisory Committee expressed particular concern over the risk of deportation for those unable to take the test, including due to the lack of testing facilities, leading to potential family separation. The Advisory Committee considers that all these requirements create legal uncertainty and will impose an insurmountable or disproportionate burden on persons belonging to national minorities and their families, without taking into account the circumstances of all persons affected by these restrictive measures.<sup>157</sup>

Before September 2023, Russian-speaking residents failed to pass the language test in more than half of the cases. According to the OCMA, more than 5,000 Russian citizens had their residence permits revoked as of January 2024 for failure to meet the above requirements. In accordance with these requirements,

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<sup>156</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/18102024-pokinuvshaya-latviyu-izza-diskriminatsii-russkoyazychnykh-semya-namerena-zhit-v-rossii/>

<sup>157</sup> Fourth Opinion of the Advisory Committee of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities on Latvia. Adopted on 9 October 2023, published on 22 February 2024. <https://rm.coe.int/4th-op-latvia-en/1680ae98f6>

1,167 Russian citizens were subject to deportation, about 800 of whom were over the age of 60.

Representatives of the State Centre for Educational Content reported that 17,865 people planned to take the language test in 2023, 1,780 people registered, and 919 failed to show up. About 5,000 people did not register for the test; 6,367 passed, while 5,494 failed.

In 2024, participation in the language proficiency test has been low and few people have passed the test. On average, 100 people pass the test each month. In the first three months of 2024, 303 people signed up for the test. Of these, 23 percent passed, 56 percent failed and 21 percent did not attend.

The Russian citizens, who immediately found themselves in the status of "illegal immigrants", were deprived of the right to free medical care, access to public services, social benefits and pensions.

Moreover, there have been outrageous cases, where deaf-mute and even blind citizens with certain disabilities and duly issued medical documents confirming this had to take the language test (which includes written, oral and listening sections). All of them, for obvious reasons, could not pass the language test and were deprived of the status of permanent residents of Latvia.

Such cases have been described by Russian citizens in their reports to the Russian Embassy in Latvia, where they say that in recent months there has been a multiple increase in the number of applications to the diplomatic mission from Russians who have fallen under the flywheel of repression of the Latvian authorities, as a result of which many of them have lost their permanent residence permits. These reports are often personal accounts of tragedy, and over time they increasingly resemble a collective cry of despair. In some cases, outrageous situations are described in which frail, bedridden, even deaf-mute and blind Russians who, due to insurmountable circumstances, including limited physical ability and artificially created bureaucratic obstacles, were unable to pass the

Latvian language proficiency test in a short period or obtain a medical exemption from the test, are threatened with deportation.<sup>158</sup>

Moreover, taking the test is no guarantee that Russian-speaking residents will not be persecuted. There have been cases where Russians who had successfully passed the language test and submitted their documents for a residence permit on time received notices of impending expulsion, allegedly due to a "technical error".

On 15 February 2024, the Latvian Constitutional Court ruled that the amendments to the Immigration Act, which require Russian citizens who were previously Latvian citizens or "non-citizens" to pass a Latvian language test and declare their source of income within the time limit set by the law in order to obtain permanent residence status in the EU, are in accordance with the law. In fact, this decision, which was declared final and not subject to appeal, was the beginning of a gradual deportation campaign on grounds of nationality: Latvia's Supreme Court authorized the eviction of people under a retroactive law (previously issued residence permits were indefinite). This law also applies to elderly people who have children and grandchildren who live in Latvia and have Latvian citizenship. The court found that the Immigration Act did not contravene the rights to privacy and equality before the law enshrined in the Latvian Constitution, and was in line with Article 4 of the Fourth Protocol to the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. Particularly strange is the statement in the court's ruling that there will be no mass deportation, as law enforcement officers will assess the "danger" of each deportee individually, although during the hearings it was repeatedly mentioned that more than 3,000 people would be subjected to repression. At the same time, it was announced that the process of deporting the first 985 Russian citizens who did not

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<sup>158</sup> [https://latvia.mid.ru/ru/press-centre/news/kommentariy\\_vremennogo\\_poverennogo\\_v\\_delakh\\_rossii\\_v\\_latvii\\_o\\_o\\_zykova\\_informatsionnomu\\_ag\\_entstvu\\_ta/](https://latvia.mid.ru/ru/press-centre/news/kommentariy_vremennogo_poverennogo_v_delakh_rossii_v_latvii_o_o_zykova_informatsionnomu_ag_entstvu_ta/)

apply for the next Latvian language test had started even before the court hearings.<sup>159</sup>

By March 2024, the authorities have begun to implement the deportation law. The Latvian Ministry of the Interior has said that two Russian citizens who had failed to comply with the requirements of the new immigration law and had been issued with deportation orders have left the country. What is more, nine Russian citizens, who had not applied for any kind of Latvian residence permit, received exit orders by March 2024. Seven deportation orders are pending and it has been announced that the State Border Guard will forcibly deport these people if these orders are not challenged and overturned in court.<sup>160</sup>

In the summer of 2024, deportations became more frequent, further evidence of the Latvian government's desire to emulate the German Nazi regime as much as possible. To this day, Russian residents are being expelled almost on a daily basis. The number of deportation orders issued and the number of Russian citizens who have left the country change daily. The authorities report that as of 27 May 2024, they have issued 34 deportation orders. The Latvian border guards have checked about 800 people, and found out that about 600 of them have already left the country. The border guards have failed to locate more than 100 people in their homes. One month later, on 24 June 2024, OCMA issued a deportation order to 56 Russian citizens who did not comply with the requirements of the Latvian authorities and did not apply for a residence permit. Thirteen of these deportation orders have been executed and the deadline for the execution of seven others has been extended.

Some of the deportation cases are downright shocking. On 12 January 2024, a Latvian border guard forcibly deported Boris Katkov, an 82-year-old military pensioner, long-time chairman of the board of the Latvian-Russian Cooperation Association and representative of Baltic Federal University named after Immanuel

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<sup>159</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/article/politika-i-obshchestvo/20240305-potomki-kollaborantov-prodolzhayut-perepisyvat-istoriyu-pribaltiki/>

<sup>160</sup> <https://lv.sputniknews.ru/20240315/pervye-rossiyane-kotorye-ostalis-bez-vnzh-pokinuli-latviyu-po-predpisaniyu-27490489.html>



Kant, to Russia, claiming that he was a "threat to national security". They gave Katkov virtually no time, although, under local legislation, he had one month to challenge the decision of the Latvian Ministry of the Interior. This unlawful decision of the Latvian authorities (the Minister of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Latvia personally suggested to expel Boris Katkov) grossly violates the norms of international law, above all, the provisions of the 1994 bilateral intergovernmental agreement on social protection of military pensioners and members of their families, as well as the principle of "non-division" of the family – the elderly Russian had all his close relatives in Latvia. According to human rights defender Vladimir Buzaev, who is representing Katkov in court, Latvian law enforcement officials failed to present convincing arguments and evidence confirming the legality of the deportation during the court hearing on 25 April 2024.

Simultaneously with the launch of the expulsion mechanism for Russian residents living in the country in 2024, the Latvian authorities began to tighten legislative requirements for them by adopting amendments to laws that expand the categories of persons subject to mandatory testing and language examinations. In this way, the Latvian authorities are increasing the number of people they intend to expel from the country. On 2 May 2024, the Saeima adopted amendments to the Immigration Act affecting Russian citizens under the age of 75. These include many retired military personnel and members of their families, who were covered by the 1994 Intergovernmental Agreement on Social Protection retired members of the Russian Federation armed forces. The newly adopted amendments stipulate that if persons from this category of Russian residents in Latvia did not apply for permanent residence status in the EU by 30 April 2024, their temporary stay in Latvia will be invalidated from 15 May 2024. The speed with which these amendments were considered (approximately one month; they were introduced in April 2024) and the short period of time given to the persons affected by these innovations to familiarise themselves with the amendments show that the Latvian authorities do not intend to leave them with the possibility of continuing to reside

in the country. Latvian authorities announced that these measures were "necessary to ensure "public safety" in Latvia".<sup>161</sup> It is noteworthy that the OSCE, which has a mandate from its participating States to monitor the situation of Latvian military pensioners, remains indifferent to the fate of these people, whose average age is around 80.

It should be noted that, in connection with the serious problem of the situation of "non-citizens", international universal and regional human rights mechanisms have published more than 50 recommendations, including with regard to simplifying naturalization procedures, granting voting rights to "non-citizens" and respecting the full range of linguistic rights of national minorities. However, the official Riga continues to disregard all numerous recommendations.

Latvia has never signed the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages of 5 November 1992; it was not until 2005 that it ratified the Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM) with two reservations that significantly limit the effect of the provisions of the Convention. In Latvia, national minorities in places of compact residence are not allowed to communicate with the authorities in their native language, nor are they allowed to use it in topographical names. Besides, an additional declaration adopted by the Latvian Parliament upon ratification of the FCNM, separately stipulates that "non-citizens" are not subject to the rights guaranteed by the Convention, i.e. only Latvian citizens can be recognized as representatives of national minorities.

The UN human rights treaty bodies have also been made aware of the issues of "non-citizens" in Latvia. Thus, the UN Committee against Torture, even though on the whole in December 2019 it welcomed the progress Latvia achieved in addressing the issue of statelessness, at the same time expressed its concern about the fact that the law granting automatic citizenship to children of non-citizens does not cover all minor non-citizens.<sup>162</sup> In 2018, the UN Committee on the Elimination

<sup>161</sup> [https://latvia.mid.ru/ru/press-centre/news/kommentariy\\_posolstva\\_rossii\\_v\\_latvii64344244/](https://latvia.mid.ru/ru/press-centre/news/kommentariy_posolstva_rossii_v_latvii64344244/)

<sup>162</sup> Concluding observations of the Committee against Torture on the sixth periodic report of Latvia. December 2019.

of Racial Discrimination also expressed its concerns over the education reform and the remaining problem of non-citizens. Experts recommended that Latvian authorities make the necessary efforts to ensure that its language policy and laws do not lead to direct or indirect discrimination of the population.<sup>163</sup> The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has noted that in 2021 discrimination against non-citizens persisted in the country; according to its data, that year, the number of non-citizens in Latvia was about 209 thousand.<sup>164</sup>

In November 2023, the Advisory Committee of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (AC FCNM) also indicated that the extent of statelessness remains significant: one in ten of Latvia's permanent residents is still a "non-citizen", which entails restrictions on their rights to participate in political life.<sup>165</sup>

Another serious problem for Russian-speaking residents of Latvia has been the restrictions imposed by the Latvian authorities on the use of the native language.

In recent years, in the context of compulsory derussification, the policy of the official Riga to narrow the scope of application of non-state languages has been increasingly intensified. The Latvian language is being strenuously promoted as the only language allowed for communication with authorities, topographical signs and other inscriptions, as well as identity documents.

It should be noted that Russian is the second most common and used for communication language in Latvia after the state one. According to the latest population census (2011), Russian is the native language for 37.7 percent of

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[https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CAT%2fC%2fLVA%2fCO%2f6&Lang=ru](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CAT%2fC%2fLVA%2fCO%2f6&Lang=ru)

<sup>163</sup> Concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination on the combined 6th to 12th periodic reports of Latvia. September 2018

[https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CERD%2fC%2fLVA%2fCO%2f6-12&Lang=ru](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CERD%2fC%2fLVA%2fCO%2f6-12&Lang=ru)

<sup>164</sup> Concluding observations of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on the 2nd periodic report of Latvia. March 2021

[https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=E/C.12/LVA/CO/2&Lang=ru](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=E/C.12/LVA/CO/2&Lang=ru)

<sup>165</sup> Fourth Opinion of the Advisory Committee of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities on Latvia. Adopted on 9 October 2023, published on 22 February 2024. <https://rm.coe.int/4th-op-latvia-en/1680ae98f6>

Latvia's population. According to the Central Statistical Bureau latest data (2017), about 78 percent of Latvians speak Russian as a foreign language. Meanwhile, according to the surveys conducted in 2019 for the language situation in Latvia, 96 percent of Latvian respondents confirmed to have a command of the Russian language.

Despite all the efforts by the Latvian authorities, the share of Russian-speaking residents is declining slowly: over the last twenty years it has decreased by only 1.5 percent. This trend is typical for all regions, except for Latgale (Latvia's south-east region with the highest proportion of Russian-speaking population), where Russian is native to 54.5 percent of the population. The concentration of Russian speakers in Riga also remains significant, amounting to 56 percent of the inhabitants.

The 2012 referendum on giving the Russian language the status of a second state language can be considered the most recent attempt to legitimize it in the country. 273,347 people (24.88 percent of the participants) voted "in favour". The opinion of the 15 percent of (then) "non-citizens" who were deprived of the right to vote even on such a significant issue still remained "outside the scope" of the survey. The Russian language expectedly received significant support in Latgale – 55.6 percent (in Daugavpils, region's capital – 85.2 per cent, in the Zilupe region bordering on Russia – 90.3 percent). Thus, Russian still has the legal status of a foreign language in the country.

The discriminatory language policy of the official Riga is being built around the exclusive need to preserve the Latvian language and culture as the basis of the Latvian nation. The use of the Latvian language is handled by the State Language Centre (SLC), whose inspections were dubbed the "language inquisition" in the Russian-speaking environment. According to the latest SLC report, 2,255 inspections were carried out in 2021 (2,061 inspections in 2020), 531 proceedings were initiated on administrative offenses (530 proceedings in 2020), 517 people were fined. Over 60 percent of all cases on this issue are related to the state language underuse, according to the inquisitors, in the discharge of

professional or official duties. Through the Friend of the Language app, in operation since 2018 and actively promoted by the local authorities, only 58 reports of language violations were submitted (136 reports in 2020).

The Latvian authorities position the Russian language as the main threat to the development and even the very existence of the state language. The State Language Policy Guidelines for 2021-2027 approved on 25 August 2021 cites addressing the consequences of the "Soviet occupation" in the societal linguistic behaviour, including the allegedly unreasonable demand for knowledge of the Russian language on the labour market, among the main tasks. In addition, it is noted that children must be given an opportunity to study one of the EU official languages as a second foreign language at school (English is the first, as a rule). It is noteworthy that due to a lack of teachers, some educational institutions may offer only Russian to study as a foreign language, and there is still sufficient demand for such lessons among the youth.

Another step by the Latvian authorities to force out the Russian language is the proposal to prohibit employers from asking about Russian language skills at job interviews. Such amendments to the law on labour contracts, which have already been sent for approval, may come into force in 2025. Under the pretext of "strengthening the role of the Latvian language" the authorities are trying to oust the Russian language from the labour sphere, which may significantly limit employment opportunities for Russian-speaking citizens. But the pressure on the Russian language does not end there. Latvia has decided to completely remove the Russian language from the interfaces of commercial bank ATMs. The amendments to the Law on Credit Institutions, supported by the Budget and Finance Commission, stipulate that from 2025 ATMs will be available only in Latvian and the languages of EU and OECD countries. Thus, the access of Russian-speaking citizens to basic services is becoming increasingly restricted.<sup>166</sup>

Since the launch of the Russian special military operation, abandoning the use of the Russian language has occupied a central place in the rhetoric of the

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<sup>166</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/12092024-vlasti-latvii-nachali-masshtabnyyu-travlyu-russkogo-yazyka/>

country's leadership. It has been repeatedly emphasized that "Latvian core value – the state language – needs to be fostered more than ever" in the current geopolitical conditions. It is no surprise that this is supposed to be done at the expense of oppressing the Russian language. In fact, an open discrimination campaign on linguistic grounds has been launched in the country, actually taking the shape of ethnic persecution.

Due to an almost Nazi in nature attitude basis, the Latvian government is systematically working to force the Russian language out of all spheres of public life in the country. In June 2023, the Saeima adopted amendments to the law on election campaigns conducted only in the state language. At the same time, the draft law on restricting bilingualism announced by the Minister of Justice of the Republic of Latvia Jānis Bordāns (The Conservatives party) in August 2022, which provided for restrictions on the use of the Russian language at work and in public places, was perceived by the public as a populist step and remained at the approval stage. The same occurred to another initiative from the same party in October 2022, proposing to completely opt out of the Russian language, including in the private sector (the bill ensuring status of Latvian as the sole state language in Latvia).

Another step in this direction was the proposal to prohibit employers from asking about Russian language skills at job interviews. Amendments to the Labour Contract Law, which have already been sent for approval, may come into force in 2025. Under the pretext of "strengthening the role of the Latvian language", the authorities are trying to oust Russian from the labour sphere, which may significantly limit employment opportunities for Russian-speaking citizens.<sup>167</sup>

The Latvian establishment began to abandon the use of the Russian language on a massive scale. Thus, Gatis Eglītis, Minister of Welfare, and Ilze Indriksone, Minister of Economics, ordered to communicate in the ministerial institutions in the state language only. This was done: from 1 September 2022 the Ministry of Economy and from 1 October 2022 the Ministry of Welfare switched to state

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<sup>167</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/12092024-vlasti-latvii-nachali-masshtabnuyu-travlyu-russkogo-yazyka/>

language communication only. This refers to information on websites, in social media, in messages to clients and interviews with Latvian media outlets. At the same time, since 24 August 2022, the Russian-language version of the website of Latvian President Egils Levits has been blocked; the official portal [president.lv](http://president.lv) is available only in Latvian and English (the Russian-language version of the website was blocked in August 2022). In addition, a number of ministries (of Culture, Agriculture, Economy, Justice, Regional Development, Education and Science, Welfare and Environmental Protection) have also refused any interaction with the population in Russian.

In line with the efforts of the local establishment to stop the use of the Russian language, "initiatives" of Latvian NGOs are also noticeable. In May 2022, the public association for the Latvian language launched the campaign of derussification of Latvia under the leadership of poet Liāna Langa (whose real name is Liāna Bokša), chairwoman of the organization's board. In July 2023, she reported on the results of her activities: every regional government and municipality of Latvia's major cities had eliminated the Russian versions of their web pages. And this is the very Liāna Langa, who used to translate from Russian herself, and who a few years ago, criticizing the Latvian authorities, claimed that the moment was fast approaching when she would be ashamed to live in Latvia.

The Latvian authorities actually eliminated the Russian-speaking educational space through a comprehensive education reform (transfer of schools and kindergartens to the Latvian language of instruction, development and implementation of new educational content, streamlined school network, ban on teaching in Russian in private universities).

In 2021, Latvia carried out another language reform, with the school reform transitional period ending on 1 September 2021. This implied almost complete teaching in the state language in all basic and secondary schools starting from the 2021/2022 academic year already. Grades 10-12 were taught exclusively in Latvian. In grades 7-9, a new language ratio of 80 percent to 20 percent was introduced.

The discriminatory actions of the Latvian authorities for the "derussification" of the educational space find the support of the judiciary. For example, in 2019 and 2020, the Constitutional Court of Latvia recognized as constitutional the provisions on the derussification of education and the introduction of compulsory instruction in the Latvian language at various education levels.

As a result, Russian-speaking residents were forced to apply to international bodies, as they had no way of defending their interests within the country. Parents of schoolchildren of national minorities concerning this reform lodged complaints to the European Court of Human Rights. With the help of the LRU, overall about 350 individual complaints by parents of schoolchildren and preschoolers concerning linguistic discrimination of children within the framework of the above-mentioned reform have been sent to this body. A collective complaint filed by compatriots about the threat of abolition of education in minority languages has been also submitted to the UN Human Rights Committee.

As far as the European Court of Human Rights is concerned, it has fully confirmed its biased approach to dealing with complaints from parents of schoolchildren about the abolition of Russian-language education in the country. In September 2023, the Court sided with the Latvian state when considering complaints by parents of schoolchildren against legislative innovations restricting Russian-language education in public schools. In November 2023, the Court issued a negative judgment for plaintiffs challenging Latvia's education reform, which involved a significant reduction in the amount of Russian-language instruction in public schools. In fact, in both cases – on the language of instruction in public and in private schools – the ECtHR considered only one of the three Articles which the applicants alleged to have been violated, namely Article 14 of the Convention (Prohibition of discrimination). The Court ruled that the measures taken by the Latvian government to "increase the use of the State language" in schools had been "proportionate and necessary", in particular to ensure unity in the education



system. Therefore, in the view of the Court, there are legitimate reasons not to separate private schools from public ones.<sup>168</sup>

According to parents and lawyers, it is still possible to fight for Russian-language education in Latvia, as a reform option to significantly restrict education in Russian has been challenged in the ECtHR. However, this reform is outdated, as a complete transfer of education to the Latvian language has already been initiated.

In September 2022, UN Human Rights Council Special Rapporteur on minority issues Fernand de Varennes, Special Rapporteur on the right to education Farida Shaheed, and Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights Alexandra Xanthaki sent a request to the Latvian government criticizing the transition of all schools to Latvian as a language of instruction and requesting comments on the process of discussing this decision and plans for its implementation. According to the Special Rapporteurs, the amendments adopted in Latvia "severely limit education in minority languages" (the appeal lists Russian, Ukrainian, Belarusian, Hebrew, Lithuanian and Estonian) and "are in contradiction with international human rights standards, including the prohibition of discrimination on grounds of language and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child". The experts also criticized the Latvian authorities for the way the process of reviewing and discussing the draft law on switching school education to Latvian was conducted. In particular, they were concerned that the discussion of the initiative "did not provide for the effective and meaningful participation of affected minorities". Calls to wait for the consideration of complaints related to the draft law by the European Court of Human Rights and the Committee on Human Rights were also ignored.<sup>169</sup>

In 2022, under the pretext of the Ukrainian crisis, the Latvian ruling circles decided to force the conversion of educational institutions to the state language, accelerating the progress of initiatives aimed at the final elimination of Russian-language education. Amendments to the Education Law providing for a full

<sup>168</sup> <https://lv.sputniknews.ru/20231117/novaya-reforma---novyy-sud-v-espch-udastsya-li-otstoyat-russkiy-yazyk-v-shkolakh-latvii-26572350.html>

<sup>169</sup> Press release of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights on the request of the Special Rapporteurs on minority issues, on the right to education and on cultural rights. 8 February 2023. <https://web.dev.ohchr.un-icc.cloud/en/press-releases/2023/02/latvia-un-experts-concerned-about-severe-curtailement-minority-language>

transition to teaching in Latvian in kindergartens from 1 September 2023 and in schools from 1 September 2025, were approved in the final reading on 29 September 2022. Grades 1, 4 and 7 will also begin to study only in the state language since 1 September 2023. The language and culture of national minorities will only be available as interest-based education programs subsidized by the national government or a specific local government.

Thus, the changes introduced by the law affected 129 schools (out of 563, which is almost 23 percent of the total number of educational institutions), 43,000 schoolchildren (out of 220,051, which is almost 20 percent of the total number of pupils) and about 4 000 teachers (out of 25,986, which is 15.5 percent of their total number).<sup>170,171</sup>

In addition, in July 2023, Anda Čakša, Latvian Minister for Education called on Latvian law enforcement authorities to thoroughly look into the actions of public activists spreading information about Russian distance school programs in the Internet space, citing that this could pose a threat to national security.

The overall situation with regard to education in the Russian language is extremely unfavourable. In addition to translating secondary education into Latvian, the proportion of Latvian in kindergartens has been increased as well since the very 1 September 2019, for children of five years and older it is the main means of communication. The regulation obliging Russian-speaking municipal kindergartens to open groups with instruction in Latvian on request remains in effect (on 14 May 2020, the Saeima of Latvia adopted amendments to the Education Law, according to which all municipal pre-school educational institutions are required to provide educational programs in the Latvian language).

Higher education in the Russian language is also unavailable in Latvia's public universities nowadays, with Russian Philology programs at the Latvian and Daugavpils universities where certain disciplines are taught in Russian as the only

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<sup>170</sup> <https://eng.lsm.lv/article/society/education/31.08.2023-around-220000-pupils-will-start-school-year-in-latvia.a522242/>

<sup>171</sup> <https://www.grani.lv/latvia/138084-uchebu-v-635-shkolah-nachali-okolo-220-tysyach-uchenikov.html#:~:text=B%202023%2F2024%20учебном%20году>

exception. Private universities prohibited the enrollment in Russian-language groups on 1 January 2019, with studies in the EU official languages being the only possible way.

Despite the fact that on 28 June 2023, the Constitutional Court of Latvia considered the amendments non-compliant with the Law on Higher Education. These amendments prohibited the teaching of foreign languages in private educational institutions, except for certain programs in EU languages. The Court ordered the Saeima to revise them by 1 July 2024. However, the ban on admission of students to Russian-language programs in private higher education institutions, enacted as of 1 January 2019, remains in force.

On 21 November 2022, the Ministry of Education and Science, in order to achieve the goal of "fostering Latvian core value – the national language – and a strong Latvia in the common family of the European Union", announced plans to require EU language only to be studied as the second foreign language in all educational institutions starting from the 2026/2027 academic year. It is now impossible to study Russian as a second foreign language.<sup>172</sup> This initiative was documented in September 2023, when the Ministry of Education and Science of Latvia submitted for public consultation amendments to the government regulations on the gradual abolition of teaching Russian as a second foreign language in schools. As expected, the amendments will require schools to offer students one of the official languages of the European Union or the European Economic Area as a second foreign language from the 2026/2027 academic year, with the Russian language not being included in this list.<sup>173</sup>

At the same time, according to the same Ministry, Russian is taught as a second foreign language in almost half of Latvian schools.<sup>174</sup> Nevertheless, these official data do not correlate with reality. When the entire education system was converted to Latvian from 1 September 2023, many previously bilingual Latvian

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<sup>172</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/21112022-v-ministerstve-obrazovaniya-latvii-nazvali-sroki-otkaza-ot-izucheniya-russkogo-yazyka/>

<sup>173</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/14092023-v-latvii-predlozhili-zapretit-russkiy-yazyk-v-shkolakh/>

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

schools and pre-school institutions prohibited Russian children from attending additional classes in their mother tongue, citing lack of or insufficient funding and other bureaucratic difficulties.<sup>175</sup> It is also noteworthy that in many educational institutions where state-guaranteed language clubs have been organised, such lessons are held only once a week (instead of the recommended three times) and are beyond the permissible limits of the school timetable (early morning or late evening).

Russian-speaking teachers found themselves in dire straits. Subject teachers of national minority schools have to undergo constant checks for compliance with the top level of Latvian language proficiency which became more stringent after the start of the Ukrainian crisis and decision to eliminate Russian-language education. For 2018-2022 The State Language Centre identified 396 teachers (114 from January to April 2022 only) who do not speak the state language at a proper level.

According to the data of the SLC, in the 2022/2023 academic year 107 teachers were held accountable for insufficient knowledge of the Latvian language. The published data shows that teachers in Riga, where 52 teachers were found with infringements, were punished most often. In Liepaja and Daugavpils, 18 and 16 teachers were prosecuted respectively. In addition, it turned out that if the State Language Centre finds that the use of Latvian by a teacher does not correspond to the amount necessary for the performance of professional and official duties, the perpetrator is subject to an administrative penalty ranging from a warning to a fine from 35 to 120 euros. Teachers who have been found to have such violations are suspended from work until they are retested for proficiency of the state language, which must take place within three months. If a teacher fails to pass the retest, he/she shall be dismissed.<sup>176</sup>

According to the data of The State Service of Education Quality, as of March 2024, 45 teachers have been suspended since the beginning of the current

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<sup>175</sup> <https://ruskiymir.ru/news/317655/>

<sup>176</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/03072024-stalo-izvestno-skolko-pedagogov-nakazali-v-latvii-za-neznanie-latyshskogo/>

academic year due to insufficient Latvian proficiency. According to Denis Kļukin, Director of Rīga Rinuja secondary school, the reason for dismissal of teachers is not always that they do not know Latvian well – more often they are too nervous during the inspection. The peculiarity of the 2024 inspection is that, in accordance with the changes in legislation, if teachers do not pass the inspection, they are immediately marked in the State Information Educational System, and until this marking is removed (i.e. until they pass the language test successfully), these teachers cannot carry out pedagogical activities. Moreover, Latvian language teachers are not subject to this inspection.<sup>177</sup>

Despite the shortage of Latvian-speaking teachers, the Latvian authorities are carrying out the "derussification" of educational institutions and their conversion to the Latvian language. In May 2023, Ivars Balamovskis, Head of the Education Board at Riga City Council, stated that the lack of teachers endangers the transition to the Latvian language in Latvian schools. In this regard, the example of Riga is illustrative: its educational institutions adapted their schedules and teaching staff to the changes adopted in 2022, which stipulated education in the Latvian language as of 1 September 2023. Twelve schools of national minorities in the capital city pointed out the need to hire a teacher of the Latvian language, and 14 – a teacher of mathematics. Music teachers were also in shortage. At the same time, only 68 percent of the schools in the capital city said that they had found a teacher for the first grade. In Riga, education programs of national minorities are implemented in 51 schools. 17 schools implement only basic education programs for national minorities.<sup>178</sup>

By the beginning of the 2023/2024 academic year, schools across the country were short of more than 300 teachers. The situation was particularly bad for teachers of Latvian, Literature and Mathematics. The main reasons for the

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<sup>177</sup> <https://lv.sputniknews.ru/20240314/sumasshedshiy-udar-proverki-gosyazyka-lishili-shkoly-desyatkov-uchiteley-27474032.html>

<sup>178</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/25052023-defitsit-uchiteley-postavil-pod-ugrozu-perekhod-obucheniya-na-gosyazyk-v-shkolakh-latvii/>

shortage of staff were language inspections, heavy workloads, small salaries and constant stress.<sup>179</sup>

In August 2023, the Latvian Trade Union of Education and Science Employees also noted the difficulties with the transition of education to Latvian language. According to Inga Vanaga, Head of the Union, there is a serious shortage of teachers in Latvia due to the transition of educational institutions to the state language. Almost 1.5 thousand positions for teachers remained vacant by that time. She also stated that this issue is the result of other problems, pending over the years: teachers' rights, salaries, teaching materials, violence in the workplace. All of these have affected the prestige of the profession. Inga Vanaga also pointed out that national minorities should have the opportunity to preserve their language and culture. This also applies to the Russian-speaking population. "People for whom this is a value cannot be disrespected. We'll see how it works in practice. War in the neighbourhood is absolutely unacceptable, but we must respect the native speakers of Russian, as well as of other languages."<sup>180</sup>

On 31 August 2023, a protest took place in front of the Saeima building in Riga against the transition to Latvian-only education and the abolition of general education programs for national minorities. The action was organized by the Latvian Association for Support of Schools with Russian Language of Instruction. The association stressed that Latvian authorities should ensure that children are educated in their native language.<sup>181</sup>

There have also been discriminatory public statements against Russian speakers in Latvia. Such open racist judgments cannot happen without the authorities' tacit consent. Thus, in early August 2023, the journalist Elita Veidemane stated that teachers who were unable to learn Latvian "due to their narrow-mindedness" should be fired. She described as "shameless" or "mentally

<sup>179</sup> <https://lv.sputniknews.ru/20240401/pedagog-bez-vyshki-kak-v-latvii-boryutsya-s-nekhvatkoy-uchiteley-27607898.html>

<sup>180</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/31082023-profsoyuz-latvii-prizval-dat-natsmeshinstvam-vozmozhnost-sokhranit-svoy-yazyk/>

<sup>181</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/31082023-v-rige-prokhodit-piket-protiv-perekhoda-na-obuchenie-na-latyshskom-yazyke/>

retarded"<sup>182</sup> those who do not speak Latvian but have lived in the country for a long time. Given Latvian authorities' policy aimed at destroying the Russian language, it is not surprising that this discriminatory statement was never followed by the authorities' condemnation. Furthermore, there was no information about any actions taken against the person who had made racist remarks.

The trend to oust non-state languages (primarily Russian) has become quite noticeable in other spheres of Latvian public life. A consistent policy to drive out the Russian language from the media has been pursued. Over the years, regulations have been adopted to increase the proportion of broadcasts and publications in Latvian and EU official languages, while limiting radio and television broadcasts, as well as publications in Russian.

Pursuant to the new law on administrative punishments for offences in the sphere of management, public order and use of the official language, since 1 July 2020, liability has been introduced for demonstration of "serious disrespect to the state language", for conclusion of contracts with employees who do not know Latvian, and for unwillingness to ensure the use of Latvian language at work. Printed promotional products for Latvian citizens must circulate in Latvian only. An exception is possible if a citizen has agreed to receive materials in other languages as well.

In spite of the critical situation in healthcare system and significant problems with the organization of the vaccination campaign, this restriction had a great impact on the mass-scale vaccination in the country in 2021, especially among elderly people (this age group constitutes a significant part of Latvia's Russian-speaking population). The authorities did not even agree to temporarily suspend the force of the law, thereby limiting our compatriots' access to vital information.

On 16 June 2022, the Law on Political Parties was also amended to make possible suspension of the activities of political associations for "denying crimes or providing support for threatening the sovereignty and territorial integrity of

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<sup>182</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/07082023-latviyskiy-publitsist-rekomendovala-uchitelyam-ne-vladeyushchim-gosyazykom-ukhazhivat-za-skotom/>

democratic countries." Despite absent country names in the wording, this innovation is clearly directed against those political parties that represent the interests of Latvia's Russian-speaking inhabitants who are in favour of maintaining ties with Russia.

There are also initiatives to ban the use of Russian in public space and communication. For example, in February 2024, Hosams Abu Meri, Minister of Health of Latvia, stated that hospital staff should discuss any issues during working hours only in Latvian. He also indicated that if a patient does not know Latvian and insists on speaking to a doctor in a foreign language that the doctor does not understand, the patient should bring in an interpreter.<sup>183</sup>

At the beginning of July 2024, it became clear that a complaint had been filed with the Labour Inspectorate against a home-type boarding house for the elderly in Bolderāja, opened by a well-known Latvian journalist Natalia Mikhailova, as well as a second such boarding house she had recently opened in Ķengarags. The reason was an advertisement for the recruitment of staff in the boarding houses, which stated that Russian was required to work with the elderly, as Russian was mainly the mother tongue of most of the people living there. At the same time, Mikhailova herself noted that none of the applicants was refused a job because of "lack of knowledge of Russian".<sup>184</sup>

The actions in the linguistic field by the Latvian authorities, who adopt active measures to create a monolingual society, have been repeatedly criticized by international human rights mechanisms. According to the Advisory Committee of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (AC FCNM) opinion adopted in 2018, the Latvian leadership's language policy leads to a limited space for the use of national minorities' languages.<sup>185</sup> In particular, the comprehensive education reform in the country actually serves to eliminate bilingual schools and abandon the use of the Russian language in educational

<sup>183</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/13022024-v-latvii-namereny-zastavit-personal-bolnits-obshchatsya-tolko-na-gosyazyke/>

<sup>184</sup> <https://lv.sputniknews.ru/20240704/na-pansionat-napisali-zhalobu-v-trudovuyu-inspektsiyu-iz-za-russkogo-yazyka-28236740.html>

<sup>185</sup> Third opinion of the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the protection of national minorities on Latvia. Adopted on 25 February 2018. <https://rm.coe.int/3rd-op-latvia-en/16808d891d>



institutions at all levels. Russian was named the second most spoken language among the population. According to the 2017 CBS study, it was spoken by 37.7 percent of the population (Latvian – 61.3 percent).<sup>186</sup>

The AC FCNM also pointed out that the Latvian authorities' educational reform puts national minority students in a certainly disadvantageous position in terms of academic achievements, which in turn may adversely affect their ability to successfully integrate into the socio-economic life of society.<sup>187</sup>

The opinion of the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission of the Council of Europe) on educational reform in Latvia of June 2020 also pointed out problems in the field of education for national minorities. In the Commission's opinion, the issue of introducing Latvian as the main language in kindergartens should be reconsidered, since teaching in the native language is important for preserving identity and linguistic diversity in society. It was also noted that private schools should have the right to implement programs in minority languages, which is prohibited by the Latvian authorities' legislative innovations.<sup>188</sup>

The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights also expressed concern over the measures taken by the official Riga to Latvianize education. In particular, it noted that this language policy adopted by the authorities may have a discriminatory impact on persons belonging to minorities, especially in the fields of education, employment, and access to services. The Committee also stressed that it remained concerned that the amendments to the Education Law and Cabinet Decree No. 716 of 21 November 2018 had a discriminatory effect on minority groups and created unreasonable restrictions on the teaching and learning in minority languages, both in public and private schools of the pre-school and primary education system.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> <https://www.csb.gov.lv/en/statistics/statistics-by-theme/population/search-in-theme/2747-latvian-mother-tongue-608-population-latvia>

<sup>187</sup> Third opinion of the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the protection of national minorities on Latvia. Adopted on 25 February 2018. <https://rm.coe.int/3rd-op-latvia-en/16808d891d>

<sup>188</sup> [https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD\(2020\)012-e](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD(2020)012-e)

<sup>189</sup> Concluding observations of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on the 2nd periodic report of Latvia. March 2021

The resolution of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe of 3 March 2021 on the implementation of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities by Latvia also draws attention to discrimination against national minorities in Latvia.<sup>190</sup> The document states that "cases of inflammatory statements by public figures have not led to the authorities taking sufficient action, creating an impression of impunity and ambivalence, thus affecting negatively the interethnic climate. Restrictive policies and other pressures driven by a political agenda... are particularly evident in the education system, the media, and with regard to the use of national minority languages." It was also outlined that the extensive application of language requirements in Latvia adversely affects the possibility for non-native speakers of Latvian of accessing many positions within the public service.

In July 2022, Kairat Abdrakhmanov, OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, sent a letter to the Saeima of Latvia regarding a new government proposal to completely transfer schools to the Latvian language of instruction since 2025. He pointed out to possible violations of international law in the implementation of this initiative and recalled the importance for children to receive education in their mother tongue, as well as the need to take into account the opinion of national minority members in implementing reforms. The response of the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Latvia, illustrative in this regard, mentioned that there is supposedly no evidence that the Russians in Latvia are a national minority (they are supposed to be a group of "Soviet era migrants"), also noting insufficient dominance of the state language in the country.

The regular opinion on Latvia of the AC FCNM, published in February 2024, found that Riga's implementation of this international instrument has declined and that it has ignored the recommendations of the AC FCNM in the previous reporting cycle. It particularly emphasised that Latvia continues to restrict

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[https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=E/C.12/LVA/CO/2&Lang=R](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=E/C.12/LVA/CO/2&Lang=R)

<sup>190</sup> Resolution CM/ResCMN (2021)9 on the implementation of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities by Latvia. Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 3 March 2012 at the 1397<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Ministers' Deputies. [https://search.coe.int/cm/pages/result\\_details.aspx?objectid=0900001680a14111](https://search.coe.int/cm/pages/result_details.aspx?objectid=0900001680a14111)

the use of minority languages in public communication and their learning, and that after the education system has been converted to Latvian as the only language of instruction, it no longer complies with the Convention. In particular, the Advisory Committee pointed out that, following a significant reduction in minority language teaching in 2018, the second 2022 reform aims to abolish minority language teaching in most public and private pre-schools, schools and universities in the country by 2025. It is noted that, although exceptions are provided for a small number of Polish- and Ukrainian-language schools, in general the abolition of instruction in Belarusian and Russian will affect approximately 20 percent of all school-age children. The AC FCNM also underlined that since the Latvian authorities plan to discontinue the study of Russian as a foreign language as well, the opportunity to study it will remain only in extracurricular language and culture courses. The AC FCNM concluded that if all the above measures are fully implemented, the Latvian education system for national minorities will no longer be in line with the provisions of the Convention against Discrimination in Education, the right to establish private educational institutions for minorities and the right to learn or obtain education in minority languages. A difference was noted in the Latvian authorities' approach to minority languages on the basis of whether or not they are official EU languages, whether or not there are bilateral or any multilateral agreements with states in this regard. Here, the AC FCNM pointed out that Russian and Belarusian do not fit in any of the categories mentioned and are therefore in a less favourable position. It also emphasised that the reduction of opportunities for the use of Russian language limits the rights of persons belonging to other minorities whose mother tongue is Russian.<sup>191</sup>

Amid this background, Riga's efforts to preserve the Livonian language, which has about 40 speakers, or the Latgalian language, which has a somewhat wider range of speakers but is still not comparable to the number of Russian speakers in Latvia, look quite contrasting. Nevertheless, the Latvian authorities are

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<sup>191</sup> Fourth opinion of the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the protection of national minorities on Latvia. Adopted on 9 October 2023, published on 24 February 2024. <https://rm.coe.int/4th-op-latvia-en/1680ae98f6>

making efforts and allocating funding for the preservation of these languages, including the establishment of a Livonian language institute within the University of Latvia and the teaching of Latgalian in 17 schools.

The AC FCNM called the Latvian authorities on significant reconsideration of the decision to switch to full education in Latvian in light of the risks of negative consequences for equal access to quality education for children from national minorities. Riga was urged to closely monitor the impact of its measures on children's educational outcomes, with a focus on measures at pre-school and primary education levels, as well as in the education of children with special educational needs. The Advisory Committee also recommended that Latvia ensure that national minorities are able to establish and run their own private educational institutions providing education in minority languages at all levels of education. At the same time, Riga was called upon to reconsider the decision to abandon the bilingual education model and to consult with representatives of the national minorities affected by the reform. Among other aspects, the importance of conducting the educational process at all levels of education partly in the language of national minorities, if parents of schoolchildren are interested, and of providing opportunities to learn minority languages as part of the core curriculum (and not only in extracurricular courses) was emphasised. The AC FCNM also stressed the need to develop educational programmes based on, *inter alia*, data on the demand for and level of proficiency of children from national minorities in both Latvian and their mother tongue. In the Advisory Committee's view, this would require the effective participation of minority representatives in the development of such programmes, as well as in the preparation of relevant teaching materials, teaching methods and the training of teachers themselves.

Preceding the publication of the AC FCNM opinion, in January 2024, Latvian media circulated a commentary by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Latvia stating that Riga considers the stated requirements of the Advisory Committee unacceptable, as it allegedly ignored the "virtual and historical situation", including "the fact of the Soviet occupation and its unfavourable impact

on the original inhabitants of Latvia".<sup>192</sup> The recommendation to use minority languages in public communication, according to the Latvian authorities, contradicts the Constitution of the Republic of Latvia, which establishes Latvian as the only state language. Moreover, the AC FCNM has been accused of "bias" by Latvia for singling out people of Russian origin and their rights to the detriment of other minorities. The Foreign Ministry explicitly stated that Latvia does not agree with the Advisory Committee's recommendations to reconsider the decision to switch to Latvian-language education and abandon the bilingual education model because "Latvian is the only official state language, the status of which is confirmed both in the Constitution and in the State Language Law".

Although there are no formal restrictions in Latvia on participation in political life and public administration (with the shameful exception of "non-citizens"), nevertheless, the current version of the Saeima Election Law prohibits persons who were members of certain Soviet organizations (State Security Committee, Latvian Communist Party, International Front of Workers of the Latvian SSR, etc.) after 13 January 1991, from participating in them. This makes possible to put pressure on the left forces (for this reason, for example, co-chairwoman of the Latvian Russian Union (LRU) Tatyana Ždanok cannot participate in the elections). Also, since 2013, there has been a procedure of deputy mandate divestment for insufficient knowledge of the state language (it was applied to mayors of the cities of Zilupe and Daugavpils, as well as several deputies from predominantly "Russian" self-governments).

The above-mentioned numerous Russophobic manifestations, in many cases verging on rampant ignorance, did not arise out of the blue in Latvia. Data gathered by international universal and regional human rights monitoring mechanisms have repeatedly revealed the spread of intolerance against several groups in Latvia. Thus, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), referring to a Latvian Center for Human Rights 2016 survey among NGO

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<sup>192</sup> <https://lv.sputniknews.ru/20240112/latviya-ne-vypolnyaet-konventsiiyu-se-po-zaschite-natsmennshinstv-kasatelno-ispolzovaniya-russkogo-26987008.html>

employees, migrants and foreign students, indicated that almost 68 percent of respondents either became victims and 33 percent witnesses of hate incidents or discriminatory manifestations, or heard of such cases. 13 percent of respondents were victims, or heard about other victims of attacks. According to respondents, hate incidents were motivated by race (36 percent), ethnicity/xenophobia (25 percent), language (22 percent), and religion (6 percent). Over 40 percent of third country nationals reported to have been discriminated against, for example, when contacting government bodies, police, medical institutions, when passing through border checkpoints, as well as in the street and public transport.<sup>193</sup>

ECRI also pointed out to gaps in Latvian legislation concerning the prohibition of racial discrimination, as well as the public expression or incitement of hatred, as well as race, language, religion or ethnic insults. The Commission stressed the increase in Islamophobic rhetoric in socio-political discussions in Latvia.<sup>194</sup>

The UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination noted that "unofficial data show a higher number of hate crimes and hate speech than are officially reported" and was concerned "at reports that victims of hate crimes are unwilling to report crimes to the authorities." It also stressed the use of hate speech by politicians in relation to the upcoming elections, as well as on the Internet.<sup>195</sup> Latvian authorities regularly prove in practice this observation made by the CERD. The statement by Artis Pabriks, former Minister of Defense of Latvia, is an example hereto. Amid the coronavirus infection, instead of treating those who came to the Liberators of Riga monument on 9 May 2020 to pay tribute to the Red Army soldiers, he proposed to oblige them to pay for the treatment of "those who were around them".

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<sup>193</sup> Report of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance on Latvia (fifth monitoring cycle). Adopted on 4 December 2018, published on 5 March 2019. <https://rm.coe.int/fifth-report-on-latvia/1680934a9f>

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

<sup>195</sup> Concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination on the combined 6th to 12th periodic reports of Latvia. August 2018. [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CERD%2fC%2fLVA%2fCO%2f6-12&Lang=ru](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CERD%2fC%2fLVA%2fCO%2f6-12&Lang=ru)

The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights expressed concern about the absence of a comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation and policy framework aimed at ensuring equality and non-discrimination in economic, social and cultural domains. The CESCR also noted the reported prevalence of prejudice and discrimination based on colour, language, religion, national or ethnic origin, sexual orientation and gender identity that hinder disadvantaged and marginalized groups' access to economic, social and cultural rights.<sup>196</sup>

In 2023, the Advisory Committee of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities also noted the discriminatory situation of national minorities in Latvia. Thus, the AC FCNM stressed that the approach adopted by official Riga to form a cohesive society on the basis of the Latvian language, accompanied by a wide range of measures affecting the rights of national minorities, unduly restricts the rights of this group and does not comply with Latvia's obligations under the Convention. The AC FCNM indicated that the Latvian authorities, in addition to education reforms that have narrowed the rights of national minorities, also pursue restrictive policies in such areas as employment, participation in public affairs, including elections, use of language in the media, topographical signs and identity documents, as well as for interaction with the authorities. The Committee emphasised that the predominant focus on the use of Latvian language whilst reducing possibilities for persons belonging to national minorities to access minority rights are rather conducive to the opposite development and risk worsening inter-ethnic relations rather than promoting social cohesion and integration, as claimed by the Latvian authorities.<sup>197</sup>

The AC FCNM also cited data from the 2022 statistical study on hate speech. Based on this data, the Advisory Committee pointed out that such manifestations are a serious problem, especially in social media and on the

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<sup>196</sup> Concluding observations of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on the 2nd periodic report of Latvia. March 2021

[https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=E/C.12/LVA/CO/2&Lang=R](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=E/C.12/LVA/CO/2&Lang=R)

<sup>197</sup> Fourth opinion of the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the protection of national minorities on Latvia. Adopted on 9 October 2023, published on 24 February 2024. <https://rm.coe.int/4th-op-latvia-en/1680ae98f6>

Internet. It stressed that hate speech on ethnic grounds is widespread, especially against Latvians, but also against Russians or "Russian speakers". Hate speech peaks on specific dates, in particular 9 May, and increases in relation to political decisions on issues of social integration or education, as well as in the context of Russia's special military operation.

All of the above indicates that Latvian authorities deliberately indulge radical manifestations of racial discrimination and neo-Nazism and continuing violent revision of historical events and glorification of Latvian legionnaires under false pretexts of their alleged participation in the "national liberation movement". It also confirms that the Latvian leadership has actually set a course to put Nazi ideology into practice. A convincing proof of this is precisely the policy of racial discrimination against the Russian and Russian-speaking population of Latvia, which primarily affects "non-citizens" of Latvia and citizens of Russia.



## Lithuania

The Lithuanian authorities, like other Baltic countries, are openly pursuing a course of falsifying the history of the World War II and glorifying Nazi collaborators, honouring them as participants in the struggle for "national independence" and equating them with national heroes.

The Forest brothers (in the Lithuanian interpretation – "partisans", and in reality – bandits) are whitewashed and glorified in modern Lithuania under the guise of "heroes of the national liberation movement" and "fighters against the Soviet power". It should be recalled in this connection that the detachments of these "figures", numbering up to 30 thousand people, which operated on the territory of Lithuania from 1944 to 1956, were responsible for the murder of more than 25 thousand civilians, including children, women and the elderly. Most of the victims were ethnic Lithuanians. Many of the bandits were collaborators, members of the occupation administration of the Third Reich and were directly involved in the Holocaust in Lithuania during World War II, when about 220,000 Jews (96 percent of the Jewish population living in the territory at the time) were killed. According to eyewitnesses, the Forest Brothers came from the same villages whose inhabitants they murdered and robbed.<sup>198</sup> After the war, they continued their terrorist activities, killing, in addition to the Soviet authorities, also those who had rescued Jews from the Nazis during the war.<sup>199</sup>

Since, as in a number of other European countries, the Lithuanian state policy of falsifying the history of World War II is based on the thesis that the Soviet Union and Hitler's Germany were equally responsible for unleashing the war, the Lithuanian authorities have made efforts to denigrate the Soviet past. In recent years, this policy has been manifested in the inculcation of hatred towards Russians and everything related to the USSR and Russia, including monuments in

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<sup>198</sup> <https://iz.ru/1137992/andrei-razumovskii/banditskii-fors-v-litve-proslavliaiut-lesnykh-bratev>

<sup>199</sup> [https://lt.baltnews.com/freedom\\_of\\_speech/20220411/1021506655/Litovskiy-sindrom-mezhdu-geroizatsiey-natsizma-i-istoricheskoy-pravdoy.html](https://lt.baltnews.com/freedom_of_speech/20220411/1021506655/Litovskiy-sindrom-mezhdu-geroizatsiey-natsizma-i-istoricheskoy-pravdoy.html)

honour of Soviet soldiers who died in the liberation of Lithuania from fascism.<sup>200</sup> Persecution, including on political grounds, is directed primarily against Russian-speaking residents of the country. At the same time, there is large-scale discrimination against national minorities, primarily in the educational sphere in terms of receiving education in their native language. There are also numerous cases of restrictions on freedom of expression. At the same time, the anti-Russian actions of Lithuania, as well as those of Latvia and Estonia, have long since gone beyond the legal framework and are looking more and more like those described by George Orwell. The leadership of the Republic of Lithuania, like the authorities of other Baltic States, used Russia's special military operation to denazify and demilitarize Ukraine and protect the peaceful population of Donbass as a pretext for implementing its revisionist agenda. In 2022, the demolition of monuments to Soviet soldiers located at the burial sites of Red Army soldiers began throughout the country. The authorities motivate this policy by the desire to get rid of the "totalitarian legacy". There is a legal basis for this: Soviet symbols are prohibited by law in Lithuania. After the communist period of the country's history was officially recognized as an "occupation" on a par with the Nazi occupation, all objects reminiscent of that time, primarily monuments, became targets for destructive efforts of Lithuanian leaders at all levels.

On 13 December 2022, the Lithuanian Seimas adopted by majority vote the "Law on the Desovietization of Lithuanian Public Spaces", which entered into force on 1 May 2023. This document prohibits "propaganda of totalitarian and authoritarian regimes and their ideology" in the country<sup>201,202</sup>. The law also creates conditions for the demolition of unwanted monuments, memorial sites, as well as renaming of street names and other toponyms. The authors of the bill themselves

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<sup>200</sup> Detailed information on Lithuania's efforts to glorify Nazi collaborators, falsify the history of the Second World War and the Great Patriotic War and wage war on monuments and memorials in honor of Red Army soldiers who died in the battles to liberate Lithuania from Nazism, are cited in the relevant section of the report of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the situation with the glorification of Nazism and the spread of neo-Nazism and other practices that contribute to the escalation of contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance (available on the official website of the Ministry at [www.mid.ru](http://www.mid.ru)).

<sup>201</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/article/politika-i-obshchestvo/20221227-pravitelstvo-nedoveriya-v-litve-pravyashchaya-koalitsiya-stremitelno-teryat-populyarnost/>

<sup>202</sup> <https://lt.sputniknews.ru/20221213/seym-litvy-prinyal-zakonoproekt-o-desovetizatsii-obschestvennykh-prostranstv-25815368.html>

did not conceal that this initiative is aimed at creating conditions for the removal from all public places of Soviet monuments, other memorial objects, names of streets, squares and other objects, which they declared "symbols of authoritarian and totalitarian regimes".

In addition, back in April 2022, the Lithuanian Seimas approved amendments to the Code of Administrative Offenses to ban the public display of the St. George ribbon, which was seen as a symbol of a "totalitarian regime" that "promotes military aggression".<sup>203</sup>

At the end of June 2024, the Seimas Law and Order Committee approved a bill declaring the Communist Party a "criminal organization". In particular, the document proposes to prohibit members of the Lithuanian Communist Party who have held leadership positions from participating in the political and diplomatic activities of the Republic. At the same time, attention is drawn to the scandal that broke out in 2023 in Lithuania, when it turned out that the country's president G. Nauseda had previously been a member of the Communist Party, but kept silent about this "shameful" fact of his biography during the election campaign in 2019. Documents from the Lithuanian Special Archive, confirming this fact, were published in 2023 by Lithuanian journalist D. Panzerovas. It turned out that in May 1988 G. Nauseda wrote an application requesting to be admitted to the CPSU, and a month later he became a full-fledged Communist.<sup>204</sup>

After the start of the special military operation, a wave of vandalism swept through Lithuanian communities, resulting in the desecration of more than 50 memorials and obelisks, mostly located at military burial sites. Law enforcement authorities have reported initiating investigations into the incidents, but no vandal has ever been punished. It is obvious that the Lithuanian authorities are not interested in solving such crimes and are ready to turn a blind eye to them, as such actions fully fit into the political course pursued by them.

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<sup>203</sup> [www.lt.sputniknews.ru/20220419/seym-litvy-zapretil-publichnoe-ispolzovania-georgievskoy-lenty-22788067.html](http://www.lt.sputniknews.ru/20220419/seym-litvy-zapretil-publichnoe-ispolzovania-georgievskoy-lenty-22788067.html)

<sup>204</sup> <https://antifashist.com/item/eks-kommunist-nauseda-reshil-obyavit-kompartiyu-prestupnoj-v-litve-nakazyvayut-za-foto-lenina.html>

Vandalism of Soviet monuments is condoned – and even encouraged – by the top officials of the Lithuanian state. Thus, President G. Nauseda (who lived almost half of his life in the USSR, or rather in the Lithuanian SSR as a part of the Soviet Union) made it clear that he does not intend to "put up with vestiges of Soviet propaganda".<sup>205</sup> And Prime Minister I. Šimonė, who also attended a Soviet school in her childhood, stated that she allegedly does not understand "why monuments are considered as some kind of heritage and in general what kind of heritage they are".<sup>206</sup> The Lithuanian Minister of Culture S. Kairis also distinguished himself in this approach. On 19 April 2022, he signed an order allowing local governments to determine the future of "aggression-emitting and war-symbolizing" Soviet monuments in cemeteries.<sup>207</sup> At the same time, the Lithuanians made a formal reservation that the graves of the fallen with tombstones would remain untouched, because, they said, Vilnius undertook to fulfill the relevant provisions of the relevant Geneva Conventions. However, in practice this was often not observed.

The culmination of the Lithuanian authorities' struggle with the Soviet memorial heritage and the memory of the heroic feat of liberating Lithuania from Nazi invaders was the demolition of the Antakalnis cemetery in Vilnius, where the largest Red Army burial ground in Lithuania is located (3,098 Red Army soldiers and officers, including five heroes of the Soviet Union, are buried there), six steles representing Soviet soldiers of various branches of the armed forces, which were the central element of the memorial.<sup>208</sup>

For decades, this monument has been the main place where the Embassy of the Russian Federation held wreath-laying ceremonies on the memorable dates of

<sup>205</sup> <https://ru.respublika.lt/ru/naujienos/ru/politika/ne-miritsja-s-perezitkami-propagandi-i-razziganija-vojni-gnayseda-o-sovetskix-pamjatnikax/>

<sup>206</sup> [https://www.lrt.lt/ru/novosti/17/1660229/evrei-litvy-osuzhdaiut-oskvernenie-memoriala-pamiati-zhertv-kholokosta#:~:text=%D0%95%D0%B2%D1%80%D0%B5%D0%B9%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%B0%D1%8F%20%D0%BE%D0%B1%D1%89%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%B0%20%D0%9B%D0%B8%D1%82%D0%B2%D1%8B%20\(%D0%95%D0%9E%D0%9B\)%20%D0%B2,%D0%BC%D0%B5%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B5%20%D0%B%D0%B0%D1%81%D1%81%D0%BE%D0%B2%D1%8B%D1%85%20%D1%83%D0%B1%D0%B8%D0%B9%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B2%20%D0%B2%20%D0%9F%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B5%D1%80%D1%8F%D0%B9](https://www.lrt.lt/ru/novosti/17/1660229/evrei-litvy-osuzhdaiut-oskvernenie-memoriala-pamiati-zhertv-kholokosta#:~:text=%D0%95%D0%B2%D1%80%D0%B5%D0%B9%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%B0%D1%8F%20%D0%BE%D0%B1%D1%89%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%B0%20%D0%9B%D0%B8%D1%82%D0%B2%D1%8B%20(%D0%95%D0%9E%D0%9B)%20%D0%B2,%D0%BC%D0%B5%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B5%20%D0%B%D0%B0%D1%81%D1%81%D0%BE%D0%B2%D1%8B%D1%85%20%D1%83%D0%B1%D0%B8%D0%B9%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B2%20%D0%B2%20%D0%9F%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B5%D1%80%D1%8F%D0%B9)

<sup>207</sup> <https://lrkm.lrv.lt/lt/naujienos/parengtos-rekomendacijos-savivaldybems-del-sovietiniu-paminklu-nukelimo>

<sup>208</sup> <https://www.lrt.lt/ru/novosti/17/1840837/na-antakal-nisskom-kladbishche-vil-niusa-demontirovany-skul-ptury-sovetskim-voinam>

the Great Patriotic War. Russian compatriots also gathered there en masse on such days.

Blasphemous actions to destroy the monument were repeatedly preceded by barbaric acts of desecration of the memorial by local vandals. In October 2022, the Russian Investigative Committee opened a criminal case on these facts.

The decision to demolish the memorial was made by the Vilnius authorities in June 2022. At a meeting of the City Council, Mayor R. Šimasius called the monument "a militaristic monster that does not correspond to the graves".<sup>209</sup> At the end of November 2022, demolition work began, which was completed on 9 December.<sup>210</sup> The destruction of the monument was not prevented by the appeal of the UN Human Rights Committee to the Lithuanian authorities not to destroy the memorial. This appeal for interim provisional measures against the memorial steles was sent to Vilnius after the Committee received a complaint from a group of concerned Lithuanian citizens against the actions of the authorities.<sup>211</sup>

Commenting on the actions of the Vilnius authorities, who ignored the appeal of the international organization, Mayor R. Šimasius called this act of vandalism a response to "Russian aggression" and agreed that "the UN is not an institution that has the right to tell Lithuania or Vilnius whether symbols of totalitarianism can be located there".

The Chairman of the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation A. Bastrykin instructed to give a legal assessment of the actions of those involved.

On 7 February 2024, Lithuanian authorities announced the completion of the demolition of the monument to Soviet soldiers-liberators in Antakalnis cemetery.<sup>212</sup> On 22 February 2024, on the occasion of Defender of the Fatherland Day, employees of the Russian Embassy in Lithuania laid a wreath and flowers to what was left after the barbaric intervention. The Embassy emphasized that this time it was impossible to hold the commemorative event in the central part of the

<sup>209</sup> <https://lenta.ru/news/2022/06/08/pamyatnik/>

<sup>210</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/30112022-v-vilnyuse-nachali-demontirovat-memorial-sovetskim-voinam/>

<sup>211</sup> <https://www.delfi.lt/ru/news/live/komitet-oon-ne-razreshil-ubrat-stely-s-antakalnissskogo-kladbischa-v-samoupravlenii-ot-planov-ne-otkazyvayutsya.d?id=91815411>

<sup>212</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/07022024-v-litve-zavershili-snos-krupneyshego-memoriala-sovetskim-voinam/>

memorial complex, as the Lithuanian authorities continue the barbaric destruction of this largest war memorial in Lithuania. The Embassy published several photos from Antakalnis Cemetery. The images show a broken tombstone, a muddy road damaged by heavy machinery to the place where the war memorial used to stand.<sup>213</sup>

The destruction of the memorial did not prevent concerned residents of Vilnius and other Lithuanian cities, who honour the feat of Soviet soldiers, to pay tribute to them on 9 May 2024. Candles were brought to the burial site itself, as well as to the place where the memorial to Soviet soldiers used to stand, and flower arrangements and wreaths were placed. Lithuanian police officers were on duty at the site, scrupulously recording what was happening.<sup>214</sup>

Thus, from 2018, when the Lithuanian authorities began active steps to systematically destroy Soviet military monuments, until the beginning of 2023, most of such monuments were demolished in the country. But this did not seem enough to the initiators, and in 2024 they started a new stage.

In February 2024, the Lithuanian Seimas, on the proposal of the head of the ruling faction in the parliament, R. Morkunaite-Mikulienė, unanimously adopted a resolution on the continuation of decommunization of the Republic of Lithuania, which called on the authorities of Lithuanian cities to more actively demolish Soviet monuments.<sup>215</sup>

On 13 June 2024, amendments to laws introduced in February that allow the remains of Soviet soldiers to be removed from cities and towns and reburied in regular cemeteries located remotely were adopted. The document also proposes that in cases where graves and cemeteries are recognized as "propagandizing totalitarian, authoritarian regimes and their ideology," they should be allowed to be

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<sup>213</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/22022024-posolstvo-rf-v-litve-pokazalo-kak-posle-snosa-pamyatnika-vyglyadit-kladbishche-v-vilnyuse/>

<sup>214</sup> <https://iz.ru/1713577/viktor-nedelin/nadrugatelstvo-nad-pamiatu-v-litve-prodolzhaiut-oskverniat-zakhoroneniia-sovetskikh-soldat>

<sup>215</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/17022024-v-parlamente-litvy-prizvali-aktivnee-snosit-sovetskie-pamyatniki/>

destroyed, despite the fact that they are listed in the Register of Cultural Property.<sup>216</sup>

Eighty-nine MPs voted in favour of the adoption of these acts, five MPs abstained, and no votes were cast against. Thus, henceforth Lithuanian legislation considers the graves of Soviet soldiers as objects subject to the prohibition of "propaganda of totalitarian, authoritarian regimes and their ideologies". Accordingly, the provision prohibiting the liquidation of graves and cemeteries included in the "Register of Cultural Property" no longer applies to soldiers' graves.<sup>217</sup>

The Russian authorities are paying close attention to the Lithuanian authorities' "war" on memorials to Soviet soldiers. The Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation is investigating the destruction of memorials erected in memory of Red Army soldiers who died fighting the Nazis. In September 2023, the Investigative Committee reported that it had 16 criminal cases under investigation for 143 cases of desecration, destruction or damage to war graves, monuments and memorials to Soviet soldiers. For the commission of these crimes, 173 foreign nationals – citizens of Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Poland and Ukraine – have been brought as defendants in absentia.<sup>218</sup> On 24 February 2024, the head of the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation A. Bastrykin instructed to investigate the desecration of the memorial sign to Soviet soldiers in Druskininkai.<sup>219</sup>

In October 2023, the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs declared the chairperson of the Historical Memory Commission of the Vilnius City Council Kamile Šeraite wanted for active efforts to "desovietize" Vilnius.<sup>220</sup> In December 2022, after the Lithuanian Seimas adopted a law on the desovietization of public

<sup>216</sup> <https://lt.sputniknews.ru/20240225/v-litve-predlozhili-uzakonit-snos-mest-zakhoroneniya-sovetskikh-soldat-32071675.html>

<sup>217</sup> <https://iz.ru/1713577/viktor-nedelin/nadrugatelstvo-nad-pamiatiu-v-litve-prodolzhaiut-oskverniat-zakhoroneniia-sovetskikh-soldat>

<sup>218</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/12092023-sk-rossii-zaochno-obvinil-grazhdan-stran-baltii-i-polshi-v-oskvernenii-sovetskikh-pamyatnikov/>

<sup>219</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/26022024-v-rossii-rassleduyut-fakt-oskverneniya-pamyatnika-sovetskim-voinam-v-litve/>

<sup>220</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/30102023-mvd-rossii-obyavilo-v-rozysk-glavu-komissii-istoricheskoy-pamyati-v-vilnyuse/>



space and announced the city authorities' plans to remove Soviet symbols and inscriptions in Russian from 16 monuments and memorial plaques in the capital, Kamile Šeraite pointed out the need to rid the city of the ideology of the sickle and hammer.

On 13 February 2024, the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russia declared the Minister of Culture of Lithuania S. Kairis wanted in the case of destruction of monuments to Soviet soldiers.<sup>221</sup>

The now former mayor of Vilnius R. Šimasius was also declared wanted.<sup>222</sup>

Another direction of the Lithuanian authorities' struggle with the Soviet legacy was the renaming of topographical objects. As noted above, in December 2022, the Lithuanian parliament passed a law banning propaganda of totalitarian regimes, otherwise known as the "law on the desovietization of public space" (it became effective in May 2023). The law prohibits the propaganda of "totalitarian, authoritarian regimes" and prescribes the removal from public space of public objects that promote them. Official Vilnius considers the Soviet Union to be one of such regimes. Local authorities have been given twenty days to collect and submit materials on sites covered by a new law that makes it easier for Lithuanian authorities to deal with Soviet heritage sites. It allows not only the destruction of monuments and other memorial sites, but also the renaming of streets, squares and public objects. Even images of people fall under the law.<sup>223</sup> The adopted law refers not only to Soviet party figures – objects dedicated to them were got rid of back in the early 1990s –but also to Lithuanian writers, poets and artists, who during the Soviet era received badges of honour from the Soviet authorities for their services.<sup>224</sup>

In 2023, 13 streets were renamed in Lithuania, the names of which were associated with the country's "Soviet past". In seven cases the street was renamed after Petras Cvirka, in three cases after Ludas Gira and in one case after Teofilis

<sup>221</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/13022024-mvd-rossii-obyavilo-v-rozysk-ministra-kultury-litvy/>

<sup>222</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/article/politika-i-obshchestvo/20240221-rossiya-zastavila-nervnichat-bortsov-s-sovetskimi-pamyatnikami-iz-pribaltiki/>

<sup>223</sup> <https://ruskiymir.ru/news/308367/>

<sup>224</sup> <https://iz.ru/1713577/viktor-nedelin/nadrugatelstvo-nad-pamiatu-v-litve-prodolzhaiut-oskverniat-zakhoroneniia-sovetskikh-soldat>



Tilvytis. It is noteworthy that Lithuanian writers Petras Cvirka, Ludas Gira and Teofilis Tilvytis are recognized masters of Lithuanian literature, some of whose works were written during the Soviet era.<sup>225</sup>

In June 2023, the Commission for Desovietization, established by a Seimas decision, stated that it had found three monuments in Lithuania that it considered to "propagandize authoritarian regimes" and recommended their removal. In addition to these objects, it recognized two street names as "propagandizing authoritarian regimes". In one case, it was the monument to Forest Brother Juozas Krikštaponis in Ukmerg district, which the Lithuanian Jewish Community demanded be demolished.<sup>226</sup> The second commission noted the monument to Soviet soldiers in Šalčininkai district. The commission also recommended to demolish the monument to Antanas Ubagiavičius in Anikščiai district, who was the secretary of the Komsomol organization. In 1947 he was shot dead as a Soviet activist. The commission also felt that the street of Petras Cvirka in Gargždai, a classic of Lithuanian literature who is condemned in modern Lithuania for collaborating with the Soviet authorities, should be renamed. Another street – Yuri Gagarin Street in Gruzdžiai – should not be renamed, but an explanatory plaque should be erected because, according to Commission Chairman V. Karrčiauskas, "his name was used by the Soviet authorities as an instrument of ideological influence".<sup>227</sup>

At the end of February 2024, the desovietization commission decided that streets in Lithuanian cities named after the Soviet writer Salomeja Neris<sup>228</sup> should be renamed.<sup>229</sup>

<sup>225</sup> <https://lt.sputniknews.ru/20240402/v-litve-pereimenovali-13-ulits-s-sovetskimi-nazvaniyami-32514860.html>

<sup>226</sup> Detailed information on this monument in honor of a Nazi collaborator is contained in the relevant section of the Russian Foreign Ministry's report on the situation with the glorification of Nazism, the spread of neo-Nazism and other practices that contribute to the escalation of contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance

<sup>227</sup> <https://lt.sputniknews.ru/20230629/v-litve-rekomendovali-snesti-pamyatniki-sovetskim-voinam-i-lesnomu-bratu-29368146.html>

<sup>228</sup> Salomeja Neris – People's poetess of the Lithuanian SSR, winner of the Stalin Prize of the first degree. In 1940, together with other deputies of the People's Seimas, she was a member of the delegation that petitioned the Supreme Soviet of the USSR to admit Lithuania to the Soviet Union.

<sup>229</sup> <https://lt.sputniknews.ru/20240228/komissiya-po-desovetizatsii-reshila-ubrat-ulitsy-salomei-neris-po-vsey-litve-32097749.html>

In addition, the name of the poetess was removed from the name of the capital's gymnasium. In May 2024, the Vilnius City Municipality Council decided to rename the Salomeja Neris Gymnasium in honour of the Lithuanian coat of arms Vytis (Horseman). This decision was taken on the initiative of the educational institution itself. At the same time, the management of the Sofia Kovalevskaya Gymnasium also appealed to the Vilnius authorities. The latter was given the name Vilnius Capital Gymnasium.<sup>230</sup>

Lithuanian special services and law enforcement agencies, as well as nationalist circles, use the provisions of Lithuanian legislation, especially the Criminal Code, as grounds for persecuting and harassing anyone who expresses alternative views on Lithuanian domestic and foreign policy and history, and even more so for publicly claiming the involvement of the Forest Brothers in the Holocaust and the mass murder of civilians. According to a number of human rights defenders, Lithuania has built a whole system of measures and methods of influence on dissenters on this basis. All these repressive measures are most of all applied by the Lithuanian authorities to Russian citizens and compatriots.

Under Article 170 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Lithuania, denial of Lithuanian assessment of the period when the country was part of the USSR as "occupation" entails criminal prosecution for "denial of Soviet occupation" with a penalty of up to two years' imprisonment. In addition, the prohibition of retroactive application of the law, the principle of presumption of innocence and the right to a fair trial are violated in the Lithuanian legal sphere.

A striking example is the multi-year trial on the politically fabricated criminal case of the notorious events at the Vilnius TV Tower in January 1991. On 31 March 2021, the Lithuanian Court of Appeal partially satisfied the prosecutor's protest against the 27 March 2019, decision of the Vilnius District Court, under which 67 former Soviet party and state figures, special forces fighters and military personnel, most of them Russian citizens, were sentenced to long prison terms for

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<sup>230</sup> <https://lt.sputniknews.ru/20240515/vilnyusskuyu-gimnaziyu-imeni-neris-pereimenuyut-v-chest-gerba-vitis-32937907.html>

allegedly committing "war crimes and crimes against humanity." As a result, the Russian citizen, officer Y. Mel (released in March 2023), who had been in custody in Lithuania since March 2014, had his prison term increased by 3 years, cumulatively to 10 years (on 30 June 2022, the Supreme Court of the Republic of Lithuania reduced the term to 9 years). G. Ivanov, who was previously chosen a preventive measure in the form of a signature not to leave, was given a generalized punishment – imprisonment for five years.

The media also reported that the Lithuanian judicial system demonstrated double standards in this case. Russian citizens were sentenced to long prison terms. At the same time, exceptions were made for some defendants with other citizenship. A. Radkevich, a Ukrainian citizen who served in the Soviet army and also took part in the events at the TV Tower, was sentenced to four years in prison. But in November 2022 his sentence was reduced to one and a half years. A possible reason could be the fact that he is a veteran of the Ukrainian "Anti-Terrorist Operation" and could return to the Ukrainian Armed Forces after his release.<sup>231</sup>

The Russian side does not leave this issue without attention. On 6 September 2023, the Basmanniy Court of Moscow ordered the arrest in absentia from the moment of detention in Russia or extradition to its territory of the Lithuanian judges who passed knowingly unjust sentences on dozens of innocent people in the politicized "case of 13 January".<sup>232</sup>

Another illustrative example of discrimination on the part of the Lithuanian authorities against Russian citizens is the case of K. Nikulin, a former policeman of the Riga OMON police squad of the USSR Ministry of Internal Affairs, who was sentenced by the Vilnius District Court on 11 May 2011, to life imprisonment for the murder of seven persons and attempted murder of one person at the Medininkai checkpoint in July 1991. Initially, he was charged with "murder of two or more

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<sup>231</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/article/politika-i-obshchestvo/20230113-svoi-strelyali-v-svoikh-chto-stoit-za-gosudarstvennym-mifom-litvy-o-borbe-za-nezavisimost/>

<sup>232</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/article/politika-i-obshchestvo/20230906-shag-k-spravedlivosti-litovskie-sudi-otvetyat-za-politicheskie-repressii/>

persons" (the statute of limitations for such crimes had expired by the date of the trial, so the charge was deliberately changed). No clear evidence of K. Nikulin's participation in the crime attributed to him was presented, but the Russian was sentenced to life imprisonment in prison and a fine of 650 thousand euros. Despite the fact that the Russian citizen received a group three disability in 2021, the prison administration twice refused to transfer him from a strict to a lighter detention unit. In spite of repeated requests by the Russian Embassy, our citizen is denied medical diagnostic procedures, which he has been requesting for several years due to increasing stomach pains. In March 2020, after two years of consideration of K. Nikulin's application for transfer to continue serving his sentence in Russia in accordance with the Russian-Lithuanian Treaty on the Transfer of Persons Sentenced to Imprisonment for Serving Their Sentences of 25 June 2001, the Lithuanian Ministry of Justice reported "that the transfer of the convicted person is not possible".

Russian and Lithuanian citizens residing in Lithuania who advocate constructive development of relations with Russia are subjected to harassment by the Lithuanian authorities (in particular, the country's main intelligence service, the Department of State Security, DSS). In recent years, the DSS has launched a campaign of harassment and intimidation under the pretext of far-fetched accusations of espionage in favour of Russia against a group of Russian and Lithuanian citizens and local journalists. Since 11 May 2022, after the Lithuanian Court of Appeal approved the guilty verdict, the well-known Lithuanian oppositionist A. Paleckis<sup>233</sup>, who visited the Russian Crimea and has his own, different from the official authorities, point of view on the events in Vilnius in January 1991, has been in prison. The Lithuanian authorities started persecuting A. Paleckis after he challenged the official version of the events at the Vilnius TV Tower and the Press House that took place in January 1991. Citing eyewitnesses, A. Paleckis stated that the bloodshed was provoked by radicals

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<sup>233</sup> [https://lt.baltnews.com/vnutri\\_Lithuania\\_politika\\_novosti/20220511/1021570079/Nesoglasnykh--v-tyurmu-Algirdasa-Paetskisa-okonchatelno-lishili-svobody.html](https://lt.baltnews.com/vnutri_Lithuania_politika_novosti/20220511/1021570079/Nesoglasnykh--v-tyurmu-Algirdasa-Paetskisa-okonchatelno-lishili-svobody.html)

seeking power and that when the TV Tower in Vilnius was taken under control, "their own people shot at their own people". This phrase was the reason for initiating criminal proceedings against Paleckis under the article stipulating responsibility for "denial of Soviet aggression and occupation".

Such accusations looked all the more unconvincing because Lithuanian society was aware that this tragedy had been organized by the Lithuanian secret services. The first revelations began almost immediately after those bloody events. Already in the summer of 1991 the deputy of the Supreme Council of Lithuania V. Jasukaityte declared the death of people on 13 January as a consequence of provocation of V. Landsbergis. This was even publicly stated by persons involved in its organization. In particular, a former associate of V. Landsbergis A. Butkevičius claimed that he planned the bloodshed on 13 January as an act of "psychological warfare" against the "Soviets". Another former associate of V. Landsbergis V. Petkevičius wrote in his memoirs how activists of the "Sayudis" organization led snipers inside the TV centre. Participants of the events of 13 January and residents of the surrounding houses testified that they saw snipers on the roofs.<sup>234</sup>

The charges against the activist alleged that A. Paleckis and businessman D. Bertauskas were recruited by the Russian special services and were given tasks to collect information about the judges and prosecutors who handled the "13 January case". During the trial, A. Paleckis was kept in custody from October 2018 to April 2020, after which the Lithuanian Court of Appeal replaced the arrest with another preventive measure – intensive supervision with the payment of bail in the amount of 50 thousand euros and seizure of personal documents. On 27 July 2021, the court found the politician guilty and sentenced him to six years in prison.<sup>235</sup> Later the term was reduced to 4.5 years. Paleckis' lawyer told the media that the politician was kept in solitary confinement, he was severely malnourished

<sup>234</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/article/politika-i-obshchestvo/20210728-prigovor-paetskisu-litva-prinesla-novuyu-zhertvu-istoricheskoy-lzhi/>

<sup>235</sup> <https://www.lrt.lt/ru/novosti/17/1458028/za-shpionazh-v-pol-zu-rossii-paetskis-osuzhden-na-shest-let-lisheniia-svobody>, [https://lt.baltnews.com/vnutri\\_Lithuania\\_politika\\_novosti/20220511/1021570079/Nesoglasnyk--v-tyurmu-Algirdasa-Paetskisa-okonchatelno-lishili-svobody.html](https://lt.baltnews.com/vnutri_Lithuania_politika_novosti/20220511/1021570079/Nesoglasnyk--v-tyurmu-Algirdasa-Paetskisa-okonchatelno-lishili-svobody.html)

and had health problems.<sup>236</sup> The Vilnius businessman D. Bertauskas, who pleaded guilty in the criminal case and testified, was released from criminal liability.

Galina Sapozhnikova, the European correspondent of "Komsomolskaya Pravda", who in her book "Who Betrayed Whom" also expressed a point of view on the events of January 1991 that was not favourable to the Lithuanian official history, was persecuted for a similar "crime" of publishing the truth.

In 2022, the Lithuanian authorities also launched a prosecution against the Association "International Neighbourhood Forum" founded by A. Paleckis under the article of the Criminal Code providing for liability for assisting another state in actions against Lithuania.<sup>237</sup> In February 2023, the Vilnius Regional District Court ordered the liquidation of this non-governmental organization.<sup>238</sup> The said NGO was accused of "illegal activities", which were expressed in the fact that its activists voice an interpretation of Lithuania's recent history and current events in the country and the world that differs from the official Vilnius interpretation and advocate the normalization of Lithuania's relations with Russia and Belarus. A broad campaign to discredit the Forum was launched in the media, involving all major media and politicians of the country. In October 2022, its chairman E. Švenčienė was searched and the law enforcement authorities initiated a criminal case for assisting another state in actions against Lithuania. It is also indicative of the fact that during the court hearing of the Forum's liquidation case, which began at the end of December 2022, the court rejected the organization's request to postpone the hearing in order to finalize the agreement with the lawyer. E. Švenčienė said the entity had little time to find a lawyer. According to her, other lawyers were afraid to defend the organization for fear of losing their licenses.<sup>239</sup>

In December 2023, prosecutors transferred to Vilnius District Court the case against activists E. Švenčienė and K. Juraitis, who are accused of acting against

<sup>236</sup> <https://lv.sputniknews.ru/20220506/sud-litvy-otlkonil-zhalobu-osuzhdennogo-za-shpionazh-v-polzu-rf-paletskisa-21726124.html>

<sup>237</sup> <https://lt.sputniknews.ru/20220805/v-litve-protiv-foruma-paletskisa-nachato-esche-odno-rassledovanie-24098360.html>

<sup>238</sup> <https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/17096269>

<sup>239</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/28122022-v-litve-nachalsya-sudebnyy-protsess-o-likvidatsii-mezhdunarodnogo-foruma-dobrososedstva/>

Lithuania and publicly "approving Russia's crimes. Lithuanian law enforcers said that members of the liquidated organization "International Neighborhood Forum" in 2022 allegedly helped Russia and Belarus to act against Lithuania.<sup>240</sup> In accordance with the Criminal Code of the Republic of Lithuania, they face imprisonment for up to seven years.

At the same time, a new case was brought to court against human rights defender A. Paleckis, who was serving a prison sentence. This time he was charged under the articles on "defamation" and "public justification or belittling of crimes of the USSR or Nazi Germany".<sup>241</sup> The politician was accused of allegedly slandering MP L. Kasciunas, then chairman of the National Security and Defense Committee, while in prison in September 2022. The first hearing in the case took place on 28 February 2024.<sup>242</sup> In July 2024, the Kaunas District Court completed the investigation of the evidence in the case.<sup>243</sup> On 7 October 2024, at the hearing of the Kaunas District Court on the case, the prosecutor requested that A. Paleckis be sentenced to one year and four months of imprisonment.<sup>244</sup>

In addition, E. Švenčienė has been prosecuted by the Lithuanian authorities for publishing posts on social media. In 2022, she was fined 500 euros for publishing a post comparing the EU to the Soviet Union, as well as for publishing EU and USSR flags. At the end of December 2023, Kaunas police fined the activist for publishing an image with a sickle and hammer on social media. In 2024, by the decision of the administrative court, she was fined 700 euros for publishing a picture of Lenin, which she posted on 22 April 2024. She announced

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<sup>240</sup> <https://www.delfi.lt/ru/news/live/delo-shvenchenene-yuraytisa-i-ivanova-peredano-v-sud-obvinyayutsya-v-devstviyah-protiv-litvy-95339675>

<sup>241</sup> <https://www.delfi.lt/ru/news/live/paleckisa-budut-sudit-eshche-raz-94987385>

<sup>242</sup> <https://lt.sputniknews.ru/20240228/v-sude-litve-proshlo-pervoe-slushanie-po-novomu-delu-protiv-palets-kisa-32099544.html>

<sup>243</sup> <https://lt.sputniknews.ru/20240730/v-sude-litvy-zavershili-razbor-dokazatelstv-po-delu-palets-kisa-o-klevete-33680289.html>

<sup>244</sup> <https://lt.sputniknews.ru/20241007/v-litve-khotyat-naznachit-palets-kisu-novyy-srok-po-delu-o-klevete-34558013.html>



the intention to appeal the fine.<sup>245</sup> However, the Kaunas District Court upheld the fine imposed on the activist for publishing the photo.<sup>246</sup>

On 1 August 2024, it became known that a criminal case was opened against E. Švenčienė, under which she could face up to two years of imprisonment. The reason for launching a pre-trial investigation by Lithuanian Prosecutor General N. Grunskienė under the article of the Lithuanian Criminal Code for "public endorsement, denial or gross disparagement of international crimes, crimes of the Soviet Union or Nazi Germany" was E. Švenčienė's publication in social networks about the shooting of customs and police officers at the checkpoint "Medininkai" in 1991. The activist posted this post, which drew the attention of the Lithuanian prosecutor's office, on the occasion of the 33rd anniversary of the event. "The tragedy in Medininkai is a consequence of the dark activities of the Lithuanian security services. Many facts pointed to the fact that the killers were from their own. The truth is hidden, witnesses are silent," the activist wrote in social media.<sup>247</sup>

Together with them, V. Ivanov, a Russian citizen, former leader of the pro-Soviet organization "Unity", chairman of the Union of Russian Writers and Artists "RAROG", was also subjected to politically motivated persecution. On 25 September 2023, he was charged under the article on "justification of crimes committed by the USSR against Lithuania".<sup>248</sup> The prosecutor's office did not specify what his unlawful actions consisted of. However, in May 2023, he took part in the events of the Russian Embassy at Antakalnis cemetery in Vilnius dedicated to the Victory over Nazi Germany and, answering the questions of a journalist, stated that he believed the Russian version of events in Ukraine. On the same basis, in November 2023, V. Ivanov was recognized by the authorities of the Republic of Lithuania as a "threat to national security" and was deprived of his

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<sup>245</sup> <https://lt.sputniknews.ru/20240629/troynye-standarty-litovskaya-aktivistka-obzhaluet-shtraf-za-foto-lenina-33402920.html>

<sup>246</sup> <https://lt.sputniknews.ru/20240730/sud-v-litve-ostavil-v-sile-shtraf-aktivistke-za-foto-lenina-33682839.html>

<sup>247</sup> <https://lt.sputniknews.ru/20240801/litovskoy-aktivistke-grozit-tyuremnyy-srok-iz-za-slov-o-myadininkayskom-dele-33700980.html>

<sup>248</sup> <https://www.lrt.lt/ru/novosti/17/2086506/byvshemu-lideru-edinstva-predjavleny-podozreniya-v-publichnom-odobrenii-prestuplenii-sssr>



residence permit.<sup>249</sup> His attempts to appeal against this unlawful decision are blocked by the Lithuanian authorities. In social networks V. Ivanov reported that on 13 January 2024 he received an official notification from the Department of Migration that his residence permit was revoked on 7 November 2023. In response to an immediate complaint to the court of first instance, he received a reply from the Administrative Court of Regions, located in Kaunas, that this "complaint was not accepted for consideration" because the deadline for its submission was overdue. Since the deadline for filing a complaint (two weeks) from the date of receipt of the official notification of deprivation of residence permit was not violated, V.V. Ivanov sent a similar complaint to the court of next instance.<sup>250</sup> On 27 March 2024, the Supreme Administrative Court of Lithuania rejected his appeal, thus confirming the decision of the court of first instance.

In January 2024, the Vilnius District Court began hearings on the merits of the case against the Forum and its leaders E. Švenčienė, K. Juraitis and V. Ivanov.

It should be recalled that persecution of human rights defenders in Lithuania has occurred before, which only confirms their systemic nature.

Thus, in June 2020, the Vilnius district court sentenced V.V. Ivanov, who was a witness in the "Paleckis case", for "illegal possession of firearms" (during the search he was found in possession of a defective starting pistol) – he was sentenced to two years of not leaving Vilnius and staying at his place of residence at night.

In March 2020, the leader of the youth organization "Juvenis", organizer of the "Immortal Regiment" in Klaipėda A. Greicius was subjected to repressions. By the 70th anniversary of the Victory his organization published brochures dedicated to the liberation of Klaipėda and gave them to the school libraries of the city. On 12 November 2021, the Klaipėda District Court found him guilty of "espionage in favour of the Russian Federation" and sentenced him to four years in prison.

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<sup>249</sup> <https://www.lrt.lt/ru/novosti/17/2178886/byvshii-lider-edinstva-ivanov-obzhaloval-reshenie-o-ego-vysylke-iz-litvy>

<sup>250</sup> <https://lt.sputniknews.ru/20240212/sud-v-litve-otklonil-zhalobu-istorika-ivanova-o-lishenii-ego-vnzh-31938297.html>

According to the case materials, the human rights defender was accused of collecting and transferring to the "special services of Russia" information about the events he organized, photos of persons who participated in these events, video materials and articles, a video report about the trial of Klaipeda politician V. Titov, and information about employees of the Department of State Security. On 5 July 2022, the Lithuanian Court of Appeal upheld the sentence of the human rights defender.<sup>251</sup> Another defendant in the case, M. Tunikaitis, received a year and a half and pleaded guilty. The court noted that the information given to Russia was not secret, but the judges equated it with such information, as "foreign intelligence services" were allegedly interested in it.<sup>252</sup>

At the end of 2019, a campaign of harassment against the head of the Association of Russian School Teachers of Lithuania, E. Kanaite (who is also a member of Coordination Council of Russian Compatriots and one of the founders of the association "Centre for the Study and Protection of Fundamental Rights") began. She was fired from the school where she worked as a teacher.<sup>253</sup> E. Kanaite became a victim of repeated harassment in the Lithuanian media in 2022, after which she was forced to resign from her position as deputy director of the Vilnius kindergarten-school "Svaja". Journalists drew attention to her old social media posts in which she admitted her pro-Russian views.<sup>254</sup>

In 2019, a criminal case was opened against the head of the association "Forgotten Soldiers" V. Orlov, engaged in the search for the remains of Soviet soldiers. The case was dropped after a year, but he was pressured for a long time, he received threats by phone.<sup>255</sup> In 2020, T. Afanasieva-Kolomiets, who was involved in the preparation of the "Immortal Regiment" in Vilnius, was also searched and interrogated by the State Security Department.

<sup>251</sup> <https://lt.sputniknews.ru/20220705/litovskomu-pravozaschitniku-ostavili-prezhniy-srok-zaklyucheniya-zashpionazh-23750586.html>

<sup>252</sup> <https://delfi.lt/ru/news/article/php?id=88668731>

<sup>253</sup> <https://www.delfi.lt/ru/news/live/vlasti-vilnyusa-zhdut-prinyatiya-resheniy-upomyanutaya-v-otchete-dgb-litvy-pedagog-rabotaet-v-detskom-sadu-95060739>

<sup>254</sup> <https://www.lrt.lt/ru/novosti/17/2124700/ella-kanaite-popala-v-spisok-ugroz-natsional-noi-bezopasnosti-ukhodit-iz-shkoly>

<sup>255</sup> [https://news.rambler.ru/world/48627304/?utm\\_content=news\\_media&utm\\_medium=read\\_more&utm\\_source=copylink](https://news.rambler.ru/world/48627304/?utm_content=news_media&utm_medium=read_more&utm_source=copylink)

Lithuanian authorities liquidated the organization "Union of Lithuanian Russians".<sup>256</sup> Its leader S. Dmitriev is also constantly attacked and threatened.

In terms of the consistency of the Lithuanian persecution of all dissenters and those who previously fought against Nazi collaborators, the decision of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) of 12 March 2019, is illustrative. *Drelingas v. Lithuania*, which upheld the verdict of a Lithuanian court against former KGB officer V. Drelingas, who in 1956 participated in the operation to detain A. Ramanauskas-Vanagas and his wife (the gang leader was later shot by a Soviet court). Official Vilnius interprets this ECtHR ruling as an alleged recognition of the Soviet authorities' fight against "partisans who fought for the freedom of Lithuania" as "genocide of the Lithuanian people" (let us remind – the very same "partisans" who collaborated with the Nazis and after the end of the war continued to participate in the killing of civilians).

In October 2020, Lithuania's main election commission did not allow opposition politician V. Titov to run for the Seimas by rejecting some of the signatures he had collected, which were required for registration. He accused the ruling nomenclature of "bureaucratically bogging down" the non-system politician. In 2019, Titov was fined 10,000 euros for criticizing the memorialization of one of the aforementioned Forest Brothers commanders, A. Ramanauskas-Vanagas.

Because of the persecution by the Lithuanian authorities, the chairman of the Socialist Popular Front, anti-fascist G. Grabauskas, who also opposes the glorification of the Forest Brothers and the promotion of Russophobia, was forced to leave the country.

After Russia launched a special military operation to denazify and demilitarize Ukraine and protect the peaceful population of Donbas, the efforts of the Lithuanian authorities to denigrate everything related to Russia became unprecedented. As a result, the number of manifestations of Russophobia and

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<sup>256</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/04102020-soyuz-russkikh-litvy-za-nepredstavlenie-dannykh-o-kolichestve-chlenov-budet-likvidirovan/>

discrimination against Russians and natives of Russia has increased dramatically.<sup>257</sup>

One of the first to be subjected to severe restrictions was the media. A large-scale offensive was launched against Russian media outlets. In March 2022, the Lithuanian Radio and Television Commission (LRTC) suspended the broadcasting of RBC and Mir24 channels for five years, and applied similar sanctions to six other Russian and Belarusian channels. At the same time, the LRTC disconnected other programs of the interstate TV and radio company Mir from Lithuanian airwaves and blocked more than 50 news websites and some official portals of Russian authorities. In April, this odious structure suspended the retransmission of 32 Russian-language TV channels (in particular, such channels as Kinokomedia, NTV Mir, Friday, Indian Cinema, TNT, MalyshTV, and others) controlled by the Russian company Gazprom-Media. The pretext was the ownership of this media holding company by Gazprombank, against which the US Office of Foreign Assets Control (attention – not Lithuania, but the US!) imposed sanctions. In addition, according to this structure, the broadcasting or distribution of TV programs on the Internet, the owners of which are subject to anti-Russian sanctions, does not meet the interests of "national security" of Lithuania.<sup>258</sup> In September, the Seimas, under the pretext of the need to "protect its information space from the flow of disinformation," decided to close the Lithuanian airwaves to Russian and Belarusian channels.<sup>259</sup>

In mid-June 2024, the Seimas adopted amendments to the Law on Public Information that extended the ban on retransmission or distribution of Russian and Belarusian radio and television programs on the Internet in Lithuania.<sup>260</sup>

In September 2023, LRTC blocked IP addresses from which it was possible to watch banned TV programs.<sup>261</sup>

<sup>257</sup> <https://lt.sputniknews.ru/20220426/genotsid-pered-slyanami-v-litve-rasskazali-o-slychayakh-rusofobii-22888559.html>

<sup>258</sup> <https://lt.sputniknews.ru/20220420/v-litve-zapretili-retranslyatsiyu-bolee-30-rossiyskikh-telekanalov-22816590.html>

<sup>259</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/22092022-seym-litvy-zakryl-efir-dlya-rossiyskikh-i-beloruskikh-kanalov/>

<sup>260</sup> <https://baltija.eu/2024/06/13/seim-litil-prodlenie-zapreta-na-programmy-televideniia-rossii-i-belarysi/>

<sup>261</sup> Meanwhile ranked 9<sup>th</sup> in «World Press Freedom» in 2022.

In January 2024, the Vilnius District Administrative Court rejected the complaint of the Internet portal Musu TV and upheld the decision of the Lithuanian Radio and Television Commission to punish it with a fine of 2,000 euros for disseminating "disinformation". According to LRTC, the reports published on the site broadcast "favourable opinion" about the foreign policy of Russia and Belarus and published materials discrediting the Lithuanian authorities. It was stated that a "biased reaction" was presented to the events in Ukraine, questioning the sovereignty and territorial integrity of this country.<sup>262</sup>

Meanwhile, a survey conducted in May 2024 by Kantar, a market research company commissioned by the Lithuanian Radio and Television Commission, showed that the country's residents remain interested in Russian media. Although the majority of residents – four out of five – do without Russian TV programs, 14 percent of the survey participants admitted that they have recently watched TV channels broadcast in Russia.<sup>263</sup>

Lithuanian authorities introduce legislative measures aimed at preventing the spread of support for the special military operation among the country's residents. On 17 March 2022, the Lithuanian Seimas approved draft amendments to the Lithuanian Criminal Code, which, under the guise of criminalizing war propaganda, provide for criminal liability for its public support. At the same time, in mid-March, the Lithuanian parliament approved amendments to the legislation regulating public procurement, which allow excluding companies of hostile states (meaning Russia and Belarus) from tenders and terminating contracts already concluded with them.

On 19 April 2022, the Lithuanian Seimas adopted amendments to the laws on administrative offenses and on assemblies, which prohibit the public display of the St. George ribbon and other symbols of "totalitarian and authoritarian regimes" used "to promote their aggression, crimes against humanity and war crimes" (including the letters "Z" and "V"). Individuals are punished with fines ranging

<sup>262</sup> <https://www.lrt.lt/ru/novosti/17/2149841/sud-postanovil-shtraf-portalu-musu-tv-za-dezinformatsiiu-y-razmere-2-2-tys-evro>

<sup>263</sup> <https://baltija.eu/2024/06/13/seim-litva-odobril-prodlenie-zapreta-na-programmy-televideniia-rossii-i-belarysi/>

from 300 to 700 euros, and up to 900 euros for repeated violations; legal entities are fined more, up to 1,200 euros, and up to 1,500 euros for repeated violations.<sup>264</sup>

It should be noted that the Lithuanian authorities have previously engaged in the formation of a legislative framework to exert pressure on pro-Russian activists. In May 2021, the Seimas adopted amendments to the Law on the Legal Status of Aliens, which prohibit entry into Lithuania of persons who support or participate in the "aggressive" policy of a foreign state. The amendments were aimed primarily at Russian citizens, including popular media personalities who openly express their civic position in support of the actions of the Russian leadership.

In September 2022 Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, violating all international norms in the sphere of ensuring freedom of movement of citizens, reached an agreement in principle to restrict the movement of Russians across their borders with Russia and Belarus. In accordance with this line, on 14 September 2022 the Cabinet of Ministers of Lithuania approved openly discriminatory, including from the point of view of international human rights obligations of Vilnius, criteria for entry of Russian citizens into the country. On this basis, Russian citizens arriving in the Republic of Lithuania through all border checkpoints are subject to individual enhanced inspection during the state of emergency.<sup>265</sup> On 22 November 2022, Lithuanian Interior Minister A. Bilotaite signed amendments to the decrees on tightening the procedure for issuing documents to foreigners wishing to enter and reside in the country.

The result of these measures was the development of a special mandatory questionnaire for citizens of Russia and Belarus applying for a visa or residence permit or its extension. Part of the questions in the questionnaire is devoted to the attitude to what is happening in Ukraine. Applicants must also answer questions about their education, previous employment, service in the armed forces, connections in business circles, and contacts with government authorities of nonNATO and nonEU countries. Taking into account the general course of official

<sup>264</sup> [www.lt.sputniknews.ru/20220419/seym-litvy-zapretit-publichnoe-ispolzovanie-georgievskoy-lenty-22788067.html](http://www.lt.sputniknews.ru/20220419/seym-litvy-zapretit-publichnoe-ispolzovanie-georgievskoy-lenty-22788067.html)

<sup>265</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/14092022-pravitelstvo-litvy-utverdilo-kriterii-dopuska-grazhdan-rossii-v-stranu/>

Vilnius to foment Russophobia, it is not surprising that "wrong" answers in this questionnaire serve as grounds for banning entry into the country. In particular, the deputy head of the Lithuanian Interior Ministry, Mr. Abramavicius, confirmed refusals of entry on such grounds.<sup>266</sup> According to E. Gudzinskaite, director of the Migration Department, the document serves as "an additional security filter that allows for faster identification of aliens who may pose a threat to Lithuania's national security due to their previous activities or ties to non-democratic regimes".<sup>267</sup> This system appears to be actively used by the Lithuanian authorities. According to G. Misutis, a representative of the State Border Guard Service under the Ministry of the Interior, from 19 September 2022 to 18 September 2023, Lithuania refused entry to 1,343 Russian citizens.<sup>268</sup> The figure is quite impressive, given that this country, which used to be very popular among Russian and Belarusian tourists, has long lost its former attractiveness due to the openly discriminatory policy of its leadership.

By the end of 2023, the law "On the Introduction of Restrictive Measures in Connection with Military Aggression against Ukraine" (entered into force in May 2023)<sup>269</sup> became the legal basis for discriminatory measures against Russians. It is aimed at significantly reducing the already small inflow of Russian citizens who still want to obtain a residence permit here. Those who already live in Lithuania are subject to "security checks" by the State Security Department.

According to the Department of Migration (DM), from November 2022 to December 2023, 397 Russians and 1,644 citizens of Belarus were recognized as "threats to the national security of the country". They were denied temporary residence permits or did not renew them, revoked previously issued permits, canceled or denied permanent residence permits.<sup>270</sup>

<sup>266</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/09012023-v-litve-rasskazali-ob-otkaze-vo-vezde-belorusam-posle-voprosov-ob-otnoshenii-k-ukraine/>

<sup>267</sup> <https://www.lrt.lt/ru/novosti/17/1837373/grazhdanam-rossii-i-belarusi-pri-poluchenii-vnzh-v-litve-nuzhno-zapolnit-anketu-sprashivaiut-i-o-voine-v-ukraine>

<sup>268</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/19092023-v-litve-rasskazali-skolko-rossiyan-ne-pustili-v-stranu-za-god/>

<sup>269</sup> <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/lbc2cba0e9a511eda305cb3bdf2af4d8?jfwid=-1d737wmt54>

<sup>270</sup> <https://www.delfi.lt/ru/news/live/ot-sankcij-do-litvinizma-s-kakimi-problemami-stolknulis-v-2023-godu-belorusy-v-litve-i-est-li-puti-k-resheniyu-95489993>



On 12 February 2024, Lithuania extended until 2 May 2025 the national sanctions against citizens of Russia and Belarus. In addition to extending the restrictions for a year, the amendments provide for stricter checks of Russian and Belarusian citizens crossing the Lithuanian border on a Schengen visa. In addition, the sanctions were extended to legal entities whose beneficiaries are Russian citizens, regardless of whether they have temporary or permanent residence permits in Lithuania.<sup>271</sup>

The Lithuanian authorities decided not to stop there. On 17 April 2024, the Seimas Committee on National Security and Defense supported the initiative to deprive Russians and Belarusians of Lithuanian residence permits for trips to their home country.

On 25 June 2024, the Lithuanian Seimas approved the denunciation of the agreement between Russia and Lithuania on legal assistance and legal relations in civil, family and criminal cases, thus closing one of the few remaining international legal channels of interaction in this area. Even Lithuanian experts pointed out the recklessness of such a step.

The Lithuanian authorities, following other Baltic states, demanded that Russians in the country condemn the Russian special military operation. Both propaganda and pressure were used. Thus, in March 2022, with the support of the country's largest media outlets, an active campaign calling on Russian-speaking Lithuanians to "publicly condemn the policy of the Russian Federation in Ukraine" was launched. In the same month, a plan was launched to organize mass phone calls to exert psychological pressure on the Russian population. To this end, huge posters were erected in Lithuanian cities under the sign "Call Russia," inviting "all those who are not indifferent" to make calls through the callrussia.org technology platform to Russian numbers and persuade them to oppose Russia's special military operation. The organizers claimed that this resource had a database of 40 million Russian private telephone numbers at its disposal. In organizing such calls, volunteers were assisted by experts in technology, advertising and

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<sup>271</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/12022024-litva-na-god-prodlila-sanktsii-protiv-rossiyan-i-belorusov/>



communications, who gave instructions on how to structure the conversation. In addition, the project organizers offered its participants to call their friends and acquaintances in Russia for the same purposes. It is clear that such an expensive action was carried out at the expense of the local taxpayer's already very thin wallet.

Besides, to exert pressure, official Vilnius sent questionnaires to Russian and Belarusian citizens living in the country, which included, among other things, questions about the belonging of Crimea and whether they supported "Russia's military actions in Ukraine. As a result of the responses, the authorities canceled 2,905 residence permits and 160 permanent residence permits.

President of the Republic of Lithuania G. Nauseda decided to revoke the citizenship granted to figure skater M. Drobyazko "for special merits"<sup>272</sup> who was accused of "supporting aggression" because she continued to perform in our country after the start of the special military operation. Following this, the Lithuanian Interior Ministry initiated the same procedure against the Russian ballerina I. Liepa (daughter of the famous Soviet dancer Maris Liepa) for her open support of the Russian President, interpreted by the Lithuanian authorities as "approval of the war in Ukraine and contempt for the West and its values"<sup>273,274</sup>.

Businessman Yuri Kudimov, against whom the Citizenship Commission was also considering an application for revocation of citizenship because he "potentially poses a threat to Lithuania's national security,"<sup>275</sup> came under pressure. The case stated that the businessman was allegedly involved in the management of Russian state companies, non-transparent schemes of financing election campaigns in Western countries from Russia, maintains ties with influential persons in Russia and is linked to its intelligence services.

<sup>272</sup> This became possible as a result of the adoption in June 2023 of a new version of the Law on Citizenship, according to which a person may be deprived of citizenship obtained by exception if it is recognized that the person poses a threat to the national security of Lithuania. Lithuania is currently working on amendments under which citizenship obtained by descent may be revoked.

<sup>273</sup> <https://www.lrt.lt/ru/novosti/17/2161622/v-litve-v-ianvare-ozhidaiut-resheniia-po-voprosu-lisheniia-grazhdanstva-ilze-liepy>

<sup>274</sup> <https://lt.sputniknews.ru/20231113/prezident-litvy-primet-reshenie-o-grrazhdanstve-liepy-posle-otsenki-ekspertov-31052056/html>

<sup>275</sup> <https://www.delfi.lt/ru/news/politics/ministr-mvd-obratilas-k-presidentu-po-povodu-lisheniya-grazhdanstva-biznesmena-kudimova-94313989>

On 7 March 2024, G. Nauseda signed decrees stripping I. Liepa and Y. Kudimov of their citizenship.

A check has also been initiated with regard to almost 800 people who received citizenship of the republic by way of exception for "threat to national security and support of the aggressor state".<sup>276</sup>

In July 2023, the Migration Department revoked the residence permit of V. Vodo, a journalist and Russian citizen, after the State Security Department issued a conclusion that the Russian allegedly posed a "threat to national security". The journalist was accused of "having views disloyal to Lithuania and spreading propaganda on social media". V. Vodo has lived in Lithuania since 1989, he was issued his first permanent residence permit in 1993, the last permanent residence permit in Lithuania was to be valid until 2027.<sup>277</sup> On 20 March 2024, the Vilnius Chamber of the Regional Administrative Court confirmed the decision of the Migration Department to revoke V. Vodo's residence permit. On 27 April 2024, the court suspended V. Vodo's deportation to Russia. However, on 15 May 2024, the Supreme Administrative Court of Lithuania issued a final decision confirming the initial decision to deport the Russian citizen. On 24 May 2024 already, the Lithuanian authorities expelled Vodo.<sup>278</sup>

At the end of February 2024, it became known that Lithuania was going to expel a 75-year-old pensioner Valentina Vatutina from the country because she could be a potential "recruitment target" for Russian intelligence services. This became known after the Vilnius Chamber of the Regional Administrative Court approved the conclusions of the Migration Department and the State Security Department.

V. Vatutina lived most of her life in Lithuania, worked as a teacher and paid much attention to local history work. However, the Lithuanian authorities refused to extend her residence permit and recognized her as a "threat to national security"

<sup>276</sup> <https://www.lrt.lt/ru/novosti/17/2123557/mvd-prosit-dgb-proverit-800-inostrantsev-poluchivshikh-grazhdanstvo-litvy>

<sup>277</sup> <https://lt.sputniknews.ru/20240605/bez-very-v-luchshee-zhurnalist-rasskazal-o-goneniyakh-na-inakomyslyaschikh-v-litve-33141911.html>

<sup>278</sup> <https://antifashist.com/item/vlasti-litvy-vyslali-zhurnalista-v-rossiyu-obviniv-ego-v-ugroze-nacbezopasnosti.html>

of the country. The reasons for the deportation were several factors. The fact that she honoured her Russian roots and headed for some time the Russian Cultural Center in Panevezys, which was closed down five years ago and was famous during the Soviet Union for its drama theatre and cultural life. In addition, in social networks she spoke out against the demolition of the monument to the soldiers of the USSR. Another reason could be the "wrong" political position of the woman, because when filling out the above described odious questionnaire in the migration interview V. Vatutina did not recognize Crimea as Ukrainian. However, the fact that the pensioner did not express her position on the territorial belonging of the peninsula in the manner required by the Lithuanian officialdom was sufficient for deportation. V. Vatutina answered to this question that she had no idea whose peninsula belonged to, as she had not been interested in politics for many years. At the same time, after the start of the Russian special military operation, the elderly woman has already been interrogated several times by Lithuanian security services. The first time was because of a denunciation by Ukrainians who did not like the portrait of Vladimir Putin in her house. She was summoned for questioning again because of a collage with her photo, which was made by an acquaintance of the pensioner on Victory Day. Apparently, she could be accused of the fact that the collage was dedicated to a "forbidden" holiday in Lithuania, and she herself was standing against the background of the USSR flag in the photo.<sup>279</sup>

Due to the tension and excitement during the consideration of the case on deprivation of the residence permit of V. Vatutina, the pensioner started having serious health problems. V. Vatutina also told the media that during the consideration of her case in court in Lithuania, medical organizations refused to operate on her.<sup>280</sup>

<sup>279</sup> <https://baltija.eu/2024/03/01/pensionerku-vydvoryayut-iz-litvy-za-podderzhku-rossii/>

<sup>280</sup> [https://spb.tsargrad.tv/news/ne-otvetila-na-dva-voprosa-kak-pozhilaja-russkaja-zhenshhina-stala-ugrozoi-nacbezopasnosti-litvy\\_985687](https://spb.tsargrad.tv/news/ne-otvetila-na-dva-voprosa-kak-pozhilaja-russkaja-zhenshhina-stala-ugrozoi-nacbezopasnosti-litvy_985687)

On 22 April 2024, the Supreme Administrative Court of Lithuania overturned the decision of the Migration Department to deport V. Vatutina. The court decision is final and cannot be appealed.<sup>281</sup>

The Lithuanian media emphasized the participation of the "intellectual" stratum of society in the "anti-war" movement. A special place in this was given to the publication of open letters from cultural and scientific figures in support of Ukraine, calling on Russian citizens to come out to protest actions and on Russian-speaking Lithuanians not to trust "Kremlin propaganda". One of the first to publish such a statement was the staff of the Department of Philology of Vilnius University together with the staff of the Pushkin Literature Museum in Vilnius.<sup>282</sup> In addition, Lithuanian media actively published "penitential" interviews of Russian-speaking citizens of the country, which also included calls for "anti-war" protests in Russia.<sup>283</sup>

Many cultural and artistic figures who refused to publicly condemn Russia's actions were also pressured. At the end of February 2022, Lithuanian Minister of Culture S. Kairis insisted on firing those employees of Lithuanian theatres who also perform in Russia. On his Facebook page he wrote, in particular, that "no performer from Russia will set foot in Lithuania". In addition, the Lithuanian authorities imposed a ban on concerts of a number of Russian performers, and local radio stations, following this unambiguous "signal", as a gesture of support for Ukraine, announced their refusal to broadcast Russian programs and music.<sup>284</sup>

Official Vilnius also imposed a number of other restrictions on Russian citizens residing in the country. Thus, in March 2024, the Lithuanian authorities did not allow organizing polling stations for the Russian presidential election in other Lithuanian cities, as it had been previously, but agreed only one polling station – the premises of the Consulate at the Russian Embassy. Accordingly, voting there was held on the same day, 17 March. Lithuanian policemen stood next

<sup>281</sup> <https://sputnik.lt/straipsnis/29086/>

<sup>282</sup> <https://www.delfi.lt/ru/news/live/kultura-protiv-voiny-russkaya-intelligenciya-litvy-osudila-dejstviya-kremlya-i-podderzhala-ukrainu.d?id=89570813>

<sup>283</sup> <https://www.delfi.lt/ru/opinions/comments/obraschenie-k-fanatam-putina-v-litve.d?id=89639411>

<sup>284</sup> <https://www.delfi.lt/ru/news/live/klajpedskaya-radiostanciya-otkazyvaetsya-ot-translyacii-rossijskoj-produkcii.d?id=89559861>

to Russian citizens waiting their turn to go to the Consulate, as well as journalists who took photos, recorded reports, interviewed Russian citizens, thus exerting an increased psychological influence on them. According to our compatriots, police officers with the chevrons of the Lithuanian Border Guard Service approached them and checked their documents, including Russian passports.<sup>285</sup>

Given all the efforts of the Lithuanian authorities to vilify and discriminate against everything related to Russia, manifestations of hatred and discrimination against Russian citizens and Russian-speaking residents of the country have been recorded since February 2022. The level of anti-Russian and Russophobic rhetoric has sharply increased, and these sentiments are being actively planted in society by efforts from above.

According to the human rights activist G. Grabauskas, in 2022, cases of threats to Russian-speaking residents became more frequent. It came to the point of smashing cars and attacking people in the streets.

Russians living in Lithuania, who until recently felt relatively comfortable at least in comparison with Estonian and Latvian "non-citizens", now speak about more frequent cases of threats against them, about their own broken cars and even about direct attacks in the streets.<sup>286</sup>

The NGO "Diversity Development Group" and the Ethnic Studies Department of the Sociological Institute at the Lithuanian Centre of Social Sciences conducted a survey in September 2022, which showed that hostility towards Russians is growing in the republic. 74.6 percent of respondents indicated that the attitude towards Russians living in Lithuania has significantly worsened or rather worsened over the last year.<sup>287</sup> According to the survey, 23.1 percent of Lithuanian residents would not want to rent their housing to Russians (9.9 percent in 2021), 13.6 percent would not want to work together with Russians at the same

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<sup>285</sup> <https://baltija.eu/2024/03/18/valerij-ivanov-vilenskij-vybory-prezidenta-rossii-v-litve/>

<sup>286</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/article/politika-i-obshchestvo/20231006-byut-i-po-pasportu-i-po-litsu-rusofobiya-v-pribaltike-ushla-v-narod/>

<sup>287</sup> <https://www.delfi.it/ru/news/live/diskussiya-kak-vojna-v-ukraine-izmenila-otnoshenie-k-russkim-v-litve.d?id=92372495>

workplace (4.5 percent in 2021). The head of the Department for National Minorities V. Montvidaite called such a trend "alarming and even dangerous".<sup>288</sup>

So far, radical Russophobic statements have been rejected in Lithuanian society. In February 2024, Lithuanian MEP S. Jakeliunas asked the General Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Lithuania to check the insulting statements of TV presenter A. Ramanauskas against the Russian-speaking residents of the Republic, made by him during one of the broadcasts in the Lithuanian media, for the presence of incitement to hatred. Ramanauskas, in particular, made the following statements: "The overwhelming majority of those who say that "it was better with the Russians" are animals" and "In Lithuania, from a quarter to a third of the people who should be exiled are all this collapsed cattle, the Soviet masses".<sup>289</sup>

Russophobic hysteria has also affected the sphere of culture as such. Lithuanian Prime Minister I. Šimonīte stated that Lithuanian society is "poisoned by Russian culture".<sup>290</sup> The head of the Ministry of Culture S. Kairis called for a "mental quarantine"<sup>291</sup> of Russian art. From the repertoires of theatres began to withdraw performances based on the works of Russian authors: Vilnius Old Theatre (until the summer of 2022 was called the Lithuanian Theatre of Russian Drama) excluded from its playbill productions based on V.M. Shukshin, P.V. Sanayev and others. Even the children's production "The Cat's House" based on the fairy tale play of the same name by S. Marshak was excluded.<sup>292</sup> The repertoire of the Lithuanian National Opera and Ballet Theatre was deprived of a number of ballets – Tchaikovsky's The Nutcracker, Prokofiev's Romeo and Juliet, Stravinsky's Sacred Spring.<sup>293</sup> Apparently, following the example of Ukraine, Lithuanian libraries began to remove books by Russian classics.

<sup>288</sup> <https://www.lrt.lt/ru/novosti/17/1834276/glava-departamenta-natsmen-shinstv-montvidaite-tendentsii-kasatel-no-russkikh-litvy-trevozhny-i-dazhe-opasny>

<sup>289</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/01022024-evrodeputat-pozhalovalsya-v-prokuraturu-izza-razzhiganiya-nenavisti-k-russkim-v-litve/>

<sup>290</sup> <https://www.lrt.lt/ru/novosti/17/1879425/shimonite-litovskoe-obshchestvo-otravleno-russkoi-kul-turoi>

<sup>291</sup> <https://www.lrt.lt/ru/novosti/17/1879258/ministr-kul-tury-mental-nyi-karantin-rossiiskikh-proizvedenij-byl-by-polezen-no-reshenie-ostaetsia-za-uchrezhdeniiami>

<sup>292</sup> <https://www.delfi.lt/ru/news/live/vilnyusskij-staryj-teatr-prodolzhaet-obnovlyat-svoj-repertuar.d?id:=92483767>

<sup>293</sup> <https://tass.ru/kultura/16795857>

Lithuanian publishing houses, which also publish printed products in Russian, were also subjected to harassment. For example, the White Swans publishing house, which publishes books in both Lithuanian and Russian, faced pressure. The army of this Baltic country has also joined the ranks of the most zealous censors. Thus, there is information that under the influence of the Department of Strategic Communications of the Lithuanian army books of this publishing house were withdrawn from libraries and stores.<sup>294</sup>

Manifestations of Russophobia became noticeable at the local level. For example, Russian tourists were denied access to the largest manor in the Baltics, Pakruojis.<sup>295</sup>

The xenophobic course of Vilnius is also fully manifested in the field of education. The legal provisions adopted in this area discriminate against representatives of national minorities, but the Russian-speaking inhabitants of the country are the most affected.

For fourteen years after the repeal of the Law on National Minorities (1989) in 2010, Lithuania was unable to develop new legislation, which was brought to the attention of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in its Concluding observations 2019.<sup>296</sup> In November 2024, the draft law on national minorities was approved by the Seimas. The document, according to Lithuanian experts, does not change the situation of national minorities, including not covering the use of their languages, especially in education. Moreover, the adopted law actually creates the basis for accelerated "assimilation" of national minorities and erasure of their identity.

The Advisory Committee of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (AC FCNM), functioning within the Council of Europe, noted the insufficient efforts of the authorities to mitigate the negative effects of

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<sup>294</sup> [https://news.rambler.ru/world/48627304/?utm\\_content=news\\_media&utm\\_medium=read\\_more&utm\\_source=copylink](https://news.rambler.ru/world/48627304/?utm_content=news_media&utm_medium=read_more&utm_source=copylink)

<sup>295</sup> <https://ru.euronews.com/travel/2022/08/21/lt-tourist-site-bans-russians>

<sup>296</sup> Concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination on the combined 9th and 10th periodic reports of Lithuania. June 2019  
[https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CERD%2fC%2fLTU%2fCO%2f9-10&Lang=ru](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CERD%2fC%2fLTU%2fCO%2f9-10&Lang=ru)



assimilation policies on students learning minority languages. It was emphasized, the 2011 Law on Education introduced Lithuanian as the only language of instruction in all schools and unified the state language exam in grades 10 and 12. This created significant difficulties for children belonging to national minorities, and an eight-year transition period began in 2012. Pupils from national minority schools taking the exam for the first time in 2013 were taught 818 fewer hours of Lithuanian than their Lithuanian school peers. The level of knowledge of the minority language is not taken into account in the final examinations. Only the results of Lithuanian language, mathematics and one foreign language (usually English) are important, while Polish or Russian can be taken only as an optional exam. Thus, the representatives of national minorities with the worst results in final examinations are in a less favourable position than Lithuanians in access to higher education.<sup>297</sup>

The number of hours of Lithuanian language instruction, as well as methodological aids and teaching materials are still insufficiently adapted to the needs of children from families where the languages of national minorities are mostly spoken. Many first-graders start learning the state language almost as a foreign language and experience severe overload caused by the requirements of the unified curriculum.

In addition, the number of Russian-language schools in the country is being reduced while the number of subjects taught in Lithuanian is being increased, and efforts are underway to fully equalize the requirements for the Lithuanian language matriculation exam for graduates of national minority schools and Lithuanian schoolchildren. As a result, in 2020, every fifth graduate of secondary education institutions teaching in languages other than the titular language failed to pass the state examination in Lithuanian, which prevents them from accessing free higher education. In 2021, the Lithuanian Ministry of Education, Science and Sports increased to 5 hours the compulsory teaching of Lithuanian language in preschool

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<sup>297</sup> Fourth Opinion of the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities on Lithuania. Adopted on 30 May 2018  
<https://rm.coe.int/4th-advisory-committee-opinion-on-lithuania-english-language-version/1680906d97>



institutions of national minorities and provided funding for the professional development of teachers who will teach Lithuanian to preschool children. The Ministry has set a long-term goal of eliminating the teaching of Russian.<sup>298</sup> To do this, it intends to reduce the number of students who want to study the subject and has urged Russians to change their qualifications, assuring that it will create such an opportunity for them, including by paying the costs of retraining. In 2022, a Russian language textbook for grade 6 was withdrawn from circulation because of "glorification of Russia." The publishers have also been instructed to recheck the content of other textbooks.<sup>299</sup>

In total, during the years of independence, the number of Russian schools decreased from 85 to 26. In September 2022, Kaunas renamed the Alexander Pushkin Gymnasium into Kaunas International Gymnasium. In September 2022, the Alexander Pushkin Gymnasium in Kaunas was renamed into Kaunas International Gymnasium because, according to the director of the educational institution, the new name "better corresponds to the list of services and specifications". Russian compatriots living in Lithuania are deprived of the opportunity to receive full-fledged higher education in their native language (limited opportunities are still available at the European University in Vilnius and at the Department of Russian Philology of Vilnius University).

The Lithuanian authorities do not intend to stop there. At the beginning of January 2024, Lithuanian Minister of Education, Science and Sports G. Yakstas announced that his ministry was looking for possible ways to close schools for Russian-speaking children in the country, assessing the Lithuanian legal framework for this purpose. The incident that took place at the end of December 2023 in a Russian-language school in Vilnius, when two teenagers shot their classmate with an air gun because of his political views, was used as a reason for this. G. Yakstas emphasized that if a school is established by a municipality, the founder can make decisions. But the Lithuanian Ministry of Education wants "to

<sup>298</sup> <https://lt.sputniknews.ru/20220829/v-litve-khotyat-otkazatsya-ot-prepodavaniya-russkogo-yazyka-v-shkolakh-24333577.html>

<sup>299</sup> <https://iz.ru.1396081/2022-09-15/v-litve-iziali-uchebnik-russkogo-iazyka-iz-za-proslavleniia-rf>

make decisions at the state level as well, so that schools for Russian national minorities start to disappear." He also stated that Russian-speaking "children grow up divided and it is more difficult for them to integrate in Lithuania". Therefore, according to G. Yakstas, "everyone will be better off if there are no schools for the Russian minority in the future".<sup>300</sup>

At the end of the same month, G. Yakstas also voiced the tactics being implemented by the Lithuanian authorities with regard to the study of the Russian language in Lithuanian schools. His statement implied that the Lithuanian authorities are betting on the gradual retirement of older generations of Russian teachers, while no new Russian teachers are being trained in Lithuania at all. In contrast, the country is intensively training teachers of other foreign languages. According to the Lithuanian education minister, this has already resulted in fewer and fewer children choosing Russian as a second foreign language. During the last two years, the number of pupils choosing to study Russian as a second foreign language has decreased from 20.3 thousand to 14.1 thousand. G. Yakstas expects that "if we keep such tendencies as we have today, the opportunities to choose the Russian language will be very limited, when a small part will be able to study Russian in several schools".<sup>301</sup> The words of this high-ranking functionary once again confirm that the Lithuanian ruling class does not intend to follow its international obligations and protect the rights of national minorities, on the contrary, it will continue to do everything to deprive them of these rights and thus try to erase their ethnic and linguistic identity.

It should be noted that a balanced opinion on this issue is also voiced in Lithuania. For example, A. Skaistgirytė, Senior Advisor to the President of Lithuania, criticized the proposal of the Minister of Education G. Yakštis to close Russian-language schools as described above. She recognized the existence of problems with integration of national minorities in Lithuania and pointed out that it

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<sup>300</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/04012024-minobrazovaniya-litvy-rassmatrivaet-vozmozhnost-zakrytiya-russkikh-shkol-v-strane/>

<sup>301</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/23012024-v-minobrazovaniya-litvy-raskryli-plany-po-vytesneniyu-russkogo-yazyka-iz-shkol/>

would be much more useful to discuss possible ways of their integration. According to her, "we should think not about how to abolish schools, but how to integrate the youth of national minorities into Lithuanian life. How to make sure that after finishing school young people have a good command of Lithuanian, so that they can pass the state language exam and integrate into life in full".<sup>302</sup>

The actual level of Russian language use is also indicated by the following fact. At the beginning of February 2024, it became clear that children from the families of Ukrainian refugees and representatives of the Belarusian opposition who found themselves in Lithuania were studying in Russian at Russian schools during their entire stay in the country. This information was made public by the deputy mayor of Vilnius A. Shileris, who stated the need to "change the model of education of such schoolchildren" and their transfer to education in the state language during the year. According to his data, in the Lithuanian capital, where mainly Ukrainians and Belarusians, who moved to Lithuania, are concentrated, about 11 thousand pupils study in Russian-language schools. In public and private schools throughout Lithuania there are up to 4 thousand of them.<sup>303</sup>

Following this, V. Sinitsa, a member of the Vilnius City Council and deputy head of the National Association party (not represented in the Lithuanian parliament), said that measures should be taken against the spread of the Russian language in Lithuania. He noted that the majority of migrants arriving in the Republic of Lithuania stay in Vilnius, because of which the Seimas is already discussing the population growth in the capital from 300 thousand to one million people. However, all of them in Vilnius will not speak Lithuanian, but Russian, "because the Russian language is the common denominator for all major countries of migration to Lithuania, and mostly to Vilnius: from Belarus to Uzbekistan – everyone speaks Russian". At the same time, the politician recognized that even in the current conditions it is possible to do without the Lithuanian language in

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<sup>302</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/09012024-sovetnik-prezidenta-litvy-raskritikovala-predlozhenie-o-zakrytii-russkikh-shkol-v-strane/>

<sup>303</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/05022024-v-litve-potrebovali-chtoby-deti-immigrantov-s-ukrainy-uchilis-na-litovskom/>

Lithuania: it is still possible to graduate from a Russian-language school, find a job without knowing Lithuanian, and, in addition, knowledge of Russian is still valued in the service sector in Vilnius.<sup>304</sup>

The negative political and informational background around the problem of education in the languages of national minorities in Lithuania has led to constant discussion of Russia's ideological influence on the Lithuanian population, interrogations of Russian school teachers by State Security Department officials in connection with students' trips to Russian summer camps, and proposals by some officials of the Republic of Lithuania to close these educational institutions.

Lithuanian national minorities, primarily Russian and Polish, also need protection of their rights in the authentic spelling of names in documents, as well as geographical names in their native languages. The Civil Code of the Republic of Lithuania stipulates that names, surnames and place names in documents shall be written in accordance with the rules of the Lithuanian language. This is contrary to Article 11 of the Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. According to the AC FCNM, the right to use a personal name in a national minority language and to have it officially recognized is a central linguistic right closely linked to personal identity and dignity.<sup>305</sup>

In this regard, persons with foreign names face legal problems and have to defend their rights in court. In January 2022, Vilnius did legalize the spelling of surnames using letters that are not in the Lithuanian alphabet, but the right to use diacritical symbols of foreign languages was not supported.<sup>306</sup>

Russophobic hysteria in Lithuania correlates with the manifestations of xenophobia that have been identified in the country by international human rights monitoring mechanisms. Profile international organizations have repeatedly recorded the persisting violations of national minorities and certain social groups in Lithuania. For example, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) noted the prevalence of prejudicial attitudes towards

<sup>304</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/13022024-v-litve-pridumali-kak-iskorenit-russkiy-yazyk-v-vilnyuse/>

<sup>305</sup> *ibid*

<sup>306</sup> <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/13456467>

members of vulnerable and minority groups, especially migrants, Muslims and Roma, "hate speech" and insults against them, including anti-Semitic statements in the media and on the Internet.<sup>307</sup>

The AC FCNM noted the insufficient efforts of the authorities to mitigate the negative effects of assimilation policies on minority language learners, as well as problems related to the ability of linguistic minorities to use their native tongues.<sup>308</sup>

Among other problems in the human rights sphere, international monitoring bodies cite deep-rooted prejudices against vulnerable and minority groups in Lithuania, especially migrants, Muslims, Roma and Jews. As noted by the UN Human Rights Committee, this has resulted in the widespread use of "hate speech", including in the media, including Internet sources, and in the political sphere.<sup>309</sup>

The international community remains concerned about the provisions of Lithuanian anti-discrimination legislation. Even the European Commission, generally lenient towards Vilnius' Russophobic tendencies, has noted that Lithuanian law provisions do not adequately integrate EU norms on criminalization of certain forms of hate speech inciting violence or hatred. Thus, liability for public connivance, denial or gross understatement of international crimes and the Holocaust in Lithuania is provided only in case of violation of

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<sup>307</sup> Concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination on the combined 9th and 10th periodic reports of Lithuania. June 2019

[https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CERD%2fC%2fLTU%2fCO%2f9-10&Lang=ru](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CERD%2fC%2fLTU%2fCO%2f9-10&Lang=ru)

<sup>308</sup> Fourth Opinion of the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities on Lithuania. Adopted on 30 May 2018

<https://rm.coe.int/4th-advisory-committee-opinion-on-lithuania-english-language-version/1680906d97>

<sup>309</sup> Concluding observations of the Human Rights Committee on the 4th periodic report on Lithuania. July 2018.

[https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CCPR%2fC%2fLTU%2fCO%2f4&Lang=ru](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CCPR%2fC%2fLTU%2fCO%2f4&Lang=ru)

Concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination on the combined 9th and 10th periodic reports of Lithuania. June 2019

[https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CERD%2fC%2fLTU%2fCO%2f9-10&Lang=ru](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CERD%2fC%2fLTU%2fCO%2f9-10&Lang=ru)

Fourth Opinion of the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities on Lithuania. Adopted on 30 May 2018

<https://rm.coe.int/4th-advisory-committee-opinion-on-lithuania-english-language-version/1680906d97>

public order and only if such acts are committed in the territory of Lithuania or against Lithuanian citizens.<sup>310</sup>

The FRA, referring to the data of the national authorities for 2021, also indicated that the number of complaints to the relevant authorities about manifestations of discrimination on the grounds of race and ethnicity had increased in Lithuania.

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<sup>310</sup> The EU Agency for Fundamental Rights. Fundamental Rights Report 2022  
[https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/fra-2022-fundamental-rights-report-2022\\_en.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2022-fundamental-rights-report-2022_en.pdf)

## **Luxembourg**

After the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation launched the special military operation (SMO) to demilitarize and denazify Ukraine and protect the civilians of Donbass, the authorities of the Duchy, including the former Prime Minister of the country, Xavier Bettel, and the former Foreign Minister, Jean Asselborn, have repeatedly publicly noted the inadmissibility of any discrimination against Russian citizens residing in Luxembourg, and made it clear to the local Ukrainian "activists" supporting radical views that in the event of non-compliance with this condition, the Government may review its refugee reception policy. Thus, the authorities took measures against the spread of Russophobia in the country.

Nevertheless, with the influx of radical Ukrainian refugees into the Duchy, the moral and psychological pressure on Russian fellow citizens has increased and manifested itself more vividly on social media and in educational institutions.

For example, numerous cases of bullying children from Russian-speaking families, including Ukrainian ones, were reported in schools of Luxembourg. In 2022, the local authorities, without any explanation, closed the Russian language courses for children and adults in Lycée Aline Mayrisch in Luxembourg, in Lycée Technique d'Ettelbruck, in Lycée Robert-Schuman in Luxembourg, and the evening courses at the mayor's offices of Esch-sur-Alzette and Differdange. However, it must be emphasized that two main private schools with teaching in Russian, "Kalinka" and "Tournesol", continued their work in the country.

Moreover, according to the Russian Embassy in Luxembourg, individuals with Slavic first names and family names experience difficulties in local banks. In particular, in these banks they face inappropriate terms of service and refusals to open an account, their transactions are groundlessly blocked, and transfers of their funds are hindered.

The situation around the Russian film "Cheburashka" in January 2023 is indicative in this respect. The management of local cinemas had to cancel its

screenings in the Duchy organized by Russian fellow citizens, due to the threats received as well as the pressure from the Ukrainian activists.

In 2024, no serious incidents of discrimination on the grounds of ethnic origin against Russians were reported.



## **Malta**

The Russian community in Malta consists of about 7,000 to 8,000 people, which, as a percentage of the population of the Republic, (according to the Maltese National Statistics Office, as of December 2023, there were 563,000 people living in the country) makes up one of the largest foreign expatriate communities.

The majority of the Russian community consists of Russians and representatives of the titular nations of the former USSR republics (Ukrainians, Belarusians, etc.) who live dispersedly all over the country, including Gozo.

A large category is made up of highly skilled professionals whom Malta has been recruiting since 2010 in online gaming, financial services, assisted reproductive technology and aviation sectors.

Another group includes applicants for Maltese citizenship by investment (the so-called "Malta Individual Investor Program").

Since March 2022, Valletta has suspended the golden passport scheme for Russians and Belarusians.

The Russian community is deeply integrated into the local society and actively engages in public life, it makes a noticeable contribution to the social and economic development of Malta, which is also noted by the Maltese authorities. There are no conflicts on ethnic grounds between Russian compatriots and local residents.

It should be noted that since the very beginning of the special military operation local politicians have not supported Russophobic tendencies and used conciliatory language towards the large Russian community. In particular, in April 2022, Prime Minister Robert Abela publicly declared the "unacceptability of xenophobia towards Russians and Russian-speaking people living in the country."

Despite the lack of interest of the Maltese authorities in the escalation of internal inter-ethnic conflicts, after the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation started the special military operation for denazification and demilitarization of Ukraine and protection of Donbass civilians, the Russian Embassy in Malta

recorded regular cases of hostile acts against Russians, mostly by local NGOs and members of the Ukrainian expatriate community which significantly expanded in 2022-2023. Few anti-Russian actions in Malta (including near the Russian Embassy) organized by them between March and May 2022, took place without incident and in the presence of the police.

In 2024, there were no records of public rebukes against Russians.

At the same time, some compatriots continue to face problems in the banking sector related to the freezing of accounts and financial transactions, although in a lesser extent than in 2022. Some compatriots living in Malta on short-term permits complain about delays in the issuance of documents, up to 3-4 months in some cases. All this time, Russian citizens have to live with their accounts being blocked due to the absence of a valid ID card. It is difficult to get a long-term residence permit for Russians.

Since March 2022, access to Russian satellite TV channels and the Internet resources of Russia's leading news agencies (RT, RIA Novosti, TASS, etc.) has been blocked in the country in accordance with the EU's unlawful sanctions measures and in violation of freedom of expression and freedom of the media.

As a consequence, there are currently no Russian-language media in Malta. The quarterly magazine "My Malta" and the monthly magazine "Maltese Herald" closed down after the beginning of the special military operation. Under these circumstances, the Russian Embassy and the Russian Centre for Science and Culture shifted to social networks. Various types of information are regularly shared with compatriots through social networks and Telegram channels. Information materials on the work of the Russian Centre for Science and Culture and the situation in Malta are periodically published for a wide audience on the Dzen platform.

Since March 2022, there have been reports about individual cases of inappropriate behaviour against Russian-speaking children in local schools. The Russian Embassy, in contact with compatriots and local authorities, promptly took necessary measures to resolve the problem. As a result of this work, the Ministry

for Education of Malta brought recommendations on interaction with Russian-speaking students to the attention of the administration of educational institutions, which improved the situation significantly.

During the year 2024, the Russian Embassy has received no complaints from compatriots about harassment by the Maltese authorities or the local people.

## Moldova

Moldova is increasingly sliding towards supporting neo-Nazism ideologies and racial discrimination. The invariable pro-European course of the Moldovan leadership headed by Maia Sandu implies a complete break of historical and cultural ties with Russia. Taking advantage of the events in Ukraine, the collective West continues its persistent attempts to draw Moldova into the coalition of ardent Russophobes. In addition to condemning the Russian special operation and calling for an end to the hostilities, the Moldovan authorities have verbally committed themselves to European integration and constitutional neutrality. In reality, however, a totalitarian regime is beginning to take shape.

The official Chisinau, under the direction of Western curators, is copying the policies of the nationalist regimes in Ukraine and the Baltics, which are based on Russophobia and neanderthal anti-Sovietism of the Cold War. Such policies are fostering the idea in society that it is absolutely right to confront Russia, now or in the past, including the USSR, and establishing an artificial equivalence between the concepts of "Russia", "communism" and "fascism".

What is happening in Moldova today is almost identical to what has happened in Ukraine. The Sandu regime, like Vladimir Zelensky and Petr Poroshenko before him, "on its way to European integration" seeks to "cancel" an entire period of its own country's history by totalitarian methods, destroying the Soviet heritage, including all manifestations of the culture of national minorities.<sup>311</sup> To this end, the government of the country makes every effort to break the historical ties between Russia and Moldova, whose cultures are mutually close, and to eradicate everything Russian in its territory. Moreover, for the sake of joining the EU (or Romania, as many experts believe), the Moldovan authorities are even demonstrating their willingness to destroy the country's national – Moldovan – identity by misrepresenting it as Romanian.

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<sup>311</sup> Украинская пропаганда вместо Пушкина: в Молдове взят курс на тотальную русофобию. [Pushkin Substituted with Ukrainian Propaganda: Moldova on a Course to Total Russophobia.] RuBaltic. 12 March 2023 <https://www.rubaltic.ru/article/politika-i-obshchestvo/20230312-ukrainskaya-propaganda-vmesto-pushkina-kulturnaya-politika-v-moldove-stroitsya-na-rusofobii/>

The Republic of Moldova continues to witness attacks against the historical memory of the Great Patriotic War, and revisionist pro-Western tendencies are getting stronger and stronger. Radicals from among the supporters of the liquidation of Moldovan statehood and accession to Romania have recently become much more active. Against this background, the Republic's attempts to glorify Nazism and its accomplices in order to "whitewash" them in the public consciousness are becoming increasingly clear. Romania erects monuments to the Romanian military and upgrades cemeteries of Romanian soldiers who fought on Hitler's side. The unveiling of such monuments is accompanied by military honours. In addition, there are also cases of changing the messages that monuments convey.

At the same time, there are reports of acts of desecration of Soviet monuments. Despite the existing relevant provisions on punishment for vandalism in Moldovan legislation, no one has ever been prosecuted for such offences.<sup>312</sup>

The unequal status of different ethnic groups in Moldova is also connected with the imposition of the ideas of Romanization of the state. The pro-Romanian radicals, who are still few in number, are more visible in the Moldovan information space than the apologists for Moldovan statehood and the supporters of closer relations with Russia. The unionists freely propagate their ideals, demanding the unification of Moldova with Romania and accusing Russia of occupying the country. However, in the context of the anti-Russian line pursued by the authorities, Russian-speaking residents, primarily our fellow citizens, in many cases feel constrained, fearing "to unnecessarily aggravate the situation". The groups themselves are few in number, yet their presence in the media space contributes to social tensions and is also used by the right-wing liberal opposition to destabilize the situation and divide society.

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<sup>312</sup> For detailed information on the whitewashing of Romanian supporters of Nazism in Moldova, erection of monuments to them and destruction of memorials in honour of Soviet soldiers, who lost their lives in the battles to liberate the country from Nazism, refer to the Ministry's regular report "Regarding the Situation with the Glorification of Nazism and the Spread of Neo-Nazism and Other Practices That Contribute to Fuelling Contemporary Forms of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance".

Experts and public figures have been pointing to the rise of xenophobia and intolerance in Moldova. On 27 January 2024, for example, former Moldovan president Igor Dodon, speaking at a flower-laying ceremony at the monument to the victims of fascism, said that there were increasing attempts to divide the country's population on the basis of language and other characteristics, and that it was necessary to fight against this.<sup>313</sup> Ethnic discrimination also surfaced during the campaign for the Moldovan presidential elections and the referendum on EU membership in October 2024. This included xenophobic attacks by pro-government activists against Alexandr Stoianoglo, Maia Sandu's rival for the country's top post, referring to his Gagauz ethnic origin.<sup>314</sup>

Of particular concern are the authorities' moves to revise language laws, reduce the use of Russian, and restrict Russian-language broadcasting. Experts estimate that over one million people in the country regularly speak Russian in everyday life (out of a population of around 2.4 million).

According to Article 13 of Moldova's Constitution, "The State shall acknowledge and protect the right to the preservation, development and usage of the Russian language and other languages spoken within the territory of the country". However, the 1989 Law "On the Functioning of Languages in the Territory of the Moldovan SSR" was declared "obsolete and useless" by a decision of the Moldovan Constitutional Court on 4 June 2018. This fundamental legislative act established Moldovan as the state language, while simultaneously considering Russian as a means of inter-ethnic communication.

In December 2020, the "Law on the Functioning of Languages in the Republic of Moldova", drafted on the initiative of Igor Dodon, was adopted. According to the law, Russian was assigned the status of a language of inter-ethnic communication, and all official documents and names of public institutions of the country were to be duplicated in Russian. At the same time, the president approved

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<sup>313</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/27012024-eksprezident-moldovy-schitaet-chto-zhiteley-respubliki-vse-chashche-pytayutsya-razdelit/>

<sup>314</sup> <https://eadaily-com.turbopages.org/turbo/eadaily.com/s/ru/news/2024/10/29/v-moldavii-storonniki-sandu-po-evropeyski-izbivayut-agitatorovostoyanoglo-psrm>

amendments to the legislation returning Russian news, analytical programs and talk shows to the Moldovan television (their broadcasting had also been banned in 2018 under the pretext of combating propaganda; whereas it was repeatedly noted that before the ban on the broadcasting of Russian TV channels, they had been watched by the majority of Moldovans).

However, as early as January 2021, a month after its adoption, the country's Constitutional Court declared it unconstitutional at the request of MPs of the Action and Solidarity party, thus depriving the Russian language of the status of an inter-ethnic language of communication.

Meanwhile, the status of Russian as an inter-ethnic language of communication was confirmed in 2023 by the Advisory Committee of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (AC FCNM), which operates within the Council of Europe.<sup>315</sup>

The important status of Russian as an inter-ethnic language of communication was also confirmed by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in April 2024.<sup>316</sup>

According to open source information, there are currently 1,218 public and private schools in Moldova. 202 of them offer instruction in Russian, which makes up 16.5 percent of the total number of national general education institutions. At the same time, during the academic year 2021/2022, 19.3 percent of all students received education in Russian (80.6 percent did in Romanian and 0.1 percent in other languages).<sup>317</sup>

The efforts of the Moldovan authorities have affected not only schooling but also higher education institutions. Maia Sandu's regime, considering there were too many universities in the country, announced another "reform" to unite them which

<sup>315</sup> Fifth opinion of the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities on Moldova, adopted on 7 June and published on 18 October 2023. <https://rm.coe.int/5th-op-moldova-en/1680acf5c8>

<sup>316</sup> Concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination on the combined twelfth to fourteenth periodic reports of Moldova. April 2024. [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CERD%2FC%2FMDA%2FCO%2F12-14&Lang=ru](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CERD%2FC%2FMDA%2FCO%2F12-14&Lang=ru)

<sup>317</sup> Fifth opinion of the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities on Moldova. Adopted on 7 June 2023, published on 18 October 2023. <https://rm.coe.int/5th-op-moldova-en/1680acf5c8>

left 11 universities instead of 16. In July 2024, local media reported the suspension of the activities of the Slavic University due to the refusal of the Ministry of Education and Research of Moldova to grant the university accreditation to teach Bachelor's and Master's degree programmes.<sup>318</sup>

This activity has yet another dimension. Under the guise of the so-called "reform of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Moldova" the alienation of dozens of hectares of land from public property was started as well. Some of the property privatized by the government from the Academy of Sciences as a result of the so-called research reform was put up for sale.

The education system reform in Moldova has led to a decrease in the overall level of education of the population and contributed to the transformation of the younger Moldovan generation into migrants for the needs of the Western market, since the lack of educational opportunities is prompting young people to leave the country.

The UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination pointed in 2024 to the reports of the lack of progress in ensuring that members of ethnic minority groups could access education in their mother tongue, the low qualification level of qualified teachers and the inadequate resources allocated to schools where mother-tongue education is offered.<sup>319</sup>

There are some cases where young people's minds are being manipulated in Moldova's general education institutions. Some photos on the Internet, for example, show an information stand at a high school in Chisinau equating the concepts of "communism" and "fascism" and comparing Stalin and Hitler.

In addition, it has become clear that the Moldovan authorities are seeking to artificially diminish the importance of the Russian language and, at the same time, of the Russian-speaking community, by giving greater importance to the Ukrainian community, which the Moldovan authorities claim to be the numerically largest

<sup>318</sup> Slavic University Suspends its Activities. 8 July 2024. <https://noi.md/ru/obshchestvo/slavyanskiy-universitet-priostanavlivaet0svoyu-deyatelnosti>

<sup>319</sup> Concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination on the combined twelfth to fourteenth periodic reports of Moldova. April 2024.

[https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CERD%2FC%2FMDA%2FCO%2F12-14&Lang=ru](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CERD%2FC%2FMDA%2FCO%2F12-14&Lang=ru)



minority group in the country, and, consequently, to the Ukrainian language. As far as the language is concerned, there are plans to increase the number of schools with Ukrainian as a medium of instruction. Such plans have been reported by the AC FCNM, among others.<sup>320</sup>

In this context, it is no surprise that the Russian-speaking population of the country continues facing discrimination at the national level. It has to be stated that our fellow citizens living in Moldova, as well as Russian-speaking residents in general, often face difficulties when it comes to guaranteeing their rights to access to public service, to choose the language of education and training, and to freely obtain information in their mother tongue. This negative trend has become particularly strong in recent years in light of the increasing adherence of the Moldovan authorities to the instructions of their Western handlers. The experts are alarmed over the authorities' actions on revising the language legislation, reducing the use of Russian language, and limiting broadcasts in Russian.

The refusal of civil servants to communicate in Russian or to accept applications in Russian is widespread, and there are domestic conflicts on linguistic grounds. The state authorities, the Agency for Inter-Ethnic Relations and the Agency for the Prevention of Discrimination designed to combat such manifestations distance themselves from performing such functions, citing an alleged lack of authority.

In April 2024, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination raised the issue of Moldovan state bodies refusing to use the Russian language. The Committee, for example, highlighted discrimination in accessing employment, participating in elections, obtaining public information and accessing justice owing to restrictions imposed on using, and the refusal of public authorities to use, Russian, despite the protection granted for the use of Russian and other languages pursuant to Article 13 of the Constitution and the guarantee, contained in Article 12 of the Act on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National

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<sup>320</sup> Fifth opinion of the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities on Moldova. Adopted on 7 June, published on 18 October 2023. <https://rm.coe.int/5th-op-moldova-en/1680acf5c8>

Minorities and the Legal Status of their Organizations, that Russian may be used to communicate with public institutions and submit complaints. The Moldovan authorities were recommended to ensure the use and protection of the languages used by ethnic minority groups, particularly Russian as an inter-ethnic communication language, including special measures addressing intersectional inequalities among the members of ethnic minority groups.<sup>321</sup>

An incident in Republican Clinical Hospital with a doctor who refused to treat a Russian-speaking patient and expressed desire to kill Russians caused a wide response. A video went viral on social networks where Eduard Chernolev, otolaryngologist (ear, nose and throat specialist) at a medical centre, refused to operate on a Russian-speaking patient simply because she had greeted him in Russian. On top of that, he said he wanted to "take a Kalashnikov and shoot" the patient because she was "an enemy right away". Although the hospital's management condemned the actions of the doctor who blatantly violated professional ethics and promised to take punitive measures against him, many officials in the country supported this manifestation of racism. Moldavian Health Minister Ala Nemerenco, for example, spoke in defense of the doctor and also quoted another Nazi – Octavian Goga, Prime Minister of Romania in 1937-1938, who defended the exclusive right of "ethnically right Romanians" to live in Romania and deprived a quarter of a million Romanian Jews of citizenship. Igor Sharov, former Minister of Education and current Rector of country's leading university – Moldova State University, – took a picture with Eduard Chernolev and posted it on his social networks as a token of support.<sup>322</sup>

Media outlets have drawn attention to the fact that many high-profile cases of Russophobia in Moldova are directly linked to the currently ruling Action and Solidarity party. For example, Oazu Nantoi, a deputy of the party, speaking in

<sup>321</sup> Concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination on the combined twelfth to fourteenth periodic reports of Moldova. April 2024.  
[https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CERD%2FC%2FMDA%2FCO%2F12-14&Lang=ru](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CERD%2FC%2FMDA%2FCO%2F12-14&Lang=ru)

<sup>322</sup> Русских учеников называют скотами: 5 вопиющих случаев русофобии в Молдове. [Russian Students Labelled as Cattle: 5 Blatant Cases of Russophobia in Moldova.] RuBaltic. 31 July 2023.  
<https://www.rubaltic.ru/article/politika-i-obshchestvo/20230731-russkikh-uchenikov-nazyvayut-skotami-5-vopiyushchikh-sluchaev-rusofobii-v-moldove/>

early June 2023 on a pro-government TV channel, said: "Russia is a state with a lot of internal problems, with a defective genetic code, and Russia will not be a threat only when... and that's where I'm going to stop so I don't cross the line." Lidia Guzun, advisor to the mayor's office of Magdacesti village and Criuleni district from the ruling party, posted a text on her social media, entitled "Why don't we deport Russians?" where she noted that "we will not kill their children, let them just leave". Following extensive media coverage, the post vanished from the social network, but its screenshots are still available. In July 2021, Maia Sandu congratulated Moldovan writer Vladimir Besleaga, known for his Russophobic views, on his jubilee. In particular, at a rally of the DA Platform and the Action and Solidarity parties in May 2015, Vladimir Besleaga openly said that Moldova needed to clean itself of "Russian dirt".

In 2023, supporters of the liquidation of Moldovan statehood held several rallies in support of the unification of Moldova with Romania, displaying not only Romanian flags, but also symbols of Azov<sup>323</sup>, Ukrainian nationalist battalion, and the effigy of Ion Antonescu.<sup>324</sup>

There was yet another high-profile case in November 2012, when Victor Kravchenko, geography teacher at a technical college in Balti (second largest city in Moldova with over half of its residents being Russian speakers), insulted his students with Russian last names, during class, by labeling them "cattle" who had turned the city into a pigsty, and called for "booting Russians out". The Administrative Council of the college decided to fire the teacher for resorting to physical and psychological violence. Special Commission of the staff meeting also concluded that such a teacher has no moral right to work with children. However, after the Chisinau officials from the Ministry of Education had intervened, Viktor Kravchenko resigned of his own accord.<sup>325</sup>

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<sup>323</sup> <https://eadaaily.com/ru/news/2023/03/26/blizki-po-duhu-moldavskie-unionisty-mitinguyut-pod-flagom-ukrainskih-nacikov>

<sup>324</sup> <https://eadaaily.com/ru/news/2023/12/01/v-moldavii-unionisty-otmetili-den-rumynii-s-portretom-posobnika-gitlera>

<sup>325</sup> Ibid.

In June 2023, Vasile Soimaru, deputy from the Action and Solidarity party, when reporting to the Council for Preventing and Eliminating Discrimination and Ensuring Equality, suggested fining fellow deputies for making speeches in Russian.<sup>326</sup> In October 2023, Diana Karaman, a candidate for the mayor of Chisinau from the Communist Party, was denied participation in televised debates for using the Russian language.

In April 2024, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination pointed to a number of problems related to the spread of hateful ideologies in Moldova. The Committee also noted the fact that Moldova's legislative framework did not contain provisions that expressly criminalized racist hate speech and hate crimes, such as all dissemination of ideas based on racial or ethnic superiority or hatred by whatever means, incitement to contempt or discrimination against certain individuals, and did not include all the grounds of discrimination recognized in Article 1 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, particularly descent. In addition, the Committee expressed concern over the spread of racial discrimination, racist hate speech, hate crimes and the dissemination of negative stereotypes of members of ethnic minority groups. The Committee highlighted the use of racist hate speech by politicians, particularly at the local level.<sup>327</sup>

Concern over the situation of the Russian-speaking population was expressed in 2017 by the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights that noted that since the 2012 amendments to the law on identity documents the national passport system had failed to fully recognize the names of persons belonging to ethno-linguistic minority groups, particularly Russian minorities.<sup>328</sup>

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<sup>326</sup> Депутат правящей в Молдове партии предложил штрафовать говорящих на русском языке. [Deputy of Moldovan Ruling Party Suggested Fining Those Speaking Russian.] RuBaltic. 23 June 2023 <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/23062023-deputat-pravyashchey-partii-v-moldove-predlozhit-shtrafovat-govoryashchikh-na-russkom-yazyke/>

<sup>327</sup> Concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination on the combined twelfth to fourteenth periodic reports of Moldova. April 2024. [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CERD%2FC%2FMDA%2FCO%2F12-14&Lang=ru](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CERD%2FC%2FMDA%2FCO%2F12-14&Lang=ru)

<sup>328</sup> Concluding observations of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on the third periodic report of Moldova. October 2017.

ECRI, in its 2021 Conclusions on the implementation of recommendations in respect of the Republic of Moldova subject to interim follow-up, pointed to the prevalence of discrimination and the ineffectiveness of the Moldovan relevant authorities in combating this phenomenon.<sup>329</sup>

According to Ethnobarometer Moldova 2020, a study developed with financial support from the office of the High Commissioner on National Minorities, Russians experience the most significant level of discrimination in the labour market, while the Gagauz feel more discriminated against in the health sector. People belonging to the Roma community experience discrimination in every sphere of life, especially in communications with public officials, health care and employment. They find it challenging to file complaints with law enforcement authorities, including owing to mistrust and lack of knowledge on the legal and institutional framework for combating discrimination.<sup>330</sup>

Complaints from Russian-speaking residents of the republic to lawyers of compatriots' organizations most often concerned violations of the right to use the Russian language when contacting the authorities, including courts, and widespread cases of selling medicines without instructions in Russian, as well as the lack of information in Russian in medical institutions.

The Russian Embassy in Chisinau also receives by e-mail complaints from Russian-speaking citizens reporting discrimination, when contacting state and municipal institutions, because Moldovan public officials refuse to communicate in Russian or consider citizens' written applications in Russian.

Russian is being replaced by the Moldovan authorities not only in the media. On 1 December 2022, parliament of Moldova adopted, in the second reading, amendments to the Electoral Code stipulating that ballot papers would be issued exclusively in the state language, whereas they may be printed in Russian only at

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[https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=E/C.12/MDA/CO/3&Lang=En](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=E/C.12/MDA/CO/3&Lang=En)

<sup>329</sup> Conclusion of the European Commission against Intolerance and Racism on the implementation of recommendations by Moldova. Adopted on 30 March 2021. Published on 18 May 2021. <https://rm.coe.int/ecri-conclusions-on-the-implementation-of-the-recommendations-in-respe/1680a27d9c>

<sup>330</sup> CIVIS Centre for Sociological, Political and Psychological Analysis. Ethnobarometer Moldova 2020. [https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/0/7/505306\\_0.pdf](https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/0/7/505306_0.pdf)

the request of local election commissions. For the November 2023 general local elections, 6 million ballot papers were printed in the state language and only 1.6 million in Russian; and for the October 2024 presidential election and European Union accession referendum, 2.09 million ballot papers were printed in the state language and 631,900 in Russian.<sup>331</sup> In addition, the appointment of members of the Moldovan CEC has been altered. Their number has been reduced from nine to seven, and they are now appointed by the president, parliament, government and the Superior Council of Magistracy. All these bodies are currently controlled by the ruling Action and Solidarity party.

International human rights agencies criticized these changes. OSCE and CoE line bodies adopted a joint opinion on the issue published in October 2022.<sup>332</sup> It stressed, in particular, that the issuance of ballot papers exclusively in the state language "threatens to adversely affect the electoral participation of national minorities by reducing the possibility of making an informed choice, especially in the case of referendums, when there may be multiple questions." The Moldovan authorities received a recommendation that in localities where minorities represent a certain percent of the population, ballot papers and the relevant voter information be produced in both the state language and the languages spoken by national minorities. AC FCNM also expressed concern over this legislative change in 2023.<sup>333</sup>

One striking example amidst the continuing artificial derussification of the country is the decision of the Moldovan authorities to change the abbreviated name of Chisinau International Airport from KIV to RMO starting from 18 January 2024 – allegedly for the purpose of "shedding the Soviet legacy" and "strengthening Moldova's national identity".<sup>334</sup> In addition, pro-government

<sup>331</sup> Telegram Channel Moldova Libera. 3 October 2024. <https://t.me/moldovalibera/21102>

<sup>332</sup> Opinion No. 10932022 OSCE/ODIHR Opinion No. ELE-MDA/444/2022. Strasbourg / Warsaw, 24 October 2022. CDL-AD(2022)025. [https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD\(2022\)025](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD(2022)025)

<sup>333</sup> Fifth opinion of the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities on Moldova. Adopted on 7 June, published on 18 October 2023. <https://rm.coe.int/5th-op-moldova-en/1680acf5c8>

<sup>334</sup> <https://eadaily.com/ru/news/2023/12/19/aeroport-kishineva-izbavilsya-ot-russkogo-nazvaniya>

activists are calling for the renaming of urban infrastructure in the Moldovan capital, i.e. the Moskovsky Prospekt, St Petersburg Square and Pushkin Street.

In early July 2024, the ruling Action and Solidarity party suggested that all languages other than Romanian be removed from the document flow of the Moldovan parliament. The Action and Solidarity party introduced the proposal in the draft Code on the Organization and Functioning of the Parliament, which is to replace the current regulations.<sup>335</sup>

According to the regulations, "the draft legislative act shall be submitted in Romanian, together with a translation into Russian", and according to the draft Code, strictly and only "in Romanian".

The Moldovan government's true attitude towards the rights of both Russian-speaking population and other national minorities is clear from the answer of Moldovan Minister of Finance Dumitru Budianschi to a question asked during a parliamentary discussion on the issue of financing the schools instructing in minority languages on 12 December 2022. He suggested "solving the issue" of inadequate funding of such schools by switching them to instruction in the state language. He claimed that the load on schools instructing in different languages could be easily reduced by switching them to instruction in Romanian.<sup>336</sup>

Alongside the fight against the Russian language, a trend towards instilling everything Romanian and rejecting its own Moldovan identity is gaining strength in Moldova. We can say that the course towards the development of a national identity, allegedly suppressed during the Soviet period, is in fact but a dismissal of the Moldovan identity in favour of the Romanian identity; and thus, gaining independence and proclaiming the Republic of Moldova are a transitional period towards the absorption of Moldova by neighbouring Romania. All the more so because the processes related to the "renaissance of national self-consciousness" in

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<sup>335</sup> Moldova's Ruling Party Suggests Removing Russian from Document Flow. RuBaltic. 10 July 2024. <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/09072024-pravyashchaya-partiya-moldovy-predlozhila-isklyuchit-russkiy-yazyk-iz-dokumentooborota/>

<sup>336</sup> Глава Минфина Молдовы предложил перевести русскоязычные школы на румынский язык. [Moldovan Finance Minister Proposes to Switch Russian-Language Schools to Instructing in Romanian.] RuBaltic. 13 December 2022. <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/13122022-glava-minfina-moldovy-predlozhil-perevesti-russkoyazychnye-shkoly-na-rumynskiy-yazyk/>

Moldova have taken place under the supervision of the Romanian special services; and over the years, their influence on political processes in the country has only increased. Currently, Moldova's leadership consists nearly entirely of Romanian citizens: head of state Maia Sandu, the heads of government and parliament, members of parliament and ministers, judges and many senior state officials are holders of Romanian passports. Given this fact, experts are not surprised that the Moldovan authorities' efforts focus on eradicating the Moldovan identity and replacing it with the Romanian identity under the motto of European integration.<sup>337</sup>

Actions taken by state officials only increase the experts' concerns over the concept of the Romanian expansion in Moldova. For example, on 24 March 2023, a law on referring to the official language in Moldova as Romanian, rather than Moldovan, entered into force. Under this law, the wording "Moldovan language" in any grammatical form is to be replaced with the "Romanian language". Moreover, the amendment has been introduced into the Constitution as well, although usually this requires a referendum.<sup>338</sup> Speaking on one of the Moldovan TV channels on 21 November 2023, president Maia Sandu called the existence of the notion of "Moldovan language" in the recent past nothing else than a "disgrace".<sup>339</sup>

Experts point out that such initiatives are largely artificial since, according to the 2014 census in Moldova, only 7 percent of the population identified themselves as Romanians, while 75 percent, as Moldovans. 24 percent named the Romanian language as their native tongue, while the Moldovan language, 54 percent.<sup>340</sup>

According to an opinion poll conducted in May 2024, this trend has continued: almost 72 percent of respondents identified themselves as Moldovans,

<sup>337</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/article/politika-i-obshchestvo/20240301-pervyy-den-vesny-prevratilsya-v-tikhiy-bunt-moldavan-protiv-rumynizatsii/>

<sup>338</sup> Moldova's State Language Officially Renamed. RIA Novosti. 24 March 2023. <https://ria.ru/20230324/moldaviya-1860296278.html>

<sup>339</sup> Молдавский Вагон. [Moldovan Vagon.] 22 November 2023. <http://t.me/mv6566/21856>

<sup>340</sup> Sandu is Implementing the Western Scenario of Romania's Absorption of Moldova. RuBaltic. 11 December 2022. <https://www.rubaltic.ru/cifrobalt/20221211-sandu-realizuet-stsenariy-zapada-po-pogloshcheniyu-moldovy-rumyniye/>



while 11 percent considered themselves Romanians. At the same time, 30 percent said they spoke Romanian at home, and 44 percent spoke Moldovan.<sup>341</sup>

The Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities pointed out that the second dominant language in the Republic of Moldova was Russian: nearly all of the Russian, half of the Ukrainian and a third of the Gagauz and Bulgarian respondents to Ethnobarometer Moldova 2020 identified Russian as their first language, while the rest considered their ethnic group's language to be their first language. Bilingualism or multilingualism among national minorities in Moldova means that they speak both their "mother tongue" and Russian, not Moldovan (currently referred to as "Romanian"). The overwhelming majority of national minority respondents studied at schools with Russian as a medium of instruction. 70 percent of Gagauz prefer Russian as the language of instruction at school. Only about one third of respondents belonging to other national minorities opt for the Romanian (Moldovan) language. About a fifth of all respondents want the Russian language to be the second school language. In other words, these data point to the fact that everyone wants their children to live and study in a more diverse linguistic environment than the current one.<sup>342, 343</sup>

The Moldovan authorities pursue a course of destroying any form of dissent in the country, using totalitarian censorship methods to purge the national information space of the last pockets of alternative viewpoints. In line with the tradition of the "collective West", in early 2022, the Moldovan government began to "clean-up" the country's media space from the Russian-language press. By decision of the Security and Intelligence Service of Moldova (SIS), on 26 February 2022, the "Sputnik Moldova" news agency was shut down, and access to its website blocked. On 13 September 2023, Vitaly Denisov, head of the Sputnik Moldova news agency, was deported. Later, similar restrictions were imposed on the websites of a number of other Russian and Russian-language Moldovan media

<sup>341</sup> Just 11 Percent of Moldovans Identify Themselves as Romanians. Strategic Culture Foundation. 24 May 2024. <https://www.fondsk.ru/news/2024/05/24/tolko-11-moldavan-nazyvayut-sebya-rumynami.html>

<sup>342</sup> Fifth opinion of the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities on Moldova. Adopted on 7 June, published on 18 October 2023. <https://rm.coe.int/5th-op-moldova-en/1680acf5c8>

<sup>343</sup> CIVIS Centre for Sociological, Political and Psychological Analysis. Ethnobarometer Moldova 2020. [https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/0/7/505306\\_0.pdf](https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/0/7/505306_0.pdf)

outlets. The Russian-language websites Gagauznews and Regional Trends Analytics were blocked as well. Other news and analytical outlets (RTR-Moldova and NTV-Moldova) were subjected to serious financial sanctions. Hundreds of journalists from these news outlets were left unemployed at the will of the politicians.

It is noteworthy that the Moldovan authorities have demonstrated resolve to take the most stringent measures to prevent the emergence in the country of any viewpoints alternative to the official position. For example, the state of emergency regime, in force from 24 February 2022 to 31 December 2023, imposed a number of restrictions, including a ban on holding mass socio-political events of any kind. However, this failed to prevent protests from being held regularly outside the Embassy of Russia in Chisinau, which disrupted the work of the Russian diplomatic mission. On top of that, children and minors take part in such rallies, which is prohibited by law. However, the police and carabinieri, whose duty is to protect the Embassy, pay no attention to the violations. Besides, in February 2024, the Russian Centre of Science and Culture in Chisinau was smeared with red paint, but the incident has not been investigated so far, nor the perpetrators have been brought to justice, despite the fact that they were identified immediately upon viewing the CCTV footage.

The Russophobic attitude of Maia Sandu's regime and the Action and Solidarity party has had an adverse impact on the ability of Russians on both banks of the Dnester (or Nistru) river, where more than 220,000 people hold Russian passports, to exercise their right to participate in elections. During presidential elections held in the previous years, Russian nationals staying in the territory of the country had no problems expressing their will. For instance, during the 2018 election, 27 polling stations were opened. Maia Sandu's government deliberately slowed down the opening of polling stations, thus once again violating the rights of Transnistrian residents.

As early as November 2023, the Russian Embassy in Chisinau informed the Moldovan authorities of its intention to set up polling stations in the territory of the

country for the Russian presidential elections, so that Russian citizens residing permanently in Moldova could participate in them. The Embassy therefore requested that the polling stations be secured, in line with the existing international practice. The Moldovan authorities responded by authorizing only one polling station for the presidential elections: within the premises of the Russian Embassy in Chisinau. Commenting on the situation with the request of the Russian side to open polling stations, Moldova's Foreign Minister Mihail Popsoi said it was regarded as "actions that violate the sovereignty of the Republic of Moldova".<sup>344</sup> As a result of such steps, dozens of thousands of Russian citizens, particularly those living in Transnistria, faced the restriction of their right to participate in elections, all the more so that the Moldovan authorities failed to adequately provide security of the only polling station. On 17 March 2024, a can containing Molotov cocktail was thrown into the premises of the Russian Embassy in Chisinau, causing fire. The instigator was arrested. The fire at the diplomatic mission was put out.<sup>345</sup>

In March 2022, Moldova banned the broadcasting of many Russian news and socio-political TV shows, Soviet and Russian films about the Great Patriotic War, as well as military-themed or war-related TV programmes, and blocked 16 Russian-language TV channels. The few remaining channels are subjected to regular fines for broadcasting insufficient amount of content in the Moldovan (now referred to as Romanian) language. At the same time, the frequencies vacated by Russian channels have been replaced by European, predominantly Romanian, and Ukrainian channels, which have been actively engaged in the Russophobic information campaign.<sup>346</sup> However, according to recent polls, 67 percent of Moldovans consider the shutdown of opposition TV channels to be "politically

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<sup>344</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/article/politika-i-obshchestvo/20240317-rezhim-sandu-pytaetsya-sorvat-vybory-prezidenta-rossii-na-territorii-moldovy/>

<sup>345</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/17032024-za-vorota-posolstva-rf-v-kishineve-brosili-kokteyl-molotova/>

<sup>346</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/article/politika-i-obshchestvo/20230312-ukrainskaya-propaganda-vmesto-pushkina-kulturnaya-politika-v-moldove-stroitsya-na-rusofobii/>

motivated", and only 11 percent say that pro-government sources of information are trustworthy.<sup>347</sup>

Although the state of emergency is no longer in force in the country as of the end of 2023, the authorities are in no hurry to overturn the Emergency Situations Commission's decision to ban Russian-language TV channels. The Moldovan government's press service cited "concern for the mental health" of viewers.<sup>348</sup>

The Moldovan authorities also use financial leverage. Moldova's draft budget for 2023 failed to provide for the financing of MIR, international TV and radio company, in violation of Chisinau's obligations under the relevant intergovernmental agreement within the CIS, which caused the liquidation of its bureau in the country. On 19 May 2023, Moldovan president Maia Sandu signed a decree on the denunciation of the above-mentioned agreement.

In total, by October 2024, over 60 Russian and Russian-language information resources have been blocked, including websites of major Russian media and news agencies.<sup>349</sup> Besides, websites of Russian government agencies are blocked in Moldova without official notification.

In addition, under the pretext of "limiting disinformation", the Moldovan authorities have been imposing pro-Western news agenda on the country's population, having suspended broadcasts from those states that did not ratify the European Convention on Transfrontier Television. This measure "cut off" the population of Moldova from a number of Russian TV channels. The Moldovan authorities explained this anti-Russian approach by the fact that Russian-language news channels promoted Russian "aggression" in Ukraine and misinformed Moldovan society. As pretexts for restricting media freedom, the authorities also cited such reasons as "combating disinformation", "one-sided coverage" of the special military operation, and "unreliable information" that could harm the country's national security.

<sup>347</sup> Survey Shows Almost 90 Percent of Moldovans Do Not Trust National Media, While 67 Percent Think TV Channels Shutdown Is Politically Motivated. 27 June 2024. <https://canal5.md/ru/2024/06/27/o>

<sup>348</sup> Moldovan Cabinet Spokesperson Loses Face Answering Questions on Shutdown of TV Channels. 11 January 2024. <https://md.sputniknews.ru/20240111/press-sekretar-kabmina-moldovy-oskandalilsya-otvechaya-na-vopros-o-zakryrykh-telekanalakh-59498574.html>

<sup>349</sup> <https://moldcell.md/rus/business/node/33424>

The authorities' campaign to shut down Russian and Russian-language media outlets was itself accompanied by biased and unsubstantiated accusations that stirred up Russophobia in Moldovan society.

In June 2022, the law "On Protecting the Information Space" entered into force in Moldova. It provided yet another foundation for countering the Russian media. The television and radio broadcasting development strategy, which was approved later, made it mandatory for media outlets to prioritize the content in the national language.

After Russia launched the special military operation to denazify and demilitarize Ukraine, and protect the civilian population of Donbass, changes for the worse for the Russian citizens and Russian-speaking residents were observed in Moldova.

All non-governmental organizations that maintain contacts with Russia or are related to it are under pressure from the ruling party. Threats against Russian-speaking journalists in Moldova have been reported. Among those facing threats and offences was the editor of *Russkoye Slovo*, compatriot movement newspaper. Cases of pressure and intimidation being used against pro-Russian activists have also been recorded.

The practice of banning entry to Moldova for Russian citizens and compatriots persists. The total number of entry bans (including land border crossings) is in the dozens every day. Actions of the Moldovan authorities with regard to Russian citizens arriving at Chisinau International Airport are of particular concern. Particularly close checks of passengers holding Russian passports are registered on a regular basis. There have been cases of entry denials to such passengers by the Moldovan border control service: several Russian passengers are deported on almost every flight. Among recent cases was the ban on entry into Moldova imposed in mid-April 2023 on Rustam Minikhanov, Head of the Republic of Tatarstan, who intended to visit the Gagauz autonomy. He was declared *persona non grata* and prevented from leaving the plane at Chisinau airport. Yet another example, in a series of similar cases, took place in May 2023

when, under the pretext of the "absence of grounds", Aleksandr Panchin, a renowned Russian biologist, who travelled to Moldova with a series of scientific lectures, was denied entry into the country.

There was a high-profile decision made by the Moldovan authorities, in September 2023, to deny entry into to and deport 15 philologists from Russia and four other CIS countries (Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan). They were heading to Tiraspol to participate in an international scientific conference on the Russian language held within the framework of the Year of Russian as a Language of Inter-Ethnic Communication declared in the CIS in 2023. The Moldovan authorities failed to offer any clear explanation. Documents confirming the purpose of the travel were disregarded. Many were reportedly held at Chisinau airport for more than a day without basic necessities, including water and food, while awaiting deportation.<sup>350</sup>

There are recorded cases of detainment of Russian citizens permanently residing in Transnistria by Moldovan border guards at Chisinau airport.

In addition, the Moldovan airline FlyOne announced, in early July 2024, that passengers arriving in Chisinau from Moscow via Yerevan would be subjected to additional security checks, and that the passenger list would be handed over to the competent authorities of the Republic of Moldova.<sup>351</sup>

Russophobia that the Moldovan leadership suffers from manifests itself even when it comes to the organization of concerts and various shows. In June 2002, for example, the Moldovan police cancelled the shows of Philipp Kirkorov, Egor Kreed and a number of other Russian artists, under the pretext of their support for the special military operation.

Meanwhile, Moldova eagerly invites musicians, experts, activists, and influencers recognized as "foreign agents" by the Russian Justice Ministry. Rap singer Miron Fyodorov (known under stage name "Oxymiron"; recognized as a

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<sup>350</sup> For instance, <https://md.sputniknews.ru/20230920/vezd-v-moldovu-zapreschen-konferentsiya-fillologov-rusistov-v-tiraspole-nachalas-so-skandala-58466482.html>

<sup>351</sup> В Кишиневе будут дополнительно проверять пассажиров из Москвы. [Passengers Arriving from Moscow Will Be Subject to Additional Security Checks in Chisinau.] RuBaltic. 4 July 2024. <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/04072024-v-kishineve-budut-dopolnitelno-proveryat-passazhirov-iz-moskvy/>

foreign agent in Russia), against whom a series of administrative cases on charges of extremism have been initiated in the Russian Federation, was offered in March 2023 the largest venue in the country, Arena Chisinau, to give his concert. The same venue hosted concerts of rap singer Face (March 2023) and the Bi-2 band (March 2023, October 2024) (all recognized as foreign agents). The National Palace also hosted Maksim Galkin's shows (October 2022, October 2023), who repeatedly made anti-Russian statements. There was wide media coverage in May 2024 of the decree signed by Maia Sandu on granting Moldovan citizenship to the members of the Bi-2 band, i.e. bass guitarist Maksim Andriuschenko, managers Aleksey Levchenko and Aleksandr Ovcherenko, as well as their family members. Foreign agents Aleksey Venediktov and Yury Dud came to interview representatives of the ruling elite.

Ukrainian artists have also been widely used for anti-Russian propaganda in Moldova. For instance, the concert at Arena Chisinau of the Okean Elzy band, whose frontman is known for his Russophobic views, became an openly anti-Russian event.<sup>352</sup>

The politically motivated interference of the state in church affairs is also rooted in Russophobia. The Moldovan Orthodox Church (MOC), which represents some 70 percent of the country's believers, is under pressure. The MOC clergy have been accused of having "links to Russia" and labelled "agents of the Kremlin".

The Moldovan leadership seeks to sever the century-old close spiritual ties of the MOC with the Russian Orthodox Church, and replace the traditional church with the Metropolis of Bessarabia of the Romanian Orthodox Church. The same techniques that have already been tested in Ukraine are being used to create a loyal church, on instructions from Western masterminds.

The Western-backed regime is artificially bolstering the Metropolis of Bessarabia of the Romanian Orthodox Church, thereby expanding the influence of

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<sup>352</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/article/politika-i-obshchestvo/20230312-ukrainskaya-propaganda-vmesto-pushkina-kulturnaya-politika-v-moldove-stroitsya-na-rusofobii/>

the Romanian Orthodox Church, which is alien to Moldovan society. The activities of this entity are actively supported by Romania which uses the Metropolis of Bessarabia as yet another instrument, in addition to Maia Sandu and the Action and Solidarity party, currently in power, to instil unionist sentiments among the Moldovan population.<sup>353</sup>

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<sup>353</sup> Moldovan Authorities Support Church Schism in the Country. RuBaltic. 19 August 2024. <https://www.rubaltic.ru/article/kultura-i-istoriya/19082024-vlast-moldovy-podderzhivaet-tserkovnyy-raskol-v-strane/>



## **The Netherlands**

After the beginning of a special military operation to denazify and demilitarize Ukraine and protect the civilian population of Donbass, Russophobic and discriminatory sentiments towards Russian citizens stirred up by Dutch media and government statements have begun to intensify in the Netherlands. This includes anti-Russian utterances and publications, and threats of physical violence. The Russian Embassy in the Netherlands regularly receives threatening letters. Anything related to Russia and Russian-Dutch relations is tacitly considered "toxic".

The Coordinating Council of Organizations of Russian Compatriots (CCORC) in the Netherlands records various instances of anti-Russian speech, publications against and threats to both itself and its most prominent activists. Information about certain "lists with addresses of Russians in the Netherlands" is circulated across social media, being generally accompanied with threats. Ukrainian community members are involved in these activities among others.

Dutch banks often block or refuse to open accounts for individual citizens with Russian roots, including those who have no Russian citizenship, and insist on providing excessively detailed information about the origin of funds, the purpose of transfers, etc.

At the same time, the country's law enforcement agencies, government and local press are quite tolerant of Nazi ideological manifestations in Ukraine. Thus, the Dutch media, even if they admit that individual Ukrainian structures (such as the Azov battalion)<sup>354</sup> promote Nazi ideology and use Nazi symbols, however avoid reasoning about the ideological component of such actions anyway.

On 26 March, 2022, the Nieuwsuur program showed a report under the headline "Russia calls the members of the Azov battalion Nazis, but what do they say themselves?"<sup>355</sup> where the authors of the story were forced to admit that this

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<sup>354</sup> Recognized as a terrorist organization by the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation.

<sup>355</sup> [www.nos.nl/2422707](http://www.nos.nl/2422707)

structure promotes Nazi ideology and uses Nazi symbols, but in every possible way deflected discussions about the ideological component. Michael Colborne, a "Bellingcat" journalist exposed to the MH17 case investigation, who participated in the program, could not ignore Azov's nationalist essence, but justified the neo-Nazis by the fact that Ukraine allegedly had no other choice.

Since 2022, against the backdrop of deteriorating Russian-Dutch relations, the Dutch side has not allowed Russian embassy staff to attend World War II commemorative events (for example, at the beginning of 2023, a local Jewish organization, under pressure from the Dutch authorities, withdrew an invitation to a Holocaust commemorative event for the Russian diplomatic mission). Russian flags and St. George ribbons are banned in the context of festive events on the occasion of Victory Day in the Netherlands.

## New Zealand

According to New Zealand statistics, the Russian-speaking expatriate community in the country consists of about 9,500 people, and, according to some other expert estimates, its number is around 15,000 (0.3 per cent of the population of New Zealand). The ethnic composition has remained unchanged in recent years: around 80 per cent are Russians, 5 per cent are Ukrainians and Belarusians, the rest are representatives of other peoples of the former USSR. Most of compatriots live in the largest cities of the country – Auckland, Christchurch and Wellington. There are also Russian-speaking communities in Hamilton, Palmerston North, Napier and Dunedin.

In 2024, there was no significant deterioration in the legal status of Russian citizens (including in places of detention) and compatriots in New Zealand.

At the same time, after the Russian Federation started the special military operation for demilitarization and denazification of Ukraine and protection of Donbass civilians, there were some particular attempts of discriminatory actions against Russian citizens and compatriots by both local authorities and common citizens, as well as manifestations of Russophobia on everyday level, which had not been observed before. There were cases of bullying of Russian-speaking children in New Zealand schools,<sup>356</sup> as well as the calls to prohibit employing Russian sailors to New Zealand ships. Besides, the Russian Cultural Centre in Christchurch and its school were forced to cease operations. In Auckland, two companies developing a network of Russian-speaking pre-schools closed down.

In Auckland, vandals desecrated the facade of the Russian Orthodox Church temple (they poured red paint on it).<sup>357</sup> In late March 2022, an offender tried to set on fire the Russian Embassy in Wellington. Several days before that, the Russian diplomatic mission received calls with threats.

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<sup>356</sup> Ukraine Invasion: Russians in New Zealand facing hostility, abuse and bullying at school. Newshub. 14 March 2022. <https://www.newshub.co.nz/home/new-zealand/2022/03/ukraine-invasion-russians-in-new-zealand-facing-hostility-abuse-and-bullying-at-school.html>

<sup>357</sup> "Real bullying is underway": Russian emigrants tell about aggression of foreigners due to the special military operation in Ukraine RT. 11 March 2022. <https://russian.rt.com/ussr/article/974510-russkie-emigranty-travlya-specoperaciya>

At the same time, after the first incidents of harassment of Russian citizens, the issue fell within the scope of attention of the New Zealand government – the monitoring of the observance of the civil rights of the Russian-speaking population is carried out by the Ministry for Ethnic Communities.

Due to the sanctions introduced by Wellington and other Western countries against Russian banks, Russian compatriots of retirement age were deprived of the possibility to receive their money from Russia. Meanwhile, the local authorities continued to indicate their Russian pensions as income and proportionally withhold the relevant sum from the social benefits accrued in New Zealand.

## Norway

There are no legislative acts infringing on the legal status of Russian fellow citizens in Norway. All foreign nationals are guaranteed equal rights with Norwegian citizens, excluding areas in which such restrictions are recognized as natural – participation in elections, military service, etc. Nevertheless, in the context of the constant build-up of anti-Russian sentiment, particularly in the media, there have been recorded incidents of Norwegian authorities and law enforcement agencies displaying wary attitude towards immigrants from Russia.

It should be noted that immigrants from Russia do not enjoy the national minority status in Norway (only Kvens, Jews, Forest Finns, Roma, Tater Travellers are recognized as such under the law; the Sami possess the indigenous people status and have their own self-governing body – the parliament named Sameting).

Norwegian security services are urging fellow citizens to be "vigilant" when communicating with Russians and to inform competent authorities about all suspicious circumstances relating to co-workers and neighbours. There have been incidents of the national counterintelligence exerting pressure on our fellow citizens (these officials have inquired about family members in Russia, contacts with the Embassy and even induced to renounce Russian citizenship, etc.).

It is not uncommon for the authorities to refuse to grant or to renew security clearance to organizations' employees and Norwegian citizens conscripted into the army<sup>358</sup> who have Russian origin or Russian close family members.

Russian origin can also become a reason for unwarranted searches, detentions and deportations.

The removal of children from Russian citizens living in Norway by Norwegian guardianship authorities remains a sensitive issue (as of May 2024, Russian diplomatic missions in Norway have monitored 24 requests of Russian citizens concerning removals of 43 children). However, there has been a positive

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<sup>358</sup> Article on the site of state radio and television broadcasting company NRK. 22 March 2022.  
<https://www.nrk.no/norge/matte-oppgi-drommen-om-a-fly-jagerfly-fordi-mor-er-russisk-1.15895024>.

development in this area in recent years. Since 2017, cases concerning removal of 33 children have been withdrawn from control. In the last three years, one request regarding the removal of a child has been received.

Since the launch of the special military operation to denazify and demilitarize Ukraine and protect the civil population of Donbass, Norway has taken a searing anti-Russian position, provided substantial political, military and financial support to the neo-Nazi Kiev regime and has consistently aligned itself with the EU's restrictive anti-Russian measures, though with some exceptions. In particular, Norway refused to block the media outlets RT, Sputnik, Planeta RTR, Russia-24, TV Centre, NTV/NTV Global, Russia-1, REN TV, Channel One, Izvestia, Rossiyskaya Gazeta, RIA Novosti and Voice of Europe, invoking a "particularly strong protection of freedom of expression by the constitution", although "these state-controlled media outlets are used to spread disinformation along with fake news and are engaged in propaganda".

In the context of the developments surrounding Ukraine, there have been recorded manifestations of Russophobia, such as harassment and insults, and exclusion of Russian citizens, including those with second citizenship, from international events.<sup>359</sup> In local schools Russian-speaking students have been exposed to bullying.<sup>360</sup> Certain small business owners refused to provide services to individuals of Russian origin<sup>361</sup>, and certain medical institutions – to schedule appointments for Russian patients who didn't condemn the special military operation.<sup>362</sup> Norwegian employers have held "awareness-building" discussions

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<sup>359</sup> Article on the site of the state radio and television broadcasting company NRK. 4 May 2023. [https://www.nrk.no/urix/har-tysk-pass-\\_nektet-likevel-a-delta-i-dronning-sonja-sangkonkurranse-1.16396346](https://www.nrk.no/urix/har-tysk-pass-_nektet-likevel-a-delta-i-dronning-sonja-sangkonkurranse-1.16396346).

<sup>360</sup> Article on the site of the newspaper Dagsavisen. 28 February 2022. <https://www.dagsavisen.no/nyheter/2022/02/28/redd-barna-russiske-barn-i-norge-hetses-for-krigen-i-ukraina/>.

<sup>361</sup> Article on the site of the newspaper Dagbladet. 11 March 2022. <https://dagbladet.no/nyheter/vil-ikke-ha-russere-pa-vare-hotell/75595687>

Article on the site of state radio and television broadcasting company NRK. 25 February 2022. <https://www.nrk.no/vestland/turistvert-seier-nei-til-alle-russiske-gjester-1.15869639>.

<sup>362</sup> Article on the site of the newspaper Verdens Gang. 30 March 2022. <https://vg.no/nyheter/innenriks/i/k6O9dL/russiskfoedt-kvinne-nektet-helsehjelp-i-moss-fikk-beskjed-om-aa-se-paa-tv>.

with employees who had alternative views. Some Russian citizens have had difficulties finding a job in Norway because of their citizenship.<sup>363</sup>

Starting from 25 February 2022, Vesterland Resort (Sogndal municipality, Western Norway), which possesses 107 cottages and a small hotel, has refused to accommodate tourists from Russia because of the events in Ukraine.<sup>364</sup>

Since 9 March 2022, the Enter Tromsø hotel chain located in Tromsø has refused to accommodate tourists from Russia for the same reasons.<sup>365</sup>

In practice, there have also been registered incidents involving aggression in public places, harassment and insult, as well as refusals to provide services to Russian citizens.

The Ukrainian diaspora representatives have prompted information campaigns against certain fellow Russian citizens in the local media as well as in social media. An incident of physical violence against a Russian-speaking citizen has been recorded.<sup>366</sup> On 14 March 2022, in Hundorp (Sør-Fron municipality, Eastern Norway), 12-year-old Maria Falkenhaug born in Latvia was attacked by an unidentified person while she was talking to her mother on the phone in Russian. As a result, she was severely bruised. The assailant ran away shouting "bloody Russian" in Norwegian.<sup>367</sup>

E.Klueva, Russian citizen and resident of Aure municipality (Western Norway), who works as a kindergarten teacher, was summoned to have a conversation with the municipal authorities representatives in connection with her publications on her personal social media page in the context of the special military operation (the authorities received the respective "signal" from her co-worker). The

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<sup>363</sup> Article on the site of the state radio and television broadcasting company NRK. 11 July 2022.

[https://www.nrk.no/norge/julia-fikk-ikke-jobb-fordi-hun-er-russisk\\_-\\_klart-tilfelle-av-diskriminering-1.16026902](https://www.nrk.no/norge/julia-fikk-ikke-jobb-fordi-hun-er-russisk_-_klart-tilfelle-av-diskriminering-1.16026902).

<sup>364</sup> Article on the site of the state radio and television broadcasting company NRK. 25 February 2022.

<https://www.nrk.no/vestland/turistvert-seier-nei-til-alle-russiske-gjester-1.15869639>.

<sup>365</sup> Article on the site of the newspaper Dagbladet. 11 March 2022. <https://dagbladet.no/nyheter/vil-ikke-ha-russere-pa-vare-hotell/75595687>.

<sup>366</sup> Article on the site of the state radio and television broadcasting company NRK. 15 March 2022.

<https://www.nrk.no/innlandet/maria-pa-12-ar-ble-overfalt-etter-a-ha-snakket-pa-russisk-med-moren-i-telefon-pa-vei-hjem.-1.15893367>.

<sup>367</sup> Article on the site of the state radio and television broadcasting company NRK. 15 March 2022.

<https://www.nrk.no/innlandet/maria-pa-12-ar-ble-overfalt-etter-a-ha-snakket-pa-russisk-med-moren-i-telefon-pa-vei-hjem.-1.15893367>.

meeting took place on 15 March 2022 at the municipal administration in the presence of a lawyer hired by the woman. The conversation was recorded.<sup>368</sup>

Following the demonstration against Russophobia in Norway held on 24 April 2022 outside the Storting (parliament) building, its organizer, Angelina Kivioya, has received insults and threats, in particular threats of physical violence.<sup>369</sup>

In May 2022, an information campaign against a Russian, E. Sazonova (65-year-old woman), and her friend (70-year-old woman) was launched on social media. These fellow citizens were accused of "inciting interethnic discord". Several Ukrainian Facebook groups posted pictures of these women with calls to "bully the women and their family members". Bullying was prompted by the remarks made by the Russians to the participants of the anti-Russian demonstration outside the Storting building.<sup>370</sup>

There has been a recorded high-profile case of refusal to provide medical services to people of Russian origin. T. Kvamsdal, doctor at the Jeløy Fysioterapi clinic in Moss, refused to schedule an appointment for a Russian citizen living in Norway, E. Kasin, who needed regular pain relieving injections into the spine. The physiotherapist, who knew that E. Kasin had moved to Norway from Russia, phoned her and asked about her attitude to the events in Ukraine and the President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin, stating that he wasn't going to provide services to a patient who wasn't condemning the war in Ukraine.<sup>371</sup> Having failed to get unequivocal answers from her, the doctor recommended our fellow citizen to watch the news on TV and call him back later. When commenting on the incident with E. Kasin, the Prime Minister of Norway, Jonas Gahr Støre, told the media that "it is unacceptable that Russians are denied medical care in Norway because of the war in Ukraine".

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<sup>368</sup> E. Klueva's request to the embassy.

<sup>369</sup> A.Kivioya's complaint to the police.

<sup>370</sup> E. Sazonova's request to the embassy.

<sup>371</sup> Article on the site of the newspaper Verdens Gang. 30 March 2022.

<https://vg.no/nyheter/innenriks/i/k6O9dL/russiskfoedt-kvinne-nekted-helsehjelp-i-moss-fikk-beskjed-om-aa-se-paa-tv>.



In May 2023, the applications of two Russian citizens to participate in the Queen Sonja International Music Competition were rejected.<sup>372</sup> The official reason for this was the directorate's decision "in solidarity with Ukraine" not to allow citizens of Russia and Belarus to participate in the competition. The restriction affected holders of dual citizenship as well.

The claim that the rights of individuals of Russian origin are being violated in Norway in connection with the situation surrounding Ukraine is corroborated by the 2022 Oslo Police District report "Hate Crime in Norway".<sup>373</sup> According to the document, since the launch of the special military operation, the Norwegian police have received a number of complaints regarding illegal acts against Russian citizens, in particular acts of vandalism and violence, threats, hate speech, refusal to sell goods and to provide services. It has been recognised that such acts should be considered hate crimes when motivated by the Russian origin of a victim. At the same time, it has been noted with reference to the letter sent on 2 November 2022 to the Oslo Police District by the Attorney General of Norway to clarify the interpretation that refusal to sell goods or to provide services to Russian citizens in accordance with the sanctions law cannot constitute an act of discrimination under section 186 ("Discrimination") of the Norwegian Penal Code. Besides, section 185 ("Hate speech") and section 186 of the Penal Code "may be interpreted restrictively for the sake of protecting the freedom of expression", for instance, in case an offence committed against Russians is "a manifestation of one's stance on the war or on the Russian authorities".

At the same time, the Norwegian authorities emphasize that their reaction is directed at the Russian authorities and not at Russian citizens, who should not be held responsible in any way for the Russian leadership's actions.<sup>374</sup>

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<sup>372</sup> Article on the site of the state radio and television broadcasting company NRK. 4 May 2023. [https://www.nrk.no/urix/har-tysk-pass-\\_nektet-likevel-a-delta-i-dronning-sonja-sangkonkurranse-1.16396346](https://www.nrk.no/urix/har-tysk-pass-_nektet-likevel-a-delta-i-dronning-sonja-sangkonkurranse-1.16396346).

<sup>373</sup> Report of the Oslo Police District "Hate Crime in Norway 2022 Annual Report". June 2023. <https://www.politiet.no/globalassets/dokumenter/oslo/rapporter/anmeldt-hatkriminalitet-oslo/hatkriminalitet-i-norge-2022.pdf>.

<sup>374</sup> Such statements are, at the very least, dubious, because they can make one think that in Norway, in contrast to Russia and the majority of the countries in the world, the principal authorities (with the exception of the king) are not formed as an outcome of the people participating in free elections.

In the context of growing Russophobia, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has published on Twitter/X a call to take care of Russians in Norwegian society and to combat the incitement of hatred. The authorities' statements have been translated into practical actions. Following the detection of discriminatory actions against Russian students, employees of universities and research centres, the Ministry of Education and Research circulated instructions to educational institutions. It was signalled to the educational institutions that they needed to pay the utmost attention to this problem.

The Norwegian authorities do not treat differently fellow citizens' organisations and local communities when considering requests for financial support and provide assistance in the implementation of ethno-cultural, educational, sports, social and other initiatives on an equal basis.

The arrests of four Russian citizens (V.Rustanovich, A.Reznichenko, M.Yushkov and A.Yakunin) in October 2022 for using drones in the territory of Norway have become particularly high-profile. The Russian citizens were accused of violating section 19 of the Regulation of 15 August 2014 No. 1076 relating to restrictive measures in respect of actions undermining or threatening the territorial integrity, sovereignty, independence and stability of Ukraine (which prohibits aircrafts owned or controlled by Russians from landing or taking off in Norway and from flying over its territory). In two cases, the accused were convicted of violating of the sanctions law.<sup>375</sup>

Owing to the highly professional work of Norwegian and British lawyers in the case of A. Yakunin (who is also a British citizen and lives in Italy), courts of first and second instance ruled that drones used for recreational purposes were not subject to the restrictive measures. The businessman was acquitted, and subsequently other Russian citizens were released from custody. On 29 June 2023,

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<sup>375</sup> Provision 19 of the Regulation of 15 August 2014 No. 1076 relating to restrictive measures in respect of actions undermining or threatening the territorial integrity, sovereignty, independence and stability of Ukraine imposes a ban on aircrafts owned or controlled by Russian individuals or legal entities landing or taking off and flying over the Norwegian territory.

the Supreme Court of Norway overturned the previous acquittals and ruled that the imposed ban did, after all, apply to quadcopters.

The case of A. Yakunin was transferred for a new trial to the court of first instance.<sup>376</sup> In January 2024, a new hearing was held, and A. Yakunin was treated as if he had been just a Russian citizen. In the ruling dated 14 February 2024, the court of first instance concurred with the Supreme Court's verdict of June 2023, acknowledging the existence of a ban on the operation of all drones by Russians across Norway, including Spitsbergen. However, A. Yakunin was relieved from criminal responsibility since he "could not have been aware of the restrictive norms contained in the Norwegian law".<sup>377</sup> The Court of Appeal rejected the appeal filed by the prosecutor's office in April 2024, and in October 2024 it awarded to A. Yakunin costs in the amount of 2.7 million kroner/ 250 thousand dollars. In doing so, the court found that the prosecutor's office had "unreasonably delayed the consideration of the case".<sup>378</sup>

J. Elden, Norwegian lawyer of A. Yakunin, noted that it was paradoxical that while his client has been acquitted by several instances, Russians without financial means to hire qualified defence attorneys had been convicted in similar cases.<sup>379</sup>

In late January 2024, the Supreme Court of Norway rejected the appeal filed by V. Rustanovich against the judgement of the court of second instance. According to the Russian citizen, he intends to resort to European courts.

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<sup>376</sup> NRK. 29 November 2022. <https://www.nrk.no/tromsogfinnmark/russer-domt-til-120-dagers-fengsel-etter-a-ha-flovet-drone-i-norge-1.16199601>;

NRK. 7 December 2022. <https://www.nrk.no/tromsogfinnmark/dronetiltalte-andrey-yakunin-frikjent-i-tingretten-1.16211859>;

NRK. 2 February 2023. <https://www.nrk.no/tromsogfinnmark/dronetiltalte-andrey-yakunin-frikjent-for-ulovlig-droneflyvning-1.16282160>;

Dagbladet. 6 September 2023. <https://www.dagbladet.no/studio/nyhetsstudio/5?post=144863?post=144863>;

NRK. 23 November 2022.

<https://www.nrk.no/vestland/russar-domd-til-90-dagar-fengsel-for-droneflyging-i-noreg-1.16192196>

NRK. 28 November 2022. <https://www.nrk.no/tromsogfinnmark/russer-som-floy-med-drone-i-kirkenes-nekter-straaffskyld-var-pa-jobbreise-for-russiske-myndigheter-1.16198402>).

<sup>377</sup> NRK. 14 February 2024. <https://www.nrk.no/tromsogfinnmark/forretningsmenn-andrey-yakunin-er-frikjent-for-andre-gang-1.16763560>

<sup>378</sup> <https://www.nrk.no/tromsogfinnmark/yakunin-far-millionerstatning-1.17083172>

<sup>379</sup> <https://www.bt.no/innenriks/i/EyZEQK/yakunin-faar-millionerstatning-etter-droneflygning-frikjennelse>

On 29 May 2024, the Norwegian authorities announced tighter rules for Russian citizens travelling to Norway. Under the new regime, Russian citizens arriving to Norway for tourism or other "non-essential purposes" with a valid Schengen visa issued by Norway or another Schengen country will be denied entry. Exceptions will be made, in particular, for those travelling to visit close family members, as well as for certain other categories of citizens.<sup>380</sup> The press-secretary of the President of the Russian Federation, Dmitry Peskov, called these restrictions discriminatory.<sup>381</sup>

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<sup>380</sup> <https://iz.ru/1700856/2024-05-23/norvegiia-vvela-dopolnitelnye-ogranicheniia-na-vezd-dlia-grazhdan-iz-rossii>;  
[https://norway.mid.ru/ru/consular-services/raznoe/vnimaniiu\\_grazhdan\\_rossiyskoy\\_federatsii\\_poseshchayushchikh\\_norvegiyu\\_i\\_sootechestvennikov/](https://norway.mid.ru/ru/consular-services/raznoe/vnimaniiu_grazhdan_rossiyskoy_federatsii_poseshchayushchikh_norvegiyu_i_sootechestvennikov/)

<sup>381</sup> <https://iz.ru/1700922/2024-05-23/v-kremle-nazvali-diskriminatsionnymi-ogranicheniia-norvegii-na-vezd-dlia-rossiian>

## **Poland**

The situation with Russian citizens and compatriots in Poland cannot but raise concerns, especially considering Polish authorities' radical Russophobic course, as well as their efforts to falsify the history of World War II, whitewash Nazism, impose thesis of "equal responsibility of two totalitarian regimes" and draw false parallels with current situation. The Polish authorities used the beginning of the Russia's special military operation for denazification and demilitarisation of Ukraine as a pretext to launch an unprecedented, in terms of its violence and falsehood (even by that country's standards) anti-Russian propaganda in the media which, in turn, boosted rampant Russophobia, unparalleled in its scale.

Since April 2022, national sanctions have been imposed against Russian business in Poland. (As of October 2024, the "sanctions" list of Russian companies and Russian citizens includes 42 individuals with Russian citizenship and 68 legal entities related to Russian capital) Since September 2022, the Polish authorities have imposed an entry ban on Russian citizens, including those holding Schengen visas issued by third-party countries, for tourism, business, cultural, and sporting purposes. Warsaw welcomed the suspension of the Agreement between Russia and the EU on simplified visa procedures for Russian and EU citizens. There are no passenger railway or air services between Russia and Poland. It is prohibited for vehicles with Russian license plates designed to carry up to 10 people, including the driver, to enter the country.

The Polish officials do not hide the fact of being opposed to Russia and Russian culture, publicly advocating the need to destroy Russia and cancel Russian culture, "derusification" (reducing Poland's dependence on Russia), primarily in energy sector. Thus, on 30 March 2022, the Prime Minister of Poland Mateusz Morawiecki said that Russophobia in this state had become mainstream. On 4 April 2022, Piotr Gliński, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Culture and National Heritage of Poland, called for Russian culture to disappear from the

public space. In his opinion, the period when the special military operation is conducted, is not the time for Russian ballet, staging works by Anton Chekhov and Alexander Pushkin, or the Alexandrov Ensemble performances.

The NGOs convenient for the Polish authorities are often attracted for these ends. For example, according to Polish media, "outrage in social media" was allegedly caused by the concert of a Russian pianist, Nikolay Khozyainov (resides in Switzerland), in Warsaw philharmonic hall, scheduled for 22 February 2024. Natalia Panchenko, a Ukrainian activist and founder of "Euromaidan – Warsaw" public movement permanently residing in Poland, had addressed the philharmonic hall demanding to cancel the concert which ultimately did not take place. On 9 March 2022, the last of four Russian language and culture centres in Poland located in Lublin, closed down.

The rise of Russophobia affected Russian athletes playing for sports clubs in Poland. Those who refused to condemn the special military operation and the policy of the Russian leadership had their contracts terminated. Thus, in March 2022, the Polish hockey club BS Polonia Bytom terminated contracts with five Russian hockey players: Danil Babets (who has citizenship of Kazakhstan along with that of Russia), Kirill Kleimyonov, Yegor Rudskoy, Valeriy Polinin and Ilya Smirnov. The management of the club said the reason for that was athletes' refusal to take "a definitely anti-military position" as well as their "unnecessary anti-Ukrainian activity on social media" that the club cannot agree with. The authorities of Bytom (Silesian province) where the hockey club is located, supported the decision. During the same month, the Polish hockey club Ciarko STS Sanok terminated the contract with the Russian hockey player Alexander Mokshantsev due to Russia's "open war" against "the neighbouring country". The Polish hockey club GKS Katowice also terminated the contract with the hockey player Alexander Yakimenko under the pretext of "athlete's unwillingness to definitely condemn the aggression of Vladimir Putin and the Russian Federation against Ukraine." (The club also published the relevant announcement on its web-site)

In April 2023, the Polish Fencing Federation (PFF) announced its decision to cancel the stage of Women's Foil World Cup (scheduled for 21-23 April) due to the International Fencing Federation's (IFF) decision from 4 April on conditions for the admission of Russian and Belarusian athletes to competitions. Since the IFF disavowed the PFF's intention to admit to competitions under a neutral flag only those Russian and Belarusian female athletes and their delegations members who would confirm in writing that they did not support the "war in Ukraine", were not connected with the "Putin's regime", the army or special services and were not members of army clubs, the Polish Fencing Federation, "in solidarity" with the Ukrainian Fencing Federation, refused to hold competitions.

Between 14 and 20 August 2023, the Junior World Wrestling Championship was scheduled to be held in Warsaw. Regarding Poland's non-issuance of visas for Russian athletes (the matter has been under consideration since September 2022), the International Federation "United World Wrestling" decided to move the events to Jordan. A statement published on the Federation's website said that official Warsaw had failed to fulfill the obligations as the host to ensure equal participation for all athletes without any discrimination on passport or other criteria.

In everyday life, Russians residing in Poland often face denial of services in shops, pharmacies, medical institutions, service enterprises.

In the context of the large-scale information war against Russia launched by the Polish authorities after the start of the special military operation for demilitarization and denazification of Ukraine and protection of Donbas civilians, the Polish government censored the Polish segment of the Internet in May 2022. On the Internal Security Agency's initiative, several Russian and Polish Internet portals were blocked for "spreading pro-Kremlin propaganda" (including ria.ru, lenta.ru, pl.sputniknews.com, rt.com, dziennik-polityczny.com, myslpolska.info, wicipolskie.pl, wolnemedi.net, xportal.pl, wrealu.pl) and broadcasting of five Russian channels (Russia Today, RTR-Planeta, Soyuz TV, Russia 24 and ORT-1) and one Belarusian channel (Bel-24) was banned.

As part of the campaign to rewrite history, the Polish authorities suppress all dissent views. In particular, Russian representatives of social movements, journalists, and researchers are persecuted and pressured. Two Russian citizens, Ekaterina Tsivilskaya and Anna Smirnova-Tyts who spoke out against the "war on monuments" and were detained and expelled from Poland in May 2018 on charges of participating in a "hybrid war against Poland", are still banned from entering Poland. In 2017, Russian historian Dmitriy Karnaukhov was expelled from the country, and in 2018, two other Russian citizens, I.Stolyarchik and O.Rothstein, were also expelled (allegedly because of posing a "threat to the security" of the country). On the initiative of the Polish authorities, since late 2017 and early 2018, two Russian political scientists Oleg Bondarenko and Alexey Martynov have been banned from entering Schengen countries.

In 2021, the Polish authorities prolonged the entry ban into the Schengen area until December 2025 to the "Russia Today" news agency journalist Leonid Sviridov for "waging aggressive propaganda and damaging the image of Poland." In March 2021, VGTRK correspondent Yevgeniy Reshetnev was denied entry into the country for five years, allegedly for conducting activities "outside the scope of journalistic ones." In 2023, TASS correspondent Irina Polina was declared "undesirable person" in Poland.

Visa and logistics obstacles are created for the representatives of Russian civil society who participate in specialized events still organized through OSCE in this country.

Poland is among the countries whose authorities are actively waging a "war" against monuments and memorials to the Red Army soldiers who died during the country's liberation from Nazism in World War II (that activities have intensified since late February 2022). Along with the demolitions, cases of vandalism against Soviet memorials and burial grounds have multiplied in the country since 2022. The perpetrators are not brought to liability.

Since late 1990s, most of the monuments to Soviet soldiers beyond the burial grounds have been destroyed in Poland: of 561 such monuments included in



the "List Sites Commemorating the Soviet Defenders of the Fatherland Fallen on the territory of the Republic of Poland" compiled together with Poland in 1997, less than 100 are left by 2024. However, even these remaining memorials are at risk of being destroyed.

After the start of the special military operation, Poland stopped informing Russian diplomatic missions about discoveries of remains of Soviet soldiers and their subsequent reburial. The requests sent by the Russian embassy to the relevant Polish authorities confirming Russia's interest in participating in reburial ceremonies of the remains of Soviet soldiers who died during World War II in the battles for liberation of Poland or in German concentration camps on its territory, remain without response.

Generally, Russia finds out about the destruction of monuments after the inventory of memorials has been conducted. The Polish media have recently preferred to remain silent about such incidents, so the list of cases of destruction of monuments which became known to Russia, is far from complete and is to be clarified.

The Polish authorities have long refrained from commemorative ceremonies organized by Russian diplomatic missions in Poland at the memorials to Soviet soldiers but have not impeded them so far.

In response to Embassy's notifications about the plans to hold such events, the Polish Foreign Ministry, referring to Polish legislation, recalls the prohibition of "public calls to unleash an invasive war or public approval of unleashing or waging such a war", of "public propaganda of fascist or other totalitarian state system", as well as of "calls to hatred on national, ethnic, racial, religious grounds", and of "use or propaganda of symbols or names related to the aggression of the Russian Federation in Ukraine." For this reason, the Polish Foreign Ministry "does not recommend holding such events and expects that the Embassy will observe the valid Polish legislation.

On 9 May 2022 and 2023, pro-Ukrainian "protesters" prevented Russian diplomats, compatriots and Polish citizens from laying a wreath and flowers on the Victory Day at the Soviet soldiers Memorial cemetery in Warsaw.

Besides, on 9 May 2022, the Ambassador of Russia in Poland Sergey Andreev and his spouse, as well as staff of the Embassy accompanying them, were attacked by hooligans. On the same day, attempts to disrupt a commemorative event organised by the Russian Consulate General were observed in Gdansk.

On 9 May 2023, a group of "activists" from the civil initiative Euromaidan-Warsaw organised a disgraceful demonstration at the Soviet soldiers cemetery in Warsaw. The square in front of the central monument was filled with Ukrainian flags, installations and images of "arrested Putin". One of the architectural elements of the memorial was covered with obscene anti-Russian inscriptions. The event was accompanied by noise effects that replicated the sounds of air-raid sirens and bombings. The participants were holding a banner saying: "The presence of the Russian official representative here profanes the graves of soldiers who died during World War II," accompanied by a hashtag captioning Russia as a "terrorist."

When the Russian delegation tried to approach the memorial, a cordon of "protesters" blocked their path. One of them tied himself to the wreath that the Embassy staff were about to lay. After the Russian diplomats left, the protesters removed a ribbon in the colours of the Russian flag from the wreath, tied it to a mock missile and trampled on the wreath. The protesters, addressing the Russian delegation via loudspeaker, demanded to remove St. George ribbons, calling them a symbol of "support for aggression." The protesters called the Ambassador and the staff accompanying him "fascists" and "murderers" and urged to "withdraw the Russian troops from Ukraine" and to stop "bombing and killing people."

The police meanwhile remained passive. The Polish officials called on the Embassy "to refrain from provocations", that is the commemorative ceremonies honouring the Red Army soldiers who died during the liberation of Poland.

The relevant messages are spread in the press and on the Internet. In the view of the Polish media, after the start of the special military operation, honouring

the memory of Soviet soldiers on the Victory Day "took on a new meaning, signalling support for the Kremlin's policies."

On 18 February 2024, on the 79th anniversary of the death of Ivan Chernyakhovskiy, twice Hero of the Soviet Union, commander of the 3rd Belorussian Front, General of the Army, the Russian Ambassador in Poland, Sergey Andreev and the staff of the Russian missions held an annual wreath-laying ceremony in the city of Pieniężno (Warmian-Masurian province) at the place where Ivan Chernyakhovskiy was mortally wounded. (Since 1970s, there had been a memorial to the Soviet commander demolished by the Polish authorities in 2015) A group of Ukrainians and Poles living around Pieniężno tried to disrupt the ceremony by crying out insults at the diplomats.

On the Victory Day in 2024, the Russian Embassy in Poland managed to hold a wreath-laying ceremony at Soviet soldiers Memorial cemetery in Warsaw in more or less normal conditions for the first time in three years.

Following the start of the special military operation, Poland ceased to invite Russian diplomatic and consular representatives to its events involving the diplomatic corps, including those devoted to the events of World War II.

This was the case with Gdansk on 8 May 2023 where the city administration held a commemorative ceremony in memory of the residents killed by the Nazis. Unlike the representatives of the German and Ukrainian Consulates General, the staff of the Russian Consulate General in Gdansk were not invited there.

Museum institutions also follow the policies of the Polish authorities. In early August 2022, the administration of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum of Poland located at the place of the former Nazi extermination camp at Oświęcim, closed the permanent exhibition "Tragedy. Courage. Liberation" in Block 14 organized by the Russian Central Museum of the Great Patriotic War 1941-1945 and aimed at preserving the memory of the horrors of Nazism and the liberating role of the Red Army. As a pretext, the Museum administration referred to the expiration of the operational agreement between the Polish and Russian museums in late April 2022. In fact, however, Poland has been evading contacts on

this issue for more than two months with both its partners from the Russian museum and Russian diplomats to resolve problems related to financial sanctions against Russia and preventing Russia from paying the maintenance cost of the exhibition. After the exhibition was closed, Russian museum workers took it as a basis to prepare a multimedia exhibition called "Auschwitz. The Truth" available at museum's website <https://victorymuseum.ru>.

## Portugal

According to the Portuguese State authorities, there are about 11,000 Russian citizens living in Portugal with legal grounds for long-term stay (residence or work permit). The Russian Embassy estimates that the Russian diaspora numbers approximately 15,000 people, including those who already have local identity documents. Our fellow citizens reside throughout the whole territory of Portugal, and most of them live in urban areas. These are primary Lisbon and its satellites (Setubal and Cascais), as well as the north (Porto and Aveiro) and the south (Albufeira and Portimao) of the country.

As for the situation of compatriots, the Consular Convention between the Russian Federation and the Portuguese Republic of 26 November 2001 (entered into force in May 2003) constitutes the legal framework in the country.

There is an increasing trend in the number of compatriots interested in returning to their homeland, in particular with the help of the relevant Russian State programme. They mention the possibility of being persecuted because of their origins as a reason for resettlement.

Publications about "bad Russians" have been widely circulated in the media. By contrast, the facts of inappropriate behaviour by Ukrainian refugees are silenced. Due to the tough Russophobic stance taken by the Portuguese authorities and society, Ukrainian nationalist organizations have felt free to engage in hate speech against Russians on the Internet space.

There were discriminatory manifestations against children of Russian origin in schools.<sup>382</sup> In 2022, a school in Albufeira received threats and insults from radical Ukrainians living in the city. There were comments on the webpage of the Russian school with the following content, very close to the Nazi views of the Bandera supporters: "We will skin the children," "It is time to buy an axe, there is plenty of work to be done," and "It has been a long time since you burned." The

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<sup>382</sup> A female resident of Lisbon talks about the Russophobic treatment toward her son at school. Izvestia. 5 April 2022.  
<https://iz.ru/1315610/video/zhitelnitca-lissabona-rasskazala-o-rusofobskom-otnoshenii-k-synnu-v-shkole>

school management had to contact the police and put guards at the entrance of the educational institution.<sup>383</sup>

The Ukrainian diplomatic representatives are actively involved in spreading Russophobic views. For example, one of the protest actions in front of the Russian Embassy in Lisbon, organized by the Portuguese branch of Amnesty International NGO on 19 March 2022, was attended by Inna Ognivez, the then Ukrainian Ambassador, who, in addition to standard accusations of "Russian aggression," spoke about the "corrosive influence" of Russian language schools in Portugal. Then, Pavlo Sadokha, Head of Spilka, the largest Ukrainian association in the country, published a list of all Russian diaspora associations with photos as a warning to Ukrainians against joining them. This publication provoked a wave of insulting posts by Ukrainian nationalists against Russian-speaking activists.

There were refusals to provide services to people of Russian descent. One of the cases included an incident when a Russian female fellow citizen was told by the service provider that she would no longer be able to make calls to Russia at the rate that was previously included in the service. Attempts to contact the support service did not bring any results. The Russian woman was told then that this was a forced measure in the EU, taken in connection with the situation in Ukraine. It also remained unclear at what price and whether it would be possible in general to make calls to Russia.

In March 2022, Yuriy Petko, a Ukrainian nationalist, robbed the shop of Natalya Sverlova and threatened her because of her Russian origin.<sup>384</sup> The judicial authorities sentenced the Ukrainian to 1.5 years of suspended imprisonment and ordered him to pay 750 euros in compensation.<sup>385</sup>

Because of the unfavourable situation, the number of Saturday and Sunday schools, including those of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), established by Russian-speaking immigrants has decreased. There were cases of harassment of

<sup>383</sup> The coordinator of a Russian school in Portugal reports on the wave of Russophobia and bullying. Russia Today. 7 April 2022.

<https://russian.rt.com/world/news/987147-shkola-portugaliya-rusofobiya>

<sup>384</sup> Tribunal manda julgar sete ucranianos que ameaçaram lojista russa em Braga. O Minho. 11 April 2023.

<https://ominho.pt/tribunal-manda-julgar-sete-ucranianos-que-ameacaram-lojista-russa-em-braga>

<sup>385</sup> Jornal de Notícias. 12 April 2024.

clergymen of the ROC of the Moscow Patriarchate: attempts to disrupt church services, as well as calls for Ukrainians to leave parishes and to withdraw their children from the schools affiliated with them were reported. In October 2022, the rector of the Russian Orthodox Church of All Saints of the Moscow Patriarchate (Lisbon) was attacked. The Portuguese police initiated a criminal proceeding. People of Ukrainian descent are suspected of committing the offence.

In 2023, a Ukrainian association tried to disrupt the Victory Day event organized by a Portuguese NGO together with Russian compatriots in Lisbon. At the entrance to the building where the "Immortal Regiment" action and a concert of war songs were held, members of the Ukrainian diaspora organized an unauthorized protest, which ended after law enforcement agencies arrived on the site.

It is worth noting that the authorities do not prevent the Victory Day celebrations. On 5 May 2024, a series of events dedicated to the 79th anniversary of the Victory in the Great Patriotic War, including the "Immortal Regiment" action, took place in Albufeira with the support of the Russian Embassy in Portugal and the Rossotrudnichestvo office. In total, more than 100 people attended the event.<sup>386</sup> In 2024, the Immortal Regiment procession was also held through the centre of Lisbon.<sup>387</sup>

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<sup>386</sup> The 79th anniversary of the Victory in the Great Patriotic War is celebrated in the south of Portugal, website of the Embassy of the Russian Federation in the Portuguese Republic. 9 May 2024. [https://portugal.mid.ru/ru/news/na\\_yuge\\_portugalii\\_otmetili\\_79\\_yu\\_godovshchinu\\_pobedy\\_v\\_velikoy\\_otechestvennoy\\_voyne/](https://portugal.mid.ru/ru/news/na_yuge_portugalii_otmetili_79_yu_godovshchinu_pobedy_v_velikoy_otechestvennoy_voyne/)

<sup>387</sup> The Immortal Regiment is held in Lisbon. Pobeda RF. 13 May 2024. <https://pobedarf.ru/2024/05/13/bessmertnyj-polk-proshel-po-lissabonu/>

## Romania

With the start of Russia's special military operation to demilitarize and denazify Ukraine and protect the peaceful population of Donbass, cases of violation of the rights and discrimination of Russians on the basis of nationality and citizenship began to be recorded in Romania. Russian citizens and compatriots living here have become the object of systematic attacks and insults on social networks. In addition to certain manifestations of Russophobia and aggressive behaviour when applying for medical services, passing border control, or at schools, problems persist with servicing Russians in many banking institutions in the country.

It is possible to be attacked even because of the use of the Russian language. For example, in October 2024, a Romanian resident attacked an interpreter because of Russian speech. The incident took place near the US Embassy in Bucharest. A Russian interpreter came to the Embassy with a client from Kiev to obtain a visa. Standing in the queue, they spoke in Russian, which provoked an aggressive reaction from a man who said that "you cannot speak Russian on Romanian soil". The woman had to turn to the gendarmes for help.<sup>388</sup>

In keeping with the collective West's Russophobic policy, Romanian officials tried their best to contribute to "punishment" of Russia through limiting the activities of Russian companies that are present in Romania. For example, the members of Romanian parliament have "distinguished" themselves in this field. On 26 and 28 February, the then President of the Senate of Romania Florin Cîțu called for tougher sanctions against Russian companies operating in the EU and strict compliance of Romanian relevant authorities with those restrictions. On 4 March 2022, he spoke for total cessation of trade with Russia. On 9 March, he declared the amendments to country's government emergency order No. 25/2021 in order to limit the capabilities of Russian entities of taking part in public procurement. On

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<sup>388</sup> A Romanian resident attacked an interpreter because of Russian speech. Russia Today. 3 October 2024 [https://russian.rt.com/world/news/1377782-rumyniya-ssha-rech?utm\\_source=yxnews&utm\\_medium=desktop](https://russian.rt.com/world/news/1377782-rumyniya-ssha-rech?utm_source=yxnews&utm_medium=desktop)



28 February 2022, the then Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies, President of the Social Democratic Party Marcel Ciolacu spoke for introduction of "total blockade" against the activities of Russian companies and entrepreneurs.

While implementing the intent of Romanian political leadership to "punish" Russia as soon as possible, on 28-29 February 2022, the National Authority for Consumer Protection pointedly inspected the gas stations of Gazprom and Lukoil and also the Berezka grocery store chain across the country. On top of that, head of consumer protection authority Horia Constantinescu made it unequivocally clear that the decision to launch a sudden inspection was politically motivated – by the intent to thus contribute to "stabilization of the world" through their own "war against backsliding on the law".

Under the pretext of international sanctions, a number of Russian companies, including TMK Group plants and Aeroflot office, were denied the opportunity to manage their own financial resources. In its turn, this challenged the observance of those companies' employees' social and economic rights, including the right to receive a wage for the work performed.

In violation of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, since 28 February 2022, Romania has restricted access to Sputnik Romania and Russia Today information resources on all platforms, including websites, social networks, instant messengers, and mobile apps. On the same day, the National Audiovisual Council pledged to take action to prevent "all TV channels from the Russian Federation from broadcasting in Romania" and to "monitor the way the topic of the Russian Federation's aggression against Ukraine is covered in both news and talk shows".

In this regard, in March 2022, the mentioned authority issued fines to the Realitatea Plus TV channel (40,000 lei or 9,300 US dollars) and the Gold FM radio station (50,000 lei or about 11,600 US dollars), as well as warnings to TV channels Nașul TV and B1 TV. Local journalists (for example, correspondent of Sputnik Romania, author of news blogs "Vladimir Putin's friends" and "In the first line" (inprimalinie.org) Giorgia Arsene and editor of "News from Russia"

(vestidinrusia.ro) news website Vyacheslav Samoshkin) who try to cover the developments in Ukraine in a balanced manner and from the standpoints that are alternative to those of the collective West become a target for heavy bullying and threats in the social media.

In 2023, there were cases of seizure of driving licenses from Russian citizens when crossing the Romanian state border. Moreover, Romanian border guards justified their decision by doubts about the authenticity of the driving licenses. The main reason for the "invalidity" of the license, according to their assessment, was an allegedly incorrect positioning of watermarks or unclear textual information. It is worth stressing that in most cases the authenticity of the seized licenses was confirmed by employees of the consular department of the Embassy of the Russian Federation in Romania. It is noteworthy that the procedure for returning the seized documents took an unreasonably long time – usually more than six months from the date of the relevant ruling.

The situation around the Romanian Union of Ciscarpathian Ruthenians, which is part of the Coordination Council of Organizations of Russian Compatriots Living in Romania, remains tense. According to Union's President Mihai Lauruk, groundless persecution of this organization's activists for their pro-Russian stand continues. There have also been cases of inaction on the part of authorities regarding the raiding of property and business assets belonging to Ruthenians. The Union's representatives have also expressed concern that Bucharest encourages forced Ukrainization of the Ruthenian national minority.

## **North Macedonia**

According to estimates, the number of Russian compatriots in the Republic of North Macedonia (RSM) is about 10,000 people (0.5 per cent of the total population). There has never been an official count of Russians living in the country. However, during the last census in the country, held in September 2021, 303 people identified themselves as ethnic Russians (368 people in 2002).

The legal status of Russian citizens in the country is regulated by a number of legal and regulatory acts. The basic document that enshrines the political and civil rights and freedoms of national minorities in the Republic of North Macedonia is the Constitution. The conditions of stay of Russian compatriots in North Macedonia are regulated by the Law on Foreigners of 5 June 2018, as amended and supplemented on 30 July 2021. There are no special legal norms regarding our compatriots in the national legislation, as Russians in North Macedonia are not given the status of a national minority.

There are no official reports published by international organizations, governmental and non-governmental structures on the respect for fundamental human and civil rights and freedoms with regard to our compatriots. At the same time, there are no systemic concerns regarding the protection of the rights and legitimate interests of citizens of the Russian Federation in North Macedonia. As those coming from post-Soviet states share same values, culture, and language, they find North Macedonia a comfortable enough environment and are easily integrated.

Since 2010, the Government of North Macedonia has, on an annual basis, unilaterally cancelled visas for Russian citizens entering the country for tourism, business and humanitarian purposes for a period of up to 90 days. In March 2022, the visa-free regime was not extended by the North Macedonian side under the pretext of the beginning of the special military operation (SMO) to denazify and demilitarize Ukraine and protect the civilian population of Donbass.

Most Russian compatriots are orthodox. Meeting their spiritual needs had

previously been difficult due to the unresolved canonical status of the Macedonian Orthodox Church. By its decision of 5 June 2022, the Serbian Orthodox Church officially granted autocephaly to the Macedonian Orthodox Church, referred to Archdiocese of Ohrid (MOC-AO), which was recognized by the Russian Orthodox Church on 25 August 2022, allowing its parishioners to participate in worship services. In 2014, former honorary consul of Russia in Bitola Sergey Samsonenko (in December 2023, he was included in the U.S. sanctions list together with his wife) started the construction of a Russian orthodox church in Skopje, but due to administrative problems it was actually suspended.

After the start of the SMO, the Government of North Macedonia, on the initiative of former Foreign Minister Bujar Osmani, recommended that municipal authorities in Skopje and other cities refrain from participating in wreath-laying events organized by the Russian Embassy on the occasion of the next anniversary of the Great Victory over Nazi Germany in May 1945.

A provocative inscription "1945 – liberators, 2022 – murderers" and streaks of red paint, presumably imitating blood, were left by unknown individuals in the early 9 May 2022 morning at the foot of the stela in downtown Skopje, dedicated to the memory of anti-Hitler coalition soldiers (installed on the Russian Embassy's initiative in cooperation with the Center municipality in 2020). Having learned about it a few hours before the wreath-laying ceremony, the Embassy removed the inscription by its own forces. Demands to investigate the incident sent twice by note from the Embassy to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of North Macedonia (copied to the Minister of Internal Affairs), remained unanswered.

There are no Russian-language mass media in North Macedonia. In February 2022, the Government of North Macedonia recommended that cable network operators stop retransmitting channels whose founder is the Russian Federation or individuals and legal entities registered in its territory.

Compatriot organizations do not have their own printed publications. Russian periodicals are supplied by target funds allocated by the Government Commission for Compatriots Abroad (GCCA) for distribution among diaspora

representatives. In December 2023, the Embassy assisted in the transfer of more than 130 books and textbooks in Russian, souvenirs, information and presentation materials to the organization of compatriots "Ozaryeniye" as a donation from the Fund "Russky Mir".

The central event of the organizations of Russian compatriots was the annual Country Conference held by the Coordination Council (CC) with the support of the Embassy, which took place in Skopje on 4 December 2023. Compatriots took an active part in the events dedicated to the anniversary of the Great Victory, the Day of Russia and the Day of National Unity, participated in the ceremonies of laying flowers in honour of the Day of Cosmonautics, the Day of Russian Language, the Day of Memory and Sorrow. The societies held literary and musical evenings, creative contests, amateur concerts, children's matinées, and organized Pancake Day celebrations.

No cases of bias or direct discrimination against citizens of the Russian Federation, as well as compatriots, were identified in the Republic of North Macedonia in 2024. The conflicts involving Russian citizens, that are known to the Russian Embassy are, as a rule, of a domestic nature and relate to intra-family relations. The Macedonian law enforcement authorities did not initiate criminal proceedings against any Russian citizens.

## **Slovakia**

There are 13 registered national minorities and ethnic groups in Slovakia. The Russian minority was officially recognized in 2005. The rights of national minorities are enshrined in the Slovak Constitution and the Law on the Use of National Minority Languages. Delegates from the Union of Russians of Slovakia are members of the Committee on National Minorities and Ethnic Groups under the Slovak government, and the community receives financial subsidies from the state as part of its support for national minority culture. The Slovak authorities are generally well-disposed to the Russian diaspora; large part of the population is sympathetic to it.

After the start by the Russian Federation of the special military operation to demilitarize and denazify Ukraine and protect the peaceful population of Donbass in February 2022, the right-liberal forces in power in Slovakia pursued a discriminatory policy towards Russian citizens and compatriots. In fact, the censorship has been introduced under the pretext of countering disinformation: Channel One, the only Russian television channel broadcast in the country, was disconnected. Any criticisms of the government or support for Russia were persecuted. There were cases of Russian citizens and compatriots being denied banking services and residence permit extensions under the pretext of a threat to national security. Russian diaspora organizations faced problems in providing venues for events. However, these facts were not reflected in the public domain. From February 2022 to autumn 2023, Soviet monuments and memorials were vandalized.

After the new government came to power in Slovakia in October 2023, the situation stabilized somewhat. Vandalism and provocative actions at Soviet burial sites have ceased. The practice has resumed of holding celebrations of important anniversaries with the invitation of the Russian Ambassador. In August 2024, a youth delegation from Russia took part in the celebrations to mark the 80th

anniversary of the Slovak National Uprising at the invitation of Prime Minister Robert Fico.

One case of discrimination has been noted this year; namely, Russian contestants have been prohibited to participate in an international accordion competition (Poprad, 20-22 November 2024).

In 2024, no Russian citizens temporarily staying in Slovakia or representatives of the diaspora permanently residing in the country contacted the Embassy regarding violations of their rights by the Slovak authorities. No signals were received neither from organizations of compatriots in Slovakia nor from the European Methodological Centre.

## **Slovenia**

According to the Consular division of the Russian Embassy in Ljubljana, there were no reports about the violation of rights of the Russian citizens and compatriots over the reporting period.

Individual cases of bullying of Russian children by classmates of Slovenian and Ukrainian origin in schools, which took place in the first half of 2022, fizzled out.

The right-populist government of Janez Janša, which was in power until June 2022, intentionally fomented Russophobia in the country and in the international arena, including through demonstrative actions aimed at destroying contractual and legal relations with Russia and limiting contacts of Slovenes with Russian citizens. In March-April 2022, Ljubljana announced 6 bilateral documents on cooperation, including in the cultural and humanitarian sphere, were to cease to be effective, withdrew the exequaturs of all five honorary consuls of Russia in Slovenia. At the request of the Slovenian authorities, the personnel at the Russian Embassy were significantly reduced. The Russian Center of Science and Culture in Ljubljana was forced to shut down its work. The Slovenian Ministry of Defence sent a circular letter to local veterans' organizations recommending that they refrain from inviting official representatives or citizens of the Russian Federation to war memorial events.

Nevertheless, a perennial tradition to hold military memorial events dedicated to the developments of the 20th century lives on.

For example, with the participation of employees of the Russian diplomatic mission, members of Slovenian veterans' organizations and locals, major events in the memory of Soviet soldiers killed in fight against Nazi occupants took place, including in Ljubljana at the memorial to Sons of Russia and the Soviet Union killed on the Slovenian land during World Wars I and II and events dedicated to Victory Day (annually) and Remembrance Day on 1 November (annually) in the



Trnovo memorial park (in July 2022,<sup>389</sup> February 2023<sup>390</sup> and February 2024) and at the cemetery of the village of Breginj (May 2023<sup>391</sup>), as well as others.

A substantial contribution to preserve the historical memory about the developments during the war and the decisive role of Russia in the defeat of Nazism is made by the Maribor WWII International Research Centre, which is headquartered in the building of a former Hitler's death camp for Soviet prisoners of war, where thousands of Red Army soldiers were tortured during the war. The Centre frequently hosts thematic international conferences, film presentations and guided tours for schoolchildren. The recent events include international conferences (together with the Department of External Economic and International Relations of the city of Moscow) through a Maribor-Israel-Sofia-Minsk-Moscow video-conference "Counteraction to falsification of history, patriotic upbringing, volunteer initiatives – relevant tracks to support Russian-speaking young people abroad" (May 2023), "Red Army in Prekmurje. On the occasion of the 80th anniversary of the liberation of Slovenia's north-east" (December 2023), "Stalag XVIII D. 5000 steps to immortality" (Krasnogorsk branch of the Victory Museum, April 2024),<sup>392</sup> exhibitions timed to coincide with International Holocaust Remembrance Day and the anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz concentration camp by the Red Army troops "Return from oblivion" (December 2022) based on the archived materials about concentration camp Stalag XVIII D and "Survive against all odds!" (January 2023). At the opening of the latter event, prepared in cooperation with the Victory Museum, a video message of Director of the Museum, Deputy President of the Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation Alexander Shkolnik was demonstrated. A series of round tables, press conferences with the participation of concentration camp survivors, meetings with veterans, demonstrations of Soviet newsreels, round tables for

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<sup>389</sup> Slovenia holds an event in honour of the killed Soviet soldiers. TASS. 23 February 2023. <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/17122827>

<sup>390</sup> Ibid.

<sup>391</sup> Slovenia honours the memory of partisans and a Soviet soldier killed during the war. TASS. 28 May 2023. <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/17865703>

<sup>392</sup> The memory of the victims of Nazism to be protected collectively. Pobeda RF (Victory of the Russian Federation). 10 April 2024. <https://dzen.ru/a/Zhax-Cbn9RSiRsQx>

students, etc., timed to coincide with the International Day of Liberation of Nazi Concentration Camp Prisoners (April 2023) and Victory Day (May 2023 and 2024) was organized.

The centre-left Slovenian government headed by Robert Golob and established following the parliamentary elections in April 2022 practically carries on with the policy towards Russia adopted by its predecessors. In December 2022, the Slovenian side denied visas to the Moscow Patriarchate Synodal Choir, whose concerts were scheduled to take place in Maribor and Ljubljana, referring to "a threat to public order and state security."

Such a Russophobic policy of the official authorities did not receive wide support in Slovenian society. An attempt to disrupt a tour of Svetlana Zakharova, People's Artist of the Russian Federation, in Ljubljana in summer 2024 initiated by the Embassy of Ukraine in Slovenia was taken extremely negatively by the Slovenian general public (the Slovenian side denied visas to the Bolshoi Theatre dancers who were to take part in her performance at insistence of Kiev). However, the performance of the Russian ballet dancer in the Slovenian capital did take place on 20 August 2024, as she participated in a gala concert of world ballet stars, which was received enthusiastically by a numerous audience from all over Slovenia as well as neighbouring countries including Austria, Italy, Germany and others.

In 2023, the public movement "Slovenia against Russophobia" was established in the country, which held a number of events, including rallies in the centre of Ljubljana on 22 April and 23 September 2023, as well as on 25 February and 13 July 2024, with main slogans against arms supplies to Ukraine and in support of Russia. Slovenian citizens also organized numerous rallies in support of our country in front of the Russian Embassy in Ljubljana.

## USA

The Russophobia spread by the US government has had a negative impact on persons of Russian origin (the USA is home to one of the largest Russian expatriate communities, with over 2.8 mln. persons, making up 0.8 of the whole population).

For example, during 2021, about three hundred fellow citizens permanently residing in the USA were subjected to prosecutions by the US intelligence services on contrived grounds, thus blatantly violating their lawful rights to preserve their national cultural identity and their freedom to maintain connections with Russia. As a consequence, individual representatives of the Coordinating Council of Organizations of Russian Compatriots in the United States (CCORC) were forced to leave the territory of the United States, including its head, E. Branson, and its executive secretary, S. Gladyshev. Under these circumstances, the Coordinating Council decided to suspend its activities on 18 November 2021. In the statement published by the CCORC it is noted that the US authorities have created inadmissible conditions for continuing the work on consolidation of the community, promotion of the Russian language, holding memorial events.

Russian compatriots were subjected to searches, interrogations and psychological pressure, and their personal belongings and documentation, including electronic devices, were confiscated. Such actions were carried out under the pretext of investigating the activities of CCORC without registration as a foreign agent. By the way, attempts to intimidate Russian citizens with punishment for "maintaining ties" with the Russian Embassy and consular offices in the United States have been made before – in the run-up to the 2020 US presidential election.

The Russian position on the inadmissibility of exerting pressure on compatriots and violating their right to maintain ties with their historical homeland has been repeatedly conveyed to the US authorities. After the beginning of Russia's special military operation to denazify and demilitarize Ukraine and protect civilians in the Donbass region on 24 February 2024, Washington stepped up the

efforts to sow Russophobia that is actively promoted by the media and official rhetoric.

The State Department, the White House, and lawmakers have all repeatedly accused Russia of pursuing an "aggressive" and "expansionist" foreign policy, meddling in US domestic affairs, violating human rights and supporting authoritarian regimes abroad.

For example, senator Lindsey Graham representing the Republican Party has repeatedly made harsh statement against Russia. In particular, he called for murdering President Vladimir Putin and said that Russians dying was the "the best money the US has spent".<sup>393</sup> While commenting on these words, Russian MFA's Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said that senator had "something for a comparison" because one of such "investments" led to World War II and Holocaust.<sup>394</sup>

The US authorities orchestrated a campaign to "cancel" everything Russian, which has now exceeded the fanatical anti-Communist campaign of the McCarthy years.

Owners of shops and restaurants who used in the names of their businesses the word "Russian", or included Russian specialties in the menu, were one of the first to face everyday aggression.

It was demonstrated mostly through petty hooliganism – insulting graffiti on walls and shop-windows, negative comments on websites, anonymous threatening telephone calls. However this contributed to spreading fear among restaurant keepers. Thus, the owner of the restaurant "Russian House" in Austin (Texas) M. Varda decided to rename her institution in just "House".

The owner of "Sveta" restaurant in the Manhattan quarter of New York, Svetlana Savchits, who immigrated to the USA from Ukraine in 1993, receives dozens of threats and insults addressed to her every day. This forced her to complain to police on regular basis. As the consequence of the bullying, Svetlana

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<sup>393</sup> <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/28/05/2023/647322719a7947b5d2f52a80>

<sup>394</sup> [https://www.rbc.ru/politics/28/05/2023/64730eb59a79472a1e46565c?from=from\\_main\\_3](https://www.rbc.ru/politics/28/05/2023/64730eb59a79472a1e46565c?from=from_main_3)

has changed the gastronomical focus of the restaurant, now calling it a place with Eastern European cuisine.

The president of the association Russian Youth of America Igor Kochin confirmed increase of Russophobia in the USA in his interview to FAN media. According to him, the negative attitude is felt even more, though public catering places do not yet hang out plates "Russians not permitted" and they have not yet started writing "we do not employ Russians" in job advertisements. He noted that Russians faced pressure and bullying of children in schools, began to lose their jobs and increasingly faced loss of sources of income. Discrimination is prosecuted by law in the United States, however, it is quite problematic to prove the fact of harassment based on national or ethnic origin.

Due to such negative background, many emigrants, even those who have achieved great success abroad, started thinking of possibility to return to Russia. In this regard, experts are increasingly drawing parallels with anti-Semitism, as a result of the upsurge in which many members of the Jewish population in Europe and America are also considering emigrating. The anti-Russian attitudes in the American society not only influence colleagues' attitude towards persons of Russian origin, they destroy families. There are reported incidents when American spouses stopped communicating with, speaking with their Russian spouses or even letting them into home.<sup>395</sup>

Russian research centres, universities and academics have been excluded from American projects, and in many cases the local scientific communities are concerned about the situation (especially in joint research projects in the Arctic region). It has become so bad that Democratic Congressman Eric Swalwell has advocated for "the expulsion of Russian students from American Universities."<sup>396</sup> Russians have also been refused licensing certificates under the Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates program. US cancer organizations

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<sup>395</sup> <https://riafan.ru/22912317-lyudei-uvol-nyayut-glava-obschestva-russkaya-molodezh-ameriki-kochin-podtverdil-usilenie-rusofobii-v-ssh>

<sup>396</sup> <https://www.foxnews.com/media/eric-swallow-russians-us-universities-retaliation>

have lobbied the international oncologists' network "Onco Alert" to bar Russia from participation. NGO Space Foundation has changed the name of the annual Yuri's Night festival, dedicated to the first man in space, to Celebration of Space.

The activists of the Russian diaspora face persecution. Loyal Russian compatriots are being threatened with criminal prosecution on the pretext of violating the law on foreign agents, which dates back to 1938.

Serious aggression to Russians and even just Russian-speaking persons is demonstrated by aggressive representatives of the Ukrainian community residing in the USA. Because of fears of attacks, Russians, like Jews in a number of European countries, try to avoid speaking their native language in public places. However, it is noted that the US law enforcers accepting attitude to facts of discrimination of Russian-speaking people. However now, according to Russian citizens' assessment, they cannot expect protection from the law enforcement authorities.

Even minimal connection to Russia may become the reason for physical violence. An example of this may be the attack on the US blogger, Brooklyn resident, by his Ukrainian neighbour. It was provoked by the fact that the man carelessly unfolded in the street the flag of the "Somali" division – a gift mailed to him by his subscriber from the Donetsk People's Republic. For this, he was hit on the face, and his tooth was broken. The attacker pursued him for several blocks shouting racist insults. Charges have been already brought against him, including those of commission of a hate crime, and a court injunction on approaching the blogger has been delivered. Meanwhile, the latter is of both Russian and Ukrainian origins.<sup>397</sup>

Many Russian speakers have been harassed at work. They are often subjected to threats, including personal threats, and physical violence from the hostile Ukrainian diaspora (e.g., during the performance of domestic patriotic songs). The Rubic website popular in the USA published its readers' stories about demonstration of discrimination that they have faced. Among others, there were

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<sup>397</sup> <https://nypost.com/2022/03/18/nyc-man-attacked-for-pro-russian-flag-says-he-got-it-from-youtube-fan/>

also reported cases of discrimination and aggression in respect of Russian children at schools, biased attitude and fault-finding in respect of persons of Russian origin at work, especially on the part of those company owners who were Ukrainian. A large increase in the number of insulting statements on the Internet and in social media has been observed.<sup>398</sup> The attempts to substitute the Russian culture with Ukrainian were recorded. For example, the University of South Carolina Symphony Orchestra has removed Pyotr Tchaikovsky's Marche Slave, replacing it with The Great Gate of Kiev, by Modest Mussorgsky, and in US universities Russian language courses have been replaced by courses in the Ukrainian language, instead of the latter being added as one of the languages studied at these institutions.

Art historians and the management of the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art classified Russian painters I.K. Aivazovsky<sup>399</sup>, A.I. Kuindzhi<sup>400</sup> and I.E. Repin<sup>401</sup> as Ukrainian artists (later I.K. Aivazovsky was recognized as an Armenian). The majority of American colleagues from the "cultural guild" welcomed the Russophobic innovation. I also approved the renaming by the Metropolitan of the title of E. Degas' work "Russian Dancer" to "Dancer in a Ukrainian Outfit".<sup>402</sup>

In the United States, concerts and exhibitions featuring Russian performers were cancelled (including the annual literary evenings in New York dedicated to the works of A. Pushkin). Works by Russian classics were withdrawn from the programs of orchestras and theatres. On 24 February 2022, the management of the Carnegie Hall concert hall in New York announced that worldwide famous Russian conductor V. Gergiev would not be leading the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra in three upcoming concerts. The participation of the Russian pianist

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<sup>398</sup> <https://www.kp.ru/daily/27374/4567724/>

<sup>399</sup> <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/435570>

<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/437979>

<sup>400</sup> <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/436833>

<sup>401</sup> <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/437440>

<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/437441>

<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/437442>

<sup>402</sup> <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/436157>

D. Matsuev in a concert planned for 25 February 2022 was also cancelled.<sup>403</sup> Simultaneously, our cultural icons and athletes have been told to publicly condemn Russia's policy in Ukraine.

The US government is continually imposing new restrictions on the participation of Russian athletes, coaches and referees in international competitions.

On 6 April 2022, the Boston Athletic Association, a non-commercial organization positioning the promotion of healthy lifestyle as its main goal, informed about its decision to prohibit participation in the annual Boston marathon to Russian and Belorussian athletes who were residents of these two countries. At the same time, non-residents are allowed to the competition not depending on their citizenship. Until further notice, the organization refused to acknowledge any designation by the athletes of their appurtenance to Russia and Belarus, including using their state flags.<sup>404</sup>

New head of the US Olympic Committee (USOPC) G. Sykes, in an open letter published on 2 February 2023 by the Associated Press news agency, noted that the U.S. supports the return of Russian athletes to international competitions if only neutral and "clean" athletes can be admitted to tournaments.<sup>405</sup>

On 5 August 2024, RIA Novosti, citing the press service of the Russian Military Intelligence, reported that the United States may launch the next stage of a campaign to isolate our country in world sport with a series of publications about doping abuses. The plan is to vilify Russian athletes in the "most Russian" sports – figure skating, synchronized swimming and rhythmic gymnastics. The purpose of publishing compromising material is to convince fans around the world that Russia's success in these sports is the result of the use of banned drugs. "This time, a series of 'high-profile investigative publications' about allegedly uncovered

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<sup>403</sup> <https://tass.ru/kultura/13850801>

<sup>404</sup> <https://www.baa.org/baa-policy-russian-and-belarusian-athletes>

<sup>405</sup> <https://apnews.com/article/sports-paris-20eecf005df757d3090e23664d7f1fa4>; <https://iz.ru/1463873/2023-02-02/glava-olimpiiskogo-komiteta-ssha-podderzhal-zhelanie-mok-vernut-rossii-na-turniry>



doping abuses in Russian top-level sports are being prepared," the agency said in its statement.<sup>406</sup>

In July 2022, the US Department of Justice placed the autonomous non-profit organization "Center for Support and Development of Public Initiatives – Creative Diplomacy" (ANO) and its head N. Burlinova on the sanctions list on the grounds that they "acted or intended to act for or on behalf of, directly or indirectly, the Government of the Russian Federation" in violation of local legislation on foreign agents.

In April 2023, US law enforcement authorities charged N. Burlinova in a criminal case for attempting to "recruit" US scientists and researchers to travel to Russia as part of the "Meeting Russia" program, and the FBI officially declared her wanted. Following this, the public activist was added to the list of the scandalous website "Mirotvorets" (Peacemaker) as "a person to be immediately detained and handed over to the law enforcement agencies of Ukraine or NATO countries".

Such aggressive steps by the US authorities are yet another example of the West's blatant and crude pressure on representatives of expert, scientific and academic circles.

In May 2023, the chapel of the Iveron Icon in the Orthodox cemetery in Washington, D.C. was desecrated (the fresco of St. John of Shanghai was sprayed with paint and the walls were smeared).<sup>407</sup> While commenting on this vandal attack Ambassador of the Russian Federation to the United States A. Antonov noted that: "A robbery was committed in the church. Doors were broken in, windows smashed, icons desecrated, frescoes painted over. Many resting places of Russian believers were vandalized".<sup>408</sup>

Calling on the United States administration not to encourage manifestations of neo-Nazism and discrimination, A. Antonov noted in the Telegram channel of

<sup>406</sup> <https://www.sport-express.ru/obshchestvo/news/svr-soobshchila-o-kampanii-ssha-po-izolyacii-rossii-v-mirovom-sporte-2240609/>; <https://www.sport-express.ru/obshchestvo/news/v-svr-rasskazali-o-planah-ssha-ochernit-rossiyskih-figuristik-sinhronistik-i-gimnastok-2240613/>; <https://m.sport-express.ru/obshchestvo/news/mariya-zaharova-kommentariy-o-novom-etape-kampanii-ssha-po-izolyacii-rossii-v-sporte-2240622/>; <https://ren.tv/news/politika/1247806-zakharova-prokommentirovala-gotoviashchuiusia-kampaniiu-ssha-protiv-rossiiskogo-sporta>; <https://ren.tv/longread/1247983-ssha-khotiat-izolirovat-rossiiu-v-sporte-raskryty-detali>

<sup>407</sup> <https://orthochristian.com/153526.html>

<sup>408</sup> <https://iz.ru/1510118/2023-05-09/posol-antonov-zaiavil-o-vspleske-rusofobii-v-ssha-pered-dnem-pobedy>

the Russian diplomatic mission that the US authorities not only do not prevent the erasure of everything related to Russia, but also try to stir up hysteria<sup>409</sup> by any means. The head of the diplomatic mission added that the American press massively ignores Victory Day. In his opinion, this is due to the unwillingness to mention the decisive contribution of the Soviet Army in the fight against the Nazi threat.<sup>410</sup>

Propaganda of Russophobia and its visual manifestation may be next to absurd. After the beginning of the Special Military Operation the stickers depicting the Ukrainian flag at the entrance of stores, cafes, hospitals, dry cleaners, and other public locations were prevalent in the United States. At that, quite often the specialists working there explain to their Russian clients that in this way they just avoid unnecessary conversations. The US authorities are working to erase the historical memory of the combat brotherhood of the peoples of our countries during the World War II. In 2024 – for the third year in a row – the Russian Embassy was denied permission to hold the annual wreath-laying ceremony at the Spirit of Elba Memorial at Arlington Cemetery in Washington, D.C., dedicated to the historic meeting of Soviet and American troops on the Elbe River on 25 April 1945.<sup>411</sup> In those years, the USSR and the United States had different ideas about the world order, but they managed to forget their differences for the sake of eradicating Nazism.

It was impossible for American veterans to attend the Victory Parade in Moscow in May 2022 or May 2023.

Washington is actively using the tactic of "fighting with foreign hands" against Russia and the Russians. First of all, this is expressed by sending large-scale military aid to the Kiev regime and influencing U.S. NATO allies to take similar measures. In addition, overt pressure is exerted on sovereign states in an attempt to create an appropriate negative background around the Russian Federation in the international arena.

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<sup>409</sup> <https://t.me/EmbUSA/3154>

<sup>410</sup> <https://iz.ru/1507798/valentin-loginov/ne-odna-na-vsekh-kak-na-zapade-otmechaiut-den-pobedy-bez-rossii>

<sup>411</sup> <https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/news/2024/04/25/22867910.shtml>

Guided by the principle of the extraterritoriality of United States justice, the United States is "hunting" citizens of sovereign States around the world, flagrantly violating the relevant international legal bilateral agreements, including by ignoring the norms of the national legislation of those States. At the request of United States law enforcement agencies, the unacceptable practice of arresting Russian citizens in third countries continues. Almost 80 such cases have been reported since 2008.

The most high-profile examples include the arrests of V. Bout (Thailand, 2008), K. Yaroshenko (Liberia, 2010), R. Seleznev (Maldives, 2014), who were not just arrested but kidnapped and forcibly taken to the United States, as well as A. Vinnik (Greece, 2017).

Based on the illegitimate use of the extraterritoriality principle by the US judiciary, Russians have been arrested in Germany (D. Kaznacheev – 2020), Georgia (O. Tishchenko – 2018), the Dominican Republic (A. Panin – 2013), Israel (A. Burkov – 2015), Spain (D. Belorossoff – 2013; V. Polyakov – 2014; P. Levashov, S. Lisov – 2017), Italy (A. Korshunov – 2019), Costa Rica (M. Chukharev – 2013), Latvia (Y. Martyshev – 2017), Italy (A. Korshunov – 2019), Costa Rica (M. Chukharev – 2013), Latvia (Y. Martyshev – 2017), Lithuania (D. Ustinov – 2013), Netherlands (D. Smilyanets), V. Drinkman – 2012; D. Dubnikov – 2021)<sup>412</sup>, Finland (M. Senah – 2015, M. Terada – 2018), Czech Republic (Y. Nikulin – 2016), Switzerland (V. Zdrovenin – 2011, V. Klyushin – 2021), Republic of Korea (V. Dunayev – 2021) and a number of other states.

In 2020, A. Pakhtusov from Spain was extradited to the USA. In 2021, V. Klushin was extradited from Switzerland to the USA (in 2023 he was sentenced to 9 years in prison). In 2022 Greece extradited A. Vinnik to Washington, and Thailand extradited D. Ukrainski to the United States. In these circumstances, Russian diplomats are doing everything in their power to help their compatriots.

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<sup>412</sup> According to Arkadiy Bukh – Dubnikov's lawyer – Dubnikov was apprehended in Mexico by FBI agents who brought him to the Netherlands because it is easier to arrange the extradition from that country.  
<https://ria.ru/20211221/ekstraditsiya-1764789386.html>

On 17 October 2022, at the request of the US Department of Justice, two Russian citizens, Yu. Orekhov and A. Uss, were detained in Germany and Italy, respectively<sup>413</sup>, for subsequent extradition to the United States on charges of sanctions evasion, oil smuggling and organizing a money laundering scheme.<sup>414</sup> According to Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman M. Zakharova, the incident indicates the continuation of "a large-scale campaign launched by Washington to capture Russians who have 'claims' against them for their subsequent guaranteed conviction by the US punitive justice system for long prison terms".<sup>415</sup>

In 2023, the victims of "hunting" of Russians abroad by local security services were V. Konoschenok (transferred to the Americans from Estonia), S. Makinin (from the Dominican Republic), M. Marchenko (from the Republic of Fiji), R. Nurullin (from the Kingdom of Morocco) and A. Petrov (from the Kingdom of Morocco). M. Marchenko (from the Republic of Fiji), R.A. Nurullin (from the Kingdom of Morocco), and A. Petrov (the U.S. Department of Justice is seeking his extradition from the Republic of Cyprus).

M. Butina, a former prisoner of US prisons, now a member of the State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, shares her experiences in detail in her book "Prison Diary".<sup>416</sup>

Until relatively recently, the situation with Russian citizens K. Yaroshenko and V. Bout, who were illegally sentenced to long terms of imprisonment and were exchanged in 2022 for Americans T. Reed and B. Griner, caused particular concern.

Konstantin Yaroshenko was held in Danberry Prison, Connecticut, until his release in April 2022. The conditions of detention in the facility do not stand up to criticism. The Russian was held in an overcrowded prison cell for several dozen inmates. Despite his chronic diseases, the prisoner's medical needs were not met in a timely manner, and he was unable to receive required dental prosthetics for years.

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<sup>413</sup> <https://ngs24.ru/text/criminal/2022/10/20/71750876/>

<sup>414</sup> <https://www.forbes.ru/society/480046-krasnoarskij-gubernator-otreagiroval-na-zaderzanie-syna-v-italii-po-obvineniam-ssa>

<sup>415</sup> <https://tass.ru/politika/16110685>

<sup>416</sup> Prison Diary / Maria Butina Moscow: AST, 2021. – 544 pages (Portrait of an era), page 95, page 101, page 97.

Despite the dozens of cases of COVID-19 in prison, all individuals are given only one medical mask per week. In addition, testing for the Coronavirus on the other hand, came very late, only after many inmates had died. Roman Seleznev, who returned to his homeland on 1 August 2024, as a result of the prisoner exchange between Russia, Belarus and Western countries, told the following in an interview with the Izvestia newspaper on 4 August 2024, spoke in detail about his experiences in American prisons (he spent a total of ten years in prison).<sup>417</sup> Numerous appeals of human rights activists (Human Rights Watch, Sentencing Project, Amnesty International, recommendations of the Federal Bureau of Prisons to release the compatriot on humanitarian grounds have long been ignored by the US authorities, despite the fact that R. Seleznev was convicted of a non-violent crime and has a number of serious chronic diseases. He was not provided with the necessary medical care, requests to transfer him to another penitentiary institution where a comprehensive examination could be carried out were not considered.

All of these vivid examples clearly demonstrate the repressive nature of American justice. The rights of Russian citizens are constantly being violated: they are regularly placed in a punishment cell without reason, denied medical care and necessary medicines, not to mention extremely poor nutrition. Undoubtedly, all of this has a negative impact on both the physical and mental health of our compatriots.

In general, it should be noted that as of 1 November 2023, there were about 100 Russian citizens in US penitentiaries of whom the Russian Embassy in Washington is aware. Unfortunately, there are no precise statistics on how many Russians are in the US prisons and detention centres.

The lack of such information on the number of imprisoned compatriots can be explained by the fact that the US authorities are far from always notified of their detention or release from custody. Numerous appeals by the Russian Embassy to the US Department of State to provide comprehensive data on all Russian citizens in detention are ignored.

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<sup>417</sup> <https://iz.ru/1737632/ivan-dubrovin/ia-do-sikh-por-ne-veriu-cto-ia-v-rossii-i-cto-vse-eto-ne-son>

As practice shows, the majority of Russian compatriots are accused of committing non-violent crimes (cyber fraud, violation of immigration laws, money laundering, theft, etc.). Russian citizens, once in the hands of American justice, are usually subjected to prejudice on the part of law enforcement agencies and courts. They are subjected to psychological pressure. Using various methods, including direct threats, they try to coerce Russian citizens to admission of their guilt and plea bargain, notwithstanding the absurdity of the charges, and if they refuse they are sentenced to long terms of imprisonment. The well-known situation with M. Butina is yet another confirmation of this.

Washington continues its attempts to put pressure on Russia by blatantly "hunting" its citizens. It is increasingly using as a pretext accusations of circumventing illegitimate anti-Russian restrictions.

According to the US Department of Justice, on 13 February 2024, a court in New York charged Kristina Puzyreva, a Russian-Canadian citizen, with conspiracy to launder money from scheme to send arms to sanctioned entities in Russia. The young woman pleaded guilty: She allegedly supplied components for drones, missile systems, and other weapons in violation of export control and sanctions laws. The items sent were allegedly later found in the area of a Special Military Operation. Kristina Puzyreva faces up to 20 years' imprisonment.<sup>418</sup>

In October 2023, Nikolay Goltsov, a Russian-Canadian national, and Salimdjon Nasriddinov, a Russian-Tajik national, were also charged in this case (with conspiracy to conduct financial transactions with the proceeds of illegal activities: procurement and trafficking to Russia of components used in unmanned aerial vehicles and guided missile systems, as well as other military technologies; components were allegedly purchased by firms on the sanctions lists, parts were allegedly found in electronic reconnaissance equipment used by the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation in the context of the Special Military Operation). The legal basis for the charge is violation of U.S. law as it relates to export restrictions

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<sup>418</sup> <https://ura.news/news/1052747757>

affecting, among other things, the export from the United States of advanced "dual-use" technology.

Protecting the rights and legitimate interests of Russian prisoners has always been a priority of the Russian Embassy in the United States. Special attention is paid to the health and living conditions of Russian citizens in prisons. There is regular contact with Russian citizens by telephone, as well as through an e-mail messaging system. Most of them receive weekly news bulletins based on the Russian media, as well as Russian-language periodicals and books.

The Embassy has had no difficulty in obtaining consular access to the detainees. In 2023, Embassy staff members visited A. Vinnik, V. Dunayev, G. Kavzharadze, V. Kliushin, V. Konoshchenok, A. Legkodymov, D. Ukrainski, and P. Krasilnikov. A. Legkodymov, D. Ukrainski, as well as P. Krasilnikov and I. Nagaev (for registration of certificates for returning to Russia).

On 1 August 2024, the largest prisoner exchange in the history of Moscow-Washington relations took place at Ankara airport: 24 people became its participants at once (a total of 26 people are listed in the exchange lists, but 2 of them are children, family members of other defendants). The Russian side handed over 16 people to the US side (this group included US citizens, dual citizens and Russians), and the US and other Western countries handed over 8 people (with two minors – 10, all of them Russian citizens).<sup>419</sup>

Vadim Konoschenok (charged with data collection on behalf of the FSB and smuggling of dual-use technology), Vladislav Klushin (serving a sentence from 2023 on cyber fraud charges) and Roman Seleznev (charged with cyber fraud) have returned to Russia from the United States.<sup>420</sup>

In recent years, Russian journalists sent to the United States have repeatedly been victims of brutal and unjustified actions by law enforcement officials, faced bans on broadcasting on American territory, restrictions on access to official

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<sup>419</sup> <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/6865911>; <https://www.iha.com.tr/haber-mitten-buyuk-takas-operasyonu-1188066>

<sup>420</sup> <https://72.ru/text/politics/2024/08/01/73906481/>

events, and blocked bank accounts. The process of issuing work visas is complicated.

Thus, while dispersing demonstrators in Minneapolis (Minnesota) on 30 May 2020, the police sprayed teargas in the face of IMG Rossiya Segodnya journalist M. Turgiev. This happened notwithstanding his showing to the police officers his press card. As could be seen from the video taken at the place of the incident, the Russian had identified himself in a loud and clear manner, he did not offer any resistance and his clothes had the necessary markings.

On the evening of 22 July 2020 in Portland, Oregon, another occurrence took place. Channel One correspondent Yu. Olkhovskaya and operator V. Arkhipov suffered from the actions of law enforcement officers in the course of preparation of materials about the disorders provoked by the killing of Afro-American G. Floyd. The law enforcers inflicted damage to the health of the Russians and damaged their professional equipment – broke the video camera and mobile phone. The incident happened after Russians had informed about their appurtenance to the media. The US media responded to this incident with silence. Total over 30 journalists were wounded as the result of unlawful actions of law enforcement and intelligence service officers in Portland while highlighting the protests.<sup>421</sup>

On 29 October 2020, a Channel One camera crew was robbed in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Correspondent G. Olisashvili suffered, operator M. Kataev had a concussion, multiple bruises and scratches. The robbers broke into the Russian citizens' car, stole a bag with personal belongings and funds and a video camera. As informed by the journalists, the local law enforcement officers demonstrated absolute indifference and total absence of any interest to investigate the incident.

On 15 October 2020, officers of the Federal Customs and Border Control Service interrogated RT channel journalist K. Rozhkov during many hours in the

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<sup>421</sup> Committee to Protect Journalists.

<https://cpj.org/2020/08/were-scared-shitless-out-here-four-reporters-on-covering-the-federal-response-to-portland-protests/>



New York airport. The Russian citizen arrived in the USA to shoot a documentary about America on the eve of the presidential elections. The discontent was caused by his intention to highlight burning issues in the country and, on the whole, by his work for RT channel that had been included in the list of foreign agents. They demanded the reporter to open access to all available electronic media, further on – to provide explanations on the information placed in public domain (including about the performed vaccination with Sputnik V) as well as on the correspondence related to his journalistic activity. What happened definitely went beyond the ordinary procedures related to ensuring public safety.

On 23 October 2020, IMG Rossiya Segodnya employee D. Zlodorev was subjected to a thirty minutes' telephone interrogation by a representative of the Baltimore FBI office. Our citizen was requested to provide information about his professional contacts with the CCORC as well as with the representative office of Rossotrudnichestvo (Federal Agency for CIS Affairs, Compatriots Living Abroad and International Humanitarian Cooperation) in Washington.

The Department of State failed to respond to any of the messages from the Russian ambassador calling for a full investigation into each of these incidents, and for the guilty parties to be prosecuted, and for measures to be taken to ensure the safety of media professionals.

In the run-up to the 2024 presidential election, the US Administration has entered an active phase of ideological confrontation with Russia. Using the case of Channel One anchor D. Simes as an example, he demonstratively intimidates journalists who broadcast alternative viewpoints.

On 5 September 2024, the US Department of Justice charged D. Symes and his wife with circumventing anti-Russian restrictions in the interests of the under-sanctioned Channel One.<sup>422</sup> It is alleged that the couple violated the American law on international emergency economic powers by providing services to the domestic media resource (modelling and producing programs) and receiving large

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<sup>422</sup> <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/tv-presenter-who-worked-channel-one-russia-charged-violating-us-sanctions-imposed-russia>

material benefits for this, including the provision of an office apartment in Moscow and staff. If convicted, the compatriots face a maximum penalty of 20 years' imprisonment on each count. In addition, as the experience of the Special Military Operation has shown, Washington actively engages controlled media and IT companies, which in every possible way prevent the international community from conveying Russian approaches and objective viewpoints on the events around Ukraine. Thus, US "digital giants" censor any information, including statements by current politicians and heads of state, that they deem "undesirable," up to and including the complete exclusion of the Russian position from the media space. All this happens on direct recommendations or with silent consent of the authorities. On the Internet, both Russian media outlets and ordinary citizens who publish content reflecting pro-Russian positions are under repression: Western Internet platforms have been blocking Russian sources of information, including media outlets and accounts of government agencies on streaming platforms and social media.

Since April 2020, Roskomnadzor has identified more than 60 cases of discrimination in relation to videos posted on the YouTube platform by Russian media, as well as state, public and sports organizations or figures.

In July 2020, YouTube video hosting blocked the accounts of Tsargrad TV channel and the Imperial Eagle historical society. The formal ground was "violation of the platform terms and conditions and of export legislation". In September 2020, the service's administration also restricted access to A. Rogatkin's film "Beslan" under the pretext that it contained materials that could scare or shock users. And in March 2021 – to the film by Russian journalist A. Kondrashev "Crimea. The Way to the Motherland."

Restrictions on Russian media resources sharply intensified in late February 2022. For example, Google banned Russian state media from advertising on its platforms. In early March, its management also announced that Google Play users in Russia would not be able to renew paid subscriptions or install paid applications due to the decisions of payment systems.

Censorship is actively applied by Meta, which owns a number of social networks. These resources restrict the dissemination of content from Russian media, public figures and public figures, as well as ordinary citizens, containing the Russian position. At the same time, in late February and March 2022, Meta-owned platforms actively disseminated calls to "kill Russians," manuals on how to kill and make explosives, and other content of a similar nature. Moderators ignored users' complaints about such a blatant dissemination of hateful ideology.

On 11 March 2022, a letter from Meta's internal mailing list was published. It stated that the company would temporarily allow Facebook and Instagram platforms in a number of countries not to block users' calls for violence against Russians, including military personnel. It was also noted that the social networks would not remove calls for the death of the presidents of Russia and Belarus.

Following the revelation of double standards against Russian citizens, Meta attempted to correct the situation. However, its statement only once again confirmed racist approaches to publications. In particular, it was stated that users would be allowed to call for the "death of Russian occupants," but at the same time the administration of the platforms would block calls for violence against Russian civilians. The company also noted that publications on ways of killings would be banned.

The company also failed to comply with the Russian authorities' legal demand to remove such dangerous materials. On 21 March 2022, a Russian court recognized Meta as extremist and banned its activities in Russia.

In March 2022, Meta and Google announced the blocking of Russian media accounts.<sup>423</sup> Netflix, a streaming service that openly promotes LGBT agenda, including among children, through movies and cartoons, refused to broadcast the programmes of 20 Russian TV channels.

According to the Roskomnadzor data, in the first month since the start of the special operation alone, more than 80 cases were officially confirmed of restrictions related to censorship of Russian journalists, political and public figures

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<sup>423</sup> YouTube's press account on Twitter. <https://twitter.com/YouTubeInsider/status/1502335030168899595>

and organizations, as well as individual programs by foreign platforms (36 on YouTube, 18 on Facebook, 13 on Instagram, and 9 on Twitter). Among other things, the accounts or content of the information agencies Russia Today and Sputnik, of the TV channels Russia 24, Zvezda, RBC, NTV, THT, REN TV, Izvestiya, The Fifth Channel, Russian Radio, Tsargrad and others were blocked. Channel One, Russia 1, Kultura TV channels and RIA Novosti media outlet also came under restrictions. According to statements by the administration of the video hosting site, the content distributed by the TV channels, including about the Special Military Operation, "violates its policies."

Simultaneously with these restrictions, the administration and moderators of YouTube do not object to dissemination of information by extremist organizations, first of all by the "Right Sector" banned in Russia and by the "Azov" nationalistic formation. In fact, YouTube has become one of the key platforms spreading fakes about the special military operation in Ukraine discrediting the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation. According to Roskomnadzor, over 12,000 of such materials are posted on the service.

Incidents related to the marking of inaccuracy of published information, marking of State control, exclusion from the list of recommendations, as well as restriction of access to download applications of Russian media are recorded.

It is noteworthy that a number of US media outlets, broadcasting internationally – Voice of America/VOA, Radio Liberty, Present Time, are officially financed by the US government, while being a part of the US Agency for Global Media, which does not conceal that its activity is "aimed at key strategic regions for US foreign policy," i.e. is directly controlled by the State interests.

## **Ukraine**

According to numerous reports and other analyses by the Ministry, it is by now abundantly clear that the Kiev regime is a blatantly Nazi regime, imitating in everything its ideological inspirers from Nazi Germany and, along the way, committing countless gross and systematic violations of human rights in all spheres of public life.

Glorification of Nazism, promotion of its penetration into all spheres of public life, systemic suppression of human rights, opposition and dissent, as well as the fight against everything connected with Russia, has become a deliberate Ukrainian policy.

Hateful ideology became so widespread after the bloody putsch of 2014, when extremists infiltrated all levels of government in the country. The leading forces therein were extremist nationalist organizations and movements (the Svoboda Party, the Right Sector, etc.), which are the ideological successors of the Ukrainian nationalists known for their collaboration with the Nazis and mass murder of civilians in the USSR during the Great Patriotic War.

Instead of forming a coalition government of national unity, as envisaged by the agreement of 21 February 2014 signed by President Yanukovich and the leaders of the then opposition, the forces that usurped power in Kiev announced the creation of a "government of the winners". One of his first steps was an attempt to abolish the status of the Russian language in Ukraine, which only provoked greater tensions in the country. The new authorities called those who did not accept the coup and advocated for autonomy and federalisation "separatists" and "terrorists" and began to use force against them, declaring the so-called anti-terrorist operation (ATO) in April 2014. Regular troops were sent against the Russian-speaking Donbass, and peaceful towns were subjected to artillery shelling and military air strikes.

The terrible crimes of that period are still horrifying, one of the most brutal being the burning alive of at least 48 people on 2 May 2014 in the Trade Union

House in Odessa. No one in Ukraine is going to investigate them.<sup>424</sup> All this only confirms the Nazi nature of the regime established in Kiev.

The fact that the ATO status envisaged the use of irregular "volunteer battalions" alongside the Armed Forces of Ukraine (AFU), whose atrocities could not be kept silent even by the international organizations and structures patronizing Kiev, including the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), is a convincing demonstration of the intentions of the Kiev authorities with regard to Donbass.

The most significant efforts are being made by the Kiev regime to glorify Nazism and whitewash its Ukrainian collaborators, who have been elevated to "heroes of the national liberation movement", and to shape Ukrainian society on the basis of neo-Nazi ideas and ideology. These actions are actively encouraged by Ukraine's Western curators and are of a massive and systemic nature. Kiev is consistently carrying out aggressive propaganda of neo-Nazism, accompanied by the rewriting of the history of the Great Patriotic War and World War II. Along with honouring fascist accomplices, the Ukrainian authorities endeavour to demolish monuments to the Red Army soldiers. In addition to the local authorities, right-wing radicals are also involved in the "war" against monuments to the Red Army soldiers and victims of the tragic events of World War II, including those related to the Holocaust.<sup>425</sup>

The current regime, having adopted the ideology and practices of Ukrainian radical nationalists, has essentially degenerated into a neo-Nazi dictatorship. For such a regime, a state of war and the use of the widest range of repressive measures

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<sup>424</sup> A detailed description of the events of those years is given in the study of the team of authors of the History of Ukraine // Grigoriev M.S., Deynogo V.N., Dyukov A.R., Zasorin S.A., Malkevich A.A., Manko S.A., Shapovalov V.L.. History of Ukraine: Monograph. Moscow, International Relations, 2022 – 648 pages. The text of the monograph is publicly available on the website of the Public Chamber of the Russian Federation: [https://files.oprf.ru/storage/image\\_store/docs2022/istoriya\\_Ukraini\\_MS\\_Grigoriev\\_dr.pdf](https://files.oprf.ru/storage/image_store/docs2022/istoriya_Ukraini_MS_Grigoriev_dr.pdf)

<sup>425</sup> Detailed information on the glorification of Nazism and its Ukrainian accomplices in Ukraine, the destruction of monuments to Soviet soldiers, the complete eradication of the Russian language in the country and the pressure on Russian-speaking residents is given in the Ministry's regular report Regarding the Situation with the Glorification of Nazism and the Spread of Neo-Nazism and Other Practices That Contribute to Fuelling Contemporary Forms of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance.

are necessary as the only and at the same time the safest way to preserve its dominance.

Acting within this paradigm, Kiev is pursuing a policy of forced Ukrainization in all spheres of public life, which takes the form of a discriminatory policy towards the Russian-speaking population and representatives of national minorities.

The Nazi approaches of the Kiev regime are clearly reflected in their attitude towards the inhabitants of Donbass. First of all, hundreds of thousands of its citizens, including the elderly, women and children, were killed and suffered during the armed conflict unleashed by Kiev a decade ago. As a result of the severe restrictions imposed by the Ukrainian authorities, citizens living in the areas of hostilities were exposed to serious life-threatening risks. They had to daily overcome significant difficulties in obtaining basic services such as social benefits, water, heating and health care. Kiev's military actions resulted in residential areas falling into disrepair, and there were no mechanisms for legal protection and compensation for the inhabitants of Donbass.

Convincing confirmation of this Nazi approach by Kiev are the well-known statements by Ukrainian leaders – former Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk, who in the summer of 2014 called the Donbass militia "subhumans" (by analogy with the Nazi "untermenschen") and current President Vladimir Zelenskiy, who, speaking of the citizens of the country against whom he had imposed sanctions, said that not all people were human beings, some were just "specimens".

The beginning of a special military operation by the Russian Federation to denazify and demilitarize Ukraine, address the threat to our security emanating from its territory and protect the civilian population of Donbass fully highlighted how profoundly that country had been reformatted into an aggressive Russophobic nation with confrontation with Russia and rejection of everything connected to it in whichever way as its main features. Since 2022, the neo-Nazi regime in Kiev has definitively ceased even formal attempts to create the appearance of maintaining

law and order and respecting human rights in Ukraine, taking any possible measures to discriminate our citizens.

It is worth noting that this report covers data on abuses of rights and prosecution of Russian citizens and compatriots. Numerous reports of crimes committed with unprecedented cruelty by Ukrainian neo-Nazi groups and foreign mercenaries against Russian servicemen are not included in this document. There are also separate reports on the atrocities committed by Ukrainian militants and foreign mercenaries against civilians living on the Russian territory – in the DPR, the LPR, the Zaporozhye Oblast, the Kherson Oblast, the Belgorod Oblast, the Bryansk Oblast, the Kursk and other Oblasts. The modern Ukrainian Banderites, striving to imitate their Nazi idols in everything, do not stop terrorising the civilian population of Russia, subjecting it to daily shelling and drone attacks, as a result of which civilians are killed and injured. We also know of concentration camps set up by the Ukrainian Armed Forces in the Russian border area, where our citizens are held in inhuman conditions. Ukrainian neo-Nazis have previously carried out similar brutal practices against the inhabitants of Donbass.

An assessment of the criminal acts of the Kiev regime, which have fully demonstrated its allegiance to the ideas and tactics of the Hitler fascists and local collaborators from the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA)<sup>426</sup> during the Great Patriotic War, is being made by the Russian competent authorities as part of the investigation of numerous criminal cases concerning those heinous crimes. Significant efforts are also being made by Russian civil society organizations and all concerned individuals to uncover the truth about the real face of Zelenskiy Nazi gang and radical nationalists covered up by them. Crime facts will be included in separate analytical materials.

In Russia, crimes against civilians in Russia and Ukraine committed by the Kiev regime, nationalists, and representatives of Ukrainian security agencies have

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<sup>426</sup> Both organizations are recognised as extremist and banned in Russia.



been recorded and investigated by the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation since 2014. As of late September 2024, over 5,300 criminal cases have already been opened. Such crimes include genocide, terrorism, cruel treatment of civilians, the use of prohibited means and methods in an armed conflict, murder, intentional destruction and damage to property (Articles 205, 356, 105, 167 of the Russian Criminal Code) and others. The defendants include over 1,065 individuals, in particular representatives of the high command of the AFU, as well as commanders of military units who gave criminal orders for the shelling of civilians and civilian infrastructure. Over 200 of them have been put on a wanted list. In total, investigations into more than 350 criminal cases have been completed and sentences have been handed down against more than 410 Ukrainian military personnel, who have been sentenced to deprivation of liberty for periods ranging from 8 to 29 years, as well as life imprisonment.<sup>427</sup> Other criminal cases are still under consideration. The Investigative Committee establishes and provides legal assessment of the actions of all persons involved in the crimes.

In addition, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs is constantly working to collect, systematise and make public information on the crimes of the Kiev regime. Since 2023, this specially created direction in its activities has been headed by Ambassador-at-Large Rodion Miroshnik.

Russian citizens and Russian-speaking residents of Ukraine continue to be persecuted by the Kiev regime, whose efforts are aimed at large-scale Ukrainization of all spheres of life through the destruction of the diversity of linguistic and ethnic groups in Ukraine, primarily the "fight" against the Russian language.

Particularly active efforts are being made by the Kiev regime to completely eliminate the Russian-speaking space and the possibilities of using the Russian language in the country. Since Ukraine gained its independence, the authorities have pursued a policy of forced Ukrainization of all spheres of public life and the

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<sup>427</sup> <https://sledcom.ru/press/events/item/1916729/>

assimilation of all ethnic groups living in the country in order to create a mono-ethnic state. These processes accelerated noticeably after the 2014 coup d'état. At the same time, Kiev's policy towards various ethnic communities assumes a differentiated nature, which contradicts the Constitution of Ukraine guaranteeing equal rights and freedoms for all citizens.

In legislative terms, the Crimean Tatars, Krymchaks and Karaites who, according to the most optimistic Kiev estimates, make up no more than 0.1 percent of the population now, enjoy a privileged position in Ukraine. Moreover, this was done recently: the Law on the Indigenous Peoples of Ukraine<sup>428</sup> was adopted in July 2021 in the interests of the mentioned groups, guaranteeing their rights to study in their native language, to establish their own educational institutions and media, and also guarantees them protection from assimilation (other national minorities were not granted this privilege).

As for other nationalities, the Kiev regime is pursuing a consistent line of legislatively consolidating the dominant role of the Ukrainian language and reducing the possibility of using other languages in the public space, while varying in degree of severity. The Russian language is subject to the ultimate restrictions, though it is the mother tongue of millions of Ukrainians – not only of ethnic Russians, but also of Belarusians, Ukrainians, Armenians, Jews, Greeks, Hungarians and representatives of other nationalities. Accordingly, the rights of the Russian and Russian-speaking population have been most restricted, as the Kiev regime's efforts have led to the gradual legislative restriction of the linguistic rights of ethnic Russians and numerous Russian-speaking representatives of other nationalities.

In September 2017, the Law on Education<sup>429</sup> was passed. It stipulates that starting from 2020 all teaching in Ukrainian educational institutions must be done

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<sup>428</sup> [https://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc\\_id=36748189](https://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=36748189)

<sup>429</sup> [https://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc\\_id=37708387](https://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=37708387)

in the official state language. Teaching in minority languages was only allowed in preschools and elementary schools.

According to the expert opinion of the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe<sup>430</sup> many provisions of the mentioned act are discriminatory. PACE resolution "Protection and Development of Regional and Minority Languages in Europe" also criticized the document.<sup>431</sup> In particular, the author of the report on the topic of the resolution, Hungarian MP Rózsa Hoffman said: "I firmly believe that while enacting the new legislation, the country failed to meet its international obligations and the Council of Europe standards." In December 2018, the then OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, Lamberto Zannier from Italy stressed that Ukraine "must remain a space for all nationalities with different languages, which they should have the right to use".<sup>432</sup>

In April 2019, the Law on Ensuring the Functioning of the Ukrainian Language as the State Language<sup>433</sup> was adopted. It mandated the use of the Ukrainian language in all areas of public life except for private communications and religious practice. According to the Law, any attempt to introduce official multilingualism in Ukraine is recognized as an action aimed at forcibly changing or overthrowing the constitutional order.

One of the prerequisites for the Law was a decision made by the Constitutional Court of Ukraine in February 2018 that recognized the Law on the Principles of State Language Policy<sup>434</sup>, according to which Russian was a regional language in certain Oblasts of the country (in 13 out of 24 Oblasts), as unconstitutional. Subsequently, at the instigation of some "language activists" the

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<sup>430</sup> [https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-AD\(2017\)030-e](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-AD(2017)030-e)

<sup>431</sup> <https://pace.coe.int/en/files/23532#trace-1>

<sup>432</sup> <https://ria.ru/20181206/1547556068.html>

<sup>433</sup> [https://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc\\_id=33624660](https://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=33624660)

<sup>434</sup> <https://ria.ru/20180228/1515481546.html>

Russian language was deprived of its regional status by decisions of Ukrainian courts.

In compliance with the Law on Ensuring the Functioning of the Ukrainian Language as the State Language, the Office of the Commissioner for the Protection of the Official Language and the National Commission on Ukrainian Language Standards have been established in 2019 to monitor the implementation of the laws on language. The Office of the Commissioner perform indeed functions of a repressive mechanism, since its responsibilities include monitoring compliance with the requirements outlined in language legislation, including conducting official investigations and making proposals to impose disciplinary or administrative penalties on people or organizations who are in breach of the laws on language. Moreover, in 2022 its powers expanded as a legal provision imposing liability for debasing or disparaging the Ukrainian language came into effect. The introduced system of fines is of an impressive amount from 200 to 400 minimum wages.

At the same time, practice shows that even the use of radical nationalists and persons close to them does not help the work of this repressive body. The language ombudsman Taras Kremen himself admitted that the institution under his control relied on the denunciations of "responsible patriotically-minded citizens". According to the ombudsman at a press conference in early May 2024, the Russian language is ubiquitous on the streets of Ukrainian cities. "We ask local authorities to go out to the people, walk the streets and look themselves at the signs, advertisements, at such an overpopulation of the Russian language as we see on the streets of many of our cities – from Odessa to Kharkov. We need to put an end to this," he said. Taras Kremen added that representatives of his office could not "go around every street, every alley and every state institution" themselves and could rely only on those who wrote complaints.<sup>435</sup>

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<sup>435</sup> <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/20698775>

As a follow-up to this idea, the mayor of Ivano-Frankovsk, Ruslan Martsinkiv, in September 2024 announced the creation of a "language inspectorate" in the city made up of representatives of "civil society" who would patrol the streets to counteract the spread of the Russian language.<sup>436</sup> Announcing the start of the "inspection" from 28 October 2024, the head of Ivano-Frankovsk wrote: "We have made sure that there is not a single Moscow church in Frankovsk. We must be a 100 percent Ukrainian-speaking city. We have no moral right to tolerate the language of the enemy".<sup>437</sup>

In an interview on 24 October 2024, Taras Kremen said that "soft Ukrainization" has been replaced by an "offensive" one, which "provides for strict control over compliance with the language law in all spheres of public life in Ukraine without exception". He said that there were currently "tools and levers to monitor, control and punish each of the management entities".<sup>438</sup>

On 21 June 2019, a group of 51 MPs of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine filed a submission to the Constitutional Court of Ukraine (CCU) raising the issue of the constitutionality of the Law on Ensuring the Functioning of the Ukrainian Language as the State Language with regard to the restrictions it imposes on the right of citizens to use and protect their native language and the right to develop the linguistic identity of indigenous peoples and national minorities of Ukraine.<sup>439</sup> Vadim Novinskiy, one of the deputies who had initiated the petition, stated that instead of regulating social interaction in the area of language policy in a multinational state, this law pits Ukrainian and Russian speakers against each

<sup>436</sup> <https://tsn.ua/ukrayina/u-zahidnomu-misti-z-yavlyatsya-movni-inspetori-yak-voni-pracyuvatimut-2656860.html>

<sup>437</sup> <https://strana.today/news/474117-kohda-v-ivano-frankovske-nachnut-rabotu-jazykovye-inspektory.html>

<sup>438</sup> <https://life.pravda.com.ua/society/chi-ye-shche-misce-lagidniy-ukrajinizaciji-poyasnyuye-movniy-ombudsmen-interv-yu-304453/>

<sup>439</sup> <https://www.ukrinform.ru/rubric-polytics/3057613-konstitucionnyj-sud-vo-vtornik-vozmetsa-zazykovo-zakon.html>

other, and causes conflict between them.<sup>440</sup> On 14 July 2021, the CCU issued a ruling in which it recognized the law on the state language as compliant with the Constitution.<sup>441</sup>

Furthermore, the Court held that "Russian-speaking citizens of Ukraine do not constitute a coherent social unit as a group entitled to legal protection as an ethnic or linguistic unit." People living for hundreds of years in the territories that are now part of Ukraine have been called a "political construct".<sup>442</sup>

After the adoption of the Law on Ensuring the Functioning of the Ukrainian Language as the State Language, its provisions came into force gradually. Thus, provisions were introduced on the mandatory use of the Ukrainian language in advertising. The state language must be used in scientific and service sectors, during cultural and mass events (including theatre performances, concerts, and shows); and all information in museums and exhibition centres is to be in the state language; mandatory dubbing into Ukrainian of films on television and in film distribution was introduced. At the same time, candidates for civil service positions have now to prove their knowledge of the Ukrainian language. Nationwide print media are required to issue a mandatory Ukrainian copy of issues published in a non-state language. Russian-language content is available only as an optional. All websites and social networking pages of public authorities, local governments, enterprises, institutions and organizations registered in Ukraine must have a Ukrainian-language version, which is loaded by default. All goods that have installed computer programs must have the Ukrainian-language interface.

The next step towards the establishment of a mono-ethnic language regime in a multi-ethnic state was the adoption of the Law on Complete General

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<sup>440</sup> <https://vesti.ua/strana/obrashhenie-v-ksu-po-yazykovomu-zakonu-yavlyaetsya-zashhitoj-prav-russkoyazychnyh> <https://strana.today/articles/analysis/277345-pochemu-predstavitel-prezidenta-v-ks-zajavil-chto-ne-nuzhno-otmenjat-zakon-o-totalnoj-ukrainizatsii-.html> (earlier <https://strana.ua/articles/analysis/277345-pochemu-predstavitel-prezidenta-v-ks-zajavil-chto-ne-nuzhno-otmenjat-zakon-o-totalnoj-ukrainizatsii-.html>)

<sup>441</sup> <https://tass-ru.turbopages.org/turbo/tass.ru/s/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/11902213>

<sup>442</sup> <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/v001p710-21>

Secondary Education on 16 January 2020.<sup>443</sup> The document introduced three teaching models which depend upon the language spoken by the students (division into representatives of indigenous peoples, representatives of national minorities whose languages are official languages of the EU, and others).

The Law on National Minorities (Communities) of Ukraine was adopted on 13 December 2022 within the framework of fulfilling the requirements necessary for Ukraine's "European integration".<sup>444</sup> The document did not introduce anything new into the existing legislation regulating the situation of national minorities in Ukraine and did not contribute to any real improvement in the protection of their rights and freedoms.

Discriminatory nature of its text with regard to the Russian language (which is defined as "the language of a national minority being the state (official) language of the state recognized by the Verkhovnaya Rada of Ukraine as aggressor-state or "occupier"-state) and ethnic Russians.

The Law on Amendments to Certain Laws of Ukraine Concerning the Consideration of the Expert Assessment of the Council of Europe and its Bodies on the Rights of National Minorities (Communities) in Specific Spheres was adopted by the Verkhovnaya Rada on 8 December 2023 and signed by Vladimir Zelenskiy on the same day.<sup>445</sup> The document provides for the amendment of several laws regulating the language policy of Ukraine, including the above-mentioned laws, ostensibly in order to harmonize the legislation with European norms in the field of ensuring the rights of national minorities. It really provides some "preferences" for the national minorities speaking one of the EU official languages. However, restrictions on the rights of Russian and Russian-speaking residents of Ukraine were further tightened and became indefinite.

Restrictions on the use of the Russian language are also contained in the Law on Media, which came into force in March 2023. This norm, in particular,

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<sup>443</sup> <https://iz.ru/986778/2020-03-13/prezident-ukrainy-podpisal-zakon-ob-obrazovanii>

<sup>444</sup> <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2827-20>

<sup>445</sup> <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/3504-20>

tightens language quotas – from January 2024, the share of the Ukrainian language on national and regional television has been increased from 75 to 90 percent, on local TV channels – from 60 to 80 percent. According to the amendments introduced to the Law on Amendments to Certain Laws of Ukraine Concerning the Consideration of the Expert Assessment of the Council of Europe and its Bodies on the Rights of National Minorities (Communities) in Specific Spheres on 8 December 2023, for TV and radio broadcasters whose language of broadcasting besides Ukrainian is the language of indigenous peoples or national minorities being the official languages of the EU or to which the provisions of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages apply, the quota was reduced to 30 percent. At the same time, the law explicitly states that these provisions do not apply to the Russian language.

On 6 June 2024, the Law on Preschool Education<sup>446</sup> was adopted; it allows representatives of indigenous peoples and national minorities receiving preschool education in their native language along with the study of the state language. Despite the fact that its Article 9 prohibits discrimination in preschool education, this right does not apply to speakers of Russian numbering millions in Ukraine.

Moreover, even private educational entities, which have the right to freely choose the language of the educational process, are prohibited from choosing Russian as such.

Thus, the above-mentioned normative acts are aimed at total Ukrainization and provide for the use of the state language in all public spheres such as education, culture, science, services, advertising, mass media, including the introduction of language quotas on radio and television, etc.

When such restrictive norms were introduced, exceptions were made for the use of English, the official languages of the EU and the languages of the indigenous peoples of Ukraine. The restrictions imposed are aimed mainly at infringing the Russian language and ethnic Russians, but have also affected other national groups, including ethnic Hungarians.

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<sup>446</sup> <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/3788-20>



It is noticeable that as the result of a number of the laws adopted, including the Law on Education, the Law on General Secondary Education and the Law on Ensuring the Functioning of the Ukrainian Language as the State Language, the Russian language was subjected to triple discrimination in the Ukrainian state: in relation to the state language, official EU languages and indigenous languages.

Many parties, media and civil society activists noted that all such restrictive norms mad the output of products in the Russian language and any use of it unprofitable. Accordingly, it has become impossible for Russian-speaking citizens of Ukraine to receive information in their native language.

At the same time, even Western sociologists recognise that in Ukraine Russian is the language of everyday communication for the majority of the local population.<sup>447</sup> This was also acknowledged by Ukrainian sociologists: according to the results of a survey conducted in Ukraine by the Social Monitoring Centre in 2021, more than half of Ukrainians actively use Russian at home. In addition, over 50 percent of the country's residents said they were willing to watch films and read books in Russian.<sup>448</sup>

The Venice Commission of the Council of Europe has pointed out numerous facts of discrimination of the Russian language<sup>449</sup>, having noted the contradiction between the language law and Ukraine's international obligations, and also voicing fears that the law may create inter-ethnic tension in society. The Commission's assessments and recommendations were supported by OHCHR.<sup>450</sup>

According to the residents of Ukraine themselves, the strongest discrimination in the country is based on language. The data from an all-Ukrainian sociological survey conducted by the Kiev International Institute of Sociology

<sup>447</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/article/politika-i-obshchestvo/20230608-russkoyazychnykh-ukraintsev-ne-sushchestvuet-v-chem-slaboe-mesto-ideologii-kiyevskogo-rezhima/>

<sup>448</sup> <https://russian.rt.com/ussr/article/896925-ukraina-opros-yazyk>

<sup>449</sup> [https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-AD\(2019\)032-e](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-AD(2019)032-e)

<sup>450</sup> OHCHR Report on the human rights situation in Ukraine. 16 February – 31 July 2020  
[https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/UA/30thReportUkraine\\_RU.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/UA/30thReportUkraine_RU.pdf)

(KIIS) in October 2023 showed that 45 percent of respondents felt harassed because of the language they used.<sup>451</sup>

As a result of Kiev's policy to eliminate the Russian language, Russian-language schools in Ukraine have effectively ceased to exist as of 2020, and since September 2022, Ukrainian school curricula has no longer provided for the teaching of subjects in Russian and the study of Russian either as a subject or as an option. All literary works by Russian and Soviet (with the exception of Ukrainian) authors have been removed from the literature programs of Ukrainian schools.<sup>452</sup>

The Nazi nature of the Kiev regime is convincingly illustrated by the following fact. The Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine has developed recommendations for the removal of Russian literature which may be deemed propagandist from library collections. These works, according to representatives of the ministry, "will be sent to waste paper for the printing of Ukrainian books". In 2022, about 11 million Russian-language books were written off and destroyed in public libraries as part of the "de-Russification" programme.<sup>453</sup> In 2023, this figure amounted to almost nine million copies.<sup>454</sup> In 2024, this process continued. Such actions copy the destruction of literature of "non-German spirit" in Nazi Germany.

According to a report published on 30 April 2024 by Taras Kremen, Commissioner for the Protection of the Ukrainian Language, there are only three schools left in Ukraine where Russian is studied as a subject. Over the past two years, the number of schoolchildren studying Russian has decreased from 454.8 thousand to 768 children.<sup>455</sup>

Taras Kremen has repeatedly publicly called for a complete ban on the Russian language in education and interpersonal communication. In April 2022, he

<sup>451</sup> <https://life.pravda.com.ua/society/653a39b5707b3/>

<sup>452</sup> [https://ru.osvita.ua/doc/files/news/866/86629/1\\_Rishennya.pdf](https://ru.osvita.ua/doc/files/news/866/86629/1_Rishennya.pdf)

<sup>453</sup> <https://www.rbc.ru/rbcfreenews/63e1f2a79a79470c4ae86e5b>

<sup>454</sup> <https://suspilne.media/culture/750451-66-z-usih-spisanih-knizok-z-ukrainskih-publicnih-bibliotek-za-ostanni-dva-roki-rosijskou-movou/>

<sup>455</sup> <https://kommersant-ru.turbopages..org/turbo/kommersant.ru/s/doc/6679806>

publicly called for abolition of teaching in Russian in all educational institutions of the country since 1 September of the current year.<sup>456</sup> He proposed in particular to replace the Russian language by other subjects, such as the history of Ukraine or the English language, and until this, he offered that before the start of each Russian language lesson, teachers explain to Russian-speaking children that their native language was, by definition, "the language of the aggressor", which was shameful to speak. Taras Kremen also said that the foreign literature programme should be revised, since it places a significant emphasis on the study of the works of Russian writers. On 11 April 2022, he urged to get rid of the Russian-language names of settlements in the country justifying it by the slogan "Ukraine for Ukrainians".<sup>457</sup> Moreover, in October 2023, he said that pupils and teachers should also speak only Ukrainian during breaks between lessons.<sup>458</sup>

His proposal was developed in the Draft Law on Amendments to the Law of Ukraine on Education Regarding the Creation of Ukrainian-Language Educational Environment in Educational Institutions<sup>459</sup> submitted to the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine on 1 October 2024, which provides for the use of exclusively Ukrainian language both during the educational process and in any other forms of interaction taking place in the premises and on the territory of the educational institution. However, there is an exception for teaching in the languages of national minorities, which are official languages of the European Union, or in the languages of indigenous peoples. The text of the draft law prohibits the use of Russian.

Minister of Education Oksen Lisovoy also spoke out against the existence of schools in which a subject or even a lesson would be provided in Russian. On 6 September 2023, he said: "We are now fighting for a value system that is radically different from the value system of the Russian Empire. We are definitely

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<sup>456</sup> <https://strana.today/news/386692-v-shkolakh-mohut-perestat-obuchat-russkomu.html>

<sup>457</sup> <https://ria.ru/20220411/yazyk-1782979284.html>

<sup>458</sup> <https://informator.ua/uk/ce-tezh-osvitniy-proces-kremin-povidomiv-yakoyu-movoyu-mayut-spilkuvatisya-vchiteli-ta-diti-na-perervah>

<sup>459</sup> <https://itd.rada.gov.ua/billinfo/Bills/Card/44959>

not on the same path as the Russian world. Why then do we prepare children to use Russian?" he said.<sup>460</sup>

At the same time, a study conducted by the State Education Quality Service of Ukraine in the 2023-2024 school year showed that despite years of restrictions and bans on the use of the Russian language, even in the west of the country not all children spoke Ukrainian between classes – only 74 percent. In the east, however, 83 percent of children use Russian during breaks. Outside of school across the country, less than 40 percent of pupils use only Ukrainian.<sup>461</sup>

In addition to different legislative bans, in order to "squeeze out" the Russian language, the forces of "civil society" (often radical organizations) were also involved; with the indulgence of the authorities, they organized various aggressive actions against teachers who continued to use the Russian language. In March 2020, nationalists organized bullying of lyceum teachers in Lvov. The teachers were then accused of "spreading propaganda about the Russian world" and "Russifying Ukrainian children".<sup>462</sup> A similar incident happened to the honoured teacher of Ukraine Pavel Viktor. In April 2020, nationalists launched an aggressive campaign against him because he had created video lessons of physics in Russian.<sup>463</sup>

In November 2020, under the pressure from the University's management, professor of the National Technical University "Dneprovskaya Politehnika" (Dnepr / Dnepropetrovsk) Valeriy Gromov was to resign after a student formally complained about him lecturing in Russian.<sup>464</sup>

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<sup>460</sup> <https://t.me/stranaua/121684>

<sup>461</sup> <https://life.pravda.com.ua/society/uchni-ta-vchiteli-stali-menshe-rozmovlyati-ukrajinskoyu-pid-chas-navchannya-ta-u-pobuti-doslidzhennya-302622/>

<sup>462</sup> <https://strana.today/news/253594-kak-vo-lvove-natsionalisty-atakujut-shkolu-s-russkim-jazykom-obuchenija-.html> (earlier <https://strana.ua/news/253594-kak-vo-lvove-natsionalisty-atakujut-shkolu-s-russkim-jazykom-obuchenija-.html>)

<sup>463</sup> <https://vesti.ua/odessa/rabotaet-na-kreml-v-odesse-zatravili-izvestnogo-professora-iz-za-yazyka>

<sup>464</sup> <https://strana.today/news/299846-jazykovo-iskandal-v-dnepre-za-chto-uvolili-professora-hromova-iz-dpi.html> (earlier <https://strana.ua/news/299846-jazykovo-iskandal-v-dnepre-za-chto-uvolili-professora-hromova-iz-dpi.html>)

At the same time, repressions against Russian-speaking teachers were launched in Ukraine by the heads of educational institutions themselves. On 7 February 2022, Kiev schools (lyceum No. 303 and school No. 152) fired two teachers for using the Russian language in class. The dismissals were carried out after an inspection, conducted in two educational institutions by the Office of State Language Protection Commissioner Taras Kremen. The teachers had been reprimanded before the dismissals.

On 4 April 2023, in Irpen, a teacher of philosophy was suspended from work in the State Customs University for lecturing in Russian after a student pointed to it during the online course. The internal investigation was launched against the teacher after the complaints from students.<sup>465</sup>

On 21 April 2023, in Odessa, a Music and Arts History teacher was fired from the Odessa Theatre and Arts College for teaching in Russian. Not in the mood to listen to the music by Russian composers Pyotr Tchaikovsky and Sergey Rachmaninov at the music lessons, a student informed against her.<sup>466</sup>

On 4 July 2023, a teacher of mathematics in school No. 126 in Dnepropetrovsk (Dnepr) was fined 3,400 grivnas for teaching in Russian during the online course. The decision was taken by Commissioner Kremen after the parents of the pupil informed him thereabout. At the same time, the Ukrainization advocates were not supported by the rest of the class.<sup>467</sup>

Not only teachers but also students themselves are subjected to bullying for using the Russian language. In April 2024, pupils at a school in Kiev severely beat their classmate because they thought he was watching a cartoon in Russian. For ten days the child did not tell his mother anything, as he was intimidated by a teacher's assistant. As a result, the boy needed surgery.<sup>468</sup>

The Ukrainian authorities are also actively pursuing a policy of banning any public use of the Russian language. On 9 February 2022, Taras Kremen, addressed

<sup>465</sup> <https://antifashist.com/item/v-irpene-studentka-donesla-na-professora-za-otkaz-vesti-lekcii-na-ukrainskom-yazyke.html>

<sup>466</sup> <https://focus.ua/ukraine/562187-ne-zahotel-slushat-chaykovskogo-v-odesse-prepodavatelya-kolledzha-uvolili-iz-za-zhaloby-studenta>

<sup>467</sup> <https://t.me/stranaua/112809>

<sup>468</sup> <https://ria.ru/amp/20240422/ukraina-1941474945.html>

the mayors of a number of Ukrainian cities with a demand to dismantle the outdoor advertising, signboards and signs installed in violation of the language law. The message about this was published on the Taras Kremen's Facebook page. In particular, it mentioned the letters being sent to the heads of Kiev, Kharkov, Odessa, Dnepr (Dnepropetrovsk), Zaporozhye, Nikolaev, Kherson, Sumy, Poltava, Chernigov, Cherkassy, Chernovtsi, Kropivnitsky (former Kirovograd), Uzhgorod, Kremenchug, Beregovo, Mariupol, Kramatorsk, Bakhmut (former Artemovsk) and Krivoy Rog, as well as to the chiefs of Volnovakha, Slavyansk, Severodonetsk and Lisichansk city military-civil administrations.

The Kiev authorities are not limiting themselves to excluding the Russian language only from education and science. The Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine adopted in first reading the draft law No. 7633 on prohibiting the use of "Russian sources of information" in education in mid-December 2022, which imposes a ban on the use of Russian-language literature in science and education. The document proposes amending the Law on Education to make it clear that references to literature and sources of information produced in the country's state language by Russian Federation citizens or legal entities are not permitted in Ukrainian curriculum. Similar changes are envisaged in the Law on Scientific and Scientific-Technical Activity. All this is being introduced to "protect the educational and information space of Ukraine from the influence of Russian imperialism".<sup>469</sup> In fact, it means a complete ban on scientific literature published in the Russian language, on the territory of Russia or by Russian citizens. Sources in Russian may no longer be used in schools, universities, or in scientific work.

If Ukrainian authorities had previously only impeded the import of Russian literature (in the form of refusals to obtain relevant licenses), on 14 March 2022, Ukraine's Committee on Television and Radio Broadcasting imposed a ban on

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<sup>469</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/amp/article/politika-i-obshchestvo/20221219-v-pogone-za-movoy-ukraina-polnostyu-khoronit-ostatki-svoey-nauki-i-kultury/>

import and distribution of all Russian publishing products with the goal of "preventing Russia's cultural and information influence on Ukrainians."<sup>470</sup>

Since 2017, there has been a ban on access from Ukrainian territory to all Russian sites and social media platforms, including Yandex, Mail.ru, VKontakte, and Odnoklassniki, as well as software products from 1C, Kaspersky Lab, and Doctor Web. In September 2020, Aleksey Danilov, Secretary of Ukraine's National Security and Defence Council, announced that the Ukrainian special services would track and preserve a registry of those who used the aforementioned social network.<sup>471</sup>

Also, under Ukrainian Law on Cinema<sup>472</sup>, it is prohibited to show films and TV series related to Russian security forces, as well as Russian television programmes and films produced after 2014.

In June 2022, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine passed laws banning the public performance of Russian songs and their use on radio and television. The above-mentioned laws also prohibited the import and distribution of books and other publishing products from Russia and Belarus, as well as publication and sale of books written by Russian citizens (the laws came into force in June 2023).

On 7 October 2022, the Law on Amendments to Certain Laws of Ukraine on Support of National Musical Productions and Restriction of Public Use of Music by an Aggressor State<sup>473</sup> came into force, banning the broadcasting of Russian music on television, radio and in public places, as well as the touring of performers from Russia.

This set of legislative measures, aimed at the gradual squeezing of the Russian language out of public life, contradicts both national legislation and Ukraine's international obligations. In particular, the policy of Ukrainization

<sup>470</sup> <https://iz.ru/1304904/2022-03-14/na-ukraine-vveli-zapret-na-vvoz-i-rasprostranenie-vsekh-knig-iz-rossii>

<sup>471</sup> <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/25/09/2020/5f6db5599a794765448c5e81>

<sup>472</sup> [https://kodeksy.com.ua/ka/o\\_kinematografii.htm](https://kodeksy.com.ua/ka/o_kinematografii.htm)

<sup>473</sup> <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/go/2310-20>



conflicts with Article 10 of the Constitution of Ukraine, which guarantees free development, use and protection of Russian and other languages of national minorities of Ukraine; with Article 22, which states that the content and scope of existing rights and freedoms may not be restricted when new laws are adopted or when existing documents are amended; and with Article 53, which states the right of national minorities to study in their native language.

Moreover, the actions of the Kiev regime contradict Ukraine's obligations under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, and a number of soft law acts: the UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, the Document of the Copenhagen Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the CSCE (now – OSCE), the Concluding Document of the Vienna CSCE Meeting, and The Hague Declaration on the Rights of National Minorities to Education.

It should be stressed that all measures aimed at squeezing the Russian language out of public life of Ukraine were adopted, as indicated above, despite critics from the international human rights structures. The OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities and OHCHR have expressed their comments about the discriminatory legislative measures taken by the Ukrainian authorities. It is also worth highlighting the opinion delivered by the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe regarding the Law on Education (December 2017)<sup>474</sup>, which confirmed the existence of discriminatory provisions in the document, and regarding the Law on the Functioning of the Ukrainian Language as

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<sup>474</sup> Conclusion No. 902/2017 of the Venice Commission (8-9 December 2017)  
[https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-AD\(2017\)030-e](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-AD(2017)030-e)



the Official Language (December 2019),<sup>475</sup> which pointed out the inconsistencies between its provisions and Ukraine's international obligations. The Commission's assessments and recommendations were supported by OHCHR.<sup>476</sup>

It is to note that even before this law was passed, Ukrainian nationalists were actively involved in combating the public performance of Russian songs and, in general, the use of the Russian language in everyday life. For example, since the beginning of 2021, unofficial associations who are radically inclined towards the Russian language – the so-called "language activists"<sup>477</sup> – consisting mainly of young people, have become active in Lvov.<sup>478</sup> They conducted a number of relevant actions in the city. For example, "language activists" demanded from the administration of Puzata Khata café to stop playing Russian music and sent a complaint to the chain's head office. Such "actors" provoked a conflict in the city centre with the entertainer, who played Russian music. Another clash took place in the AzArt hookah café between the "activist blogger" V. Andreyev, and one of the café owners. V. Andreyev demanded in a form of an ultimatum that the owner turn off the Russian music which was playing in the place. The owner refused and Andreyev was forced to leave. The blogger published a critical post on social media after this and appealed to the city administration to check the café.

The pressure on citizens who use the Russian language in everyday life was not limited to formal measures. For example, on 5 March 2021, nationalists assaulted two street musicians who were performing songs in Russian in Lvov. The local police did not respond to this illegal attack as they should have done.<sup>479</sup>

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<sup>475</sup> Conclusion No. 960/2019 of the Venice Commission (6-7 December, 2019)  
[https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD\(2019\)032-e](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD(2019)032-e)

<sup>476</sup> OHCHR Report on the human rights situation in Ukraine. 16 February – 31 July 2020  
[https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/UA/30thReportUkraine\\_RU.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/UA/30thReportUkraine_RU.pdf)

<sup>477</sup> Self-designation – "movny patrol", that is – "language patrol".

<sup>478</sup> <https://is.gd/TmiDr3> (page of one of the associations of "movny patrol" in the social network Facebook).

<sup>479</sup> <https://lvov.strana.today/366447-zakon-o-jazyke-vo-lvove-izbili-ulichnykh-muzykantov-za-pesni-na-russkom.html> (earlier <https://lvov.strana.ua/321171-zakon-o-jazyke-dobratsja-do-muzykantov-vo-lvove->

There have also been cases of discrimination against Russian-speaking customers in a number of catering establishments, especially in Western Ukraine. For example, the administration of the New York Street Pizza café in Chernovtsi displayed a crossed-out image of a pig painted in Russian flag colours on its entrance. In response to the journalists' appeals, the café administrator said: "Such visitors refuse to communicate in an English foreign language and in Ukrainian. And we, on principle, do not communicate in Russian. It's our language policy."<sup>480</sup>

On 30 May 2022, a video filmed in Lvov appeared on the Internet showing a volunteer refusing to provide the UN humanitarian aid to refugees from the eastern part of Ukraine because they spoke Russian. When asked, the volunteer told the women that he did not understand them and demanded to address him in Ukrainian. A nearby police officer informed the refugees that it was illegal to film the volunteer and, in response to their outrage, threatened with taking the women to the police station.

On 2 June 2023, a minor from Odessa singing Viktor Tsoi songs in Russian was detained in Lvov on the application of Natalia Pipa, an MP from the Golos party (was one of the initiators of the notorious draft law No. 7213 against the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, UOC), who called the police. He was sent from the police station to a shelter for minors in Lvov, where he spent a week because his disabled mother could not come and pick him up in person.<sup>481</sup> In connection with this scandal, the head of the state agency for art at the Ukrainian Culture Ministry, O. Rossoshanskaya, officially said that the "movny" law did not prohibit public performances of Viktor Tsoi's songs in Ukraine.

Similar conflict occurred in Odessa in August 2024. The scandal around street musicians performing songs on Deribasovskaya Street was provoked by

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[izbili-ljudej-za-russkij-jazyk.html](https://izbili-ljudej-za-russkij-jazyk.html)), <https://iz.ru/1262808/2021-12-10/vo-lvove-izbili-ispolniavshikh-pesni-na-russkom-muzykantov>

<sup>480</sup> The Online Environment as a Tool for Violation of Rights and Freedoms in Ukraine. The Irina Berezhnaya Institute for Legal Policy and Social Protection 2022.

<sup>481</sup> <https://focus.ua/ukraine/571602-skandal-s-pesney-coya-vo-lvove-paren-vyshel-iz-priyuta-i-rasskazal-o-planah-video>

blogger Yulya Karavadzhak. The reason was the fact that the songs were sung in Russian. The media reported that the initiator of the scandal Yulya Karavadzhak, who forbade the musicians to perform Russian-language songs, shoots candid videos for one of the relevant Internet portals. At the same time, it is in the Russian language that she communicates with her clients during this work.<sup>482</sup>

On 20 September 2024, in Ternopol, a local resident called the police because two men were singing songs in Russian. The law enforcement officers not only drew up protocols against them under the article "hooliganism", but also took them to the military enlistment office for further dispatch to the combat zone. Thus, the conditions created in Ukraine make the use of the native language for Russian-speaking citizens not only illegal, but also life-threatening.<sup>483</sup>

A scandal occurred on 26 October 2023 in Kiev when two female taxi passengers aggressively demanded the driver to speak the state language instead of Russian, and the driver asked them to get out of the car. A recording published on the Internet shows two women demanding the driver to speak the state language, while occasionally switching to the Russian language.<sup>484</sup> The Estonian company Bolt, which is the creator of a mobile application for calling taxis, announced the blocking of the taxi's account and also announced its willingness to cooperate with Ukrainian police officers over the incident. The Kiev taxi driver who was fired after this scandal received widespread support among the residents of Ukraine. On 29 October 2023, he recorded a video message in which he thanked people for their support.<sup>485</sup>

In June 2024, at a business event in Odessa, several participants interrupted the speaker, who was speaking in Russian, and demanded that he switch to Ukrainian. After he refused, the audience supported his position with applause. On the same day, Ukrainian authorities promised a "tough response" to the Russian-

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<sup>482</sup> <https://antifashist.com/item/umeet-orudovat-yazykom-zashhitnica-movy-podrabatyvala-v-pornoindustrii.html>

<sup>483</sup> <https://ria.ru/amp/20240920/ukraina-1973794986.html>

<sup>484</sup> <https://t.me/stranaua/128722>

<sup>485</sup> <https://t.me/stranaua/130465>

speaking "offender" who had allowed himself "gross abuse of Ukrainian citizens".<sup>486</sup>

Known for her neo-Nazi views, former Verkhovnaya Rada deputy Irina Farion said in connection with this incident during the programme "Big Lvov is Speaking" that the Russian-speaking residents of Ukraine who refuse to switch to the state language "deserve only one thing – complete and absolute disposal".<sup>487</sup> Spreading hate speech against all Russian-speaking residents of Ukraine, she went so far as to call Russian-speaking AFU fighters a "rabble".<sup>488</sup> Later, in July 2024, she was murdered in the courtyard of her own home, falling victim to the hatred she had cultivated.

In addition to the elimination of the Russian language from all facets of Ukrainian society, there have been ongoing initiatives to spread hostility toward Russian citizens and the Russian culture as a whole. According to statements made by Ukrainian officials, the authorities are purposefully pursuing a policy of elimination of the Russian-speaking space in the country. For example, President Zelenskiy, in an interview published on 5 August 2021,<sup>489</sup> advised Russians to get out of Ukraine. In particular, Secretary of the National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine Aleksey Danilov openly stated that "the Russian language should disappear altogether".<sup>490</sup>

Moreover, Ukrainian officials deny the Russian population the very right to exist on the territory of the country. In November 2023, Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration Olga Stefanishina said that "there is no

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<sup>486</sup> <https://www.unian.ua/society/movniy-skandal-v-odesi-divchinu-vignali-z-zahodu-za-pretenziyu-do-rosiyskomovnogo-spikera-novini-odesi-12668328.html>

<sup>487</sup> <https://lenta.ru/news/2023/10/29/na-ukraine-prizvali-utilizirovat/>

<sup>488</sup> <https://suspilne.media/culture/611357-farion-rozkritikuvala-rosiyskomovnih-vijskovih-ombudsmen-pisla-cogo-zvernuvsa-do-policii-ta-sbu/>

<sup>489</sup> <https://kanal-dom.tv/esli-ty-schitaesh-cto-my-russkie-bolshaya-oshibka-ostavatsya-zhit-na-donbasse-zelenskij-video/>

<sup>490</sup> <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/21/10/2022/6352a7b49a7947f3b9632b73>, <https://iz.ru/1414045/2022-10-21/sekretar-snbo-prizval-iskorenit-russkii-iazyk-na-ukraine>

Russian minority in Ukraine. It does not exist!"<sup>491</sup> This view was subsequently echoed by Ruslan Stefanchuk, Speaker of the Verkhovnaya Rada.

Hatred of Russians was openly propagandized on national and regional television channels. Russophobic remarks and calls for the murder of Russians were frequently broadcast. For example, the official advertisement for the programme of Ukrainian journalist Yanina Sokolova on Channel 5 sounded like this: "Turn on the 5th! This infuriates Muscovites!" In August 2022, on NTA television, she said that Russians should not be taken prisoner, they should be killed as much as possible, adding that she wanted "all of them to be destroyed as quickly as possible."

Journalist and TV presenter, former media director of the ZIK TV channel Ostap Drozdov has repeatedly publicly insulted Russian-speaking citizens arguing that the Russian language is not only foreign, but also "aggressively occupying and threatening" to Ukraine. He also called those who lived in the country and spoke Russian "the guarantors of war" arguing that such people should "disappear as a species." Olga Lakunova, an AFU member who returned from captivity as an exchange, stated that "the entire Russian population should be destroyed." Moreover, she urged that even children should not be spared.

Similar Nazi attitudes towards Russian-speaking residents of Ukraine are also demonstrated by government officials. In September 2023, a Russian-speaking resident of Odessa wanted to transfer her child to home schooling, but faced racist behaviour on the part of a children's services official. The reason for the insults was the fact that the applicant spoke Russian. The official demanded to speak to her only in Ukrainian and stated that those who spoke Russian were enemies of Ukraine and therefore had no rights. At the same time, she herself did not speak in Ukrainian, but in "surzhik" (a mixture of Russian and Ukrainian), making gross mistakes.<sup>492</sup>

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<sup>491</sup> [www.eurointegration.com.ua/rus/news/2023/11/9/7173188/](http://www.eurointegration.com.ua/rus/news/2023/11/9/7173188/)

<sup>492</sup> <https://antifashist.online/item/nikakih-prav-u-vas-net-i-byt-ne-mozhet-zhitelnice-odessy-ne-pozvolyayut-perevesti-rebenka-iz-ukrainskoj-shkoly-na-domashnee-obuchenie.html>

In these and other cases, the issue is not even about the mental adequacy of the above-mentioned and similar characters, but about the policy of the authorities, who allow such hate speech in public space and, moreover, do not condemn it.

Russophobia spreads unhindered on the Internet and social networks. By now, many different publications, pictures, collages have been published that contain not just derogatory attitudes toward Russians, but that directly dehumanize them. This includes such negative comparisons as "Coloradas," "Vatniks," and "Orcs". Materials justifying and calling for the murder of Russians are being actively distributed.

Non-governmental organizations defending the interests of the Russian-speaking population of Ukraine have repeatedly sent appeals to regional and universal structures, including the Council of Europe and the OSCE, to ensure the rights of the Russian-speaking community. However, there was no adequate reaction. For example, according to NGOs, the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities Kairat Abdrakhmanov did not meet with members of Russian communities or heads of Russian-language human rights organizations during his official visit to Ukraine in September 2021. Similarly, the meeting of Marija Pejčinović Burić, Secretary General of the Council of Europe, with Russian-speaking human rights activists was not organized.<sup>493</sup> The specialized structures of the European Union, to which the current Ukraine is so keen to be admitted, blatantly ignore the dismal human rights situation in that country.

Russian citizens continue to face a challenging scenario as their rights and liberties are frequently abused. In recent years, Russian-speaking activists have continuously faced violation of their rights to the integrity of person, dwelling, property; they have been intimidated and subjected to pressure by law enforcement authorities, intelligence services and nationalist groups.

This discrimination has been greatly facilitated by the Russophobic hysteria unleashed by the Kiev regime-controlled media, which has reached an

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<sup>493</sup> The Online Environment as a Tool for Violation of Rights and Freedoms in Ukraine. The Irina Berezhnaya Institute for Legal Policy and Social Protection 2022.

unprecedented scale. Ukrainian officials make serious efforts in this area. Thus, commenting the cynical staged-up action in the town of Bucha, the Minister of Culture Aleksander Tkachenko, in his interview to 1+1 TV channel said that "there is no mentioning of good Russians, as there are no good Russians" and urged to fight with them all over the world. Advisor to the head of the Ministry of Internal Affairs Anton Gerashchenko called on social networks for "identifying and punishing" all civilians who had collaborated with the Russian military in the Kiev Oblast. Boris Filatov, mayor of Dnepropetrovsk (Dnepr) known for his hate of all Russian, advocated on Facebook to "kill Russians all over the world and in large numbers." He was echoed by Ambassador of Ukraine to Kazakhstan Petr Vrublevskiy, who admitted that "we are trying to kill them [Russians] as many as possible." According to him, "the more Russians we kill now, the less our children will have to kill." NSDC Secretary Alexei Danilov called Russians "rats" and "pig dogs" and called for "poisoning them" and "destroying them by all means".

There are numerous examples of persecution of Russian-speaking residents of Ukraine.

In December 2018, SBU officers searched the premises of members of the Russian-speaking community in Poltava. The coordinator of the All-Ukrainian Coordinating Council of Russian Compatriot Organizations, Sergey Provatorov (who also heads Russkoye Sodruzhestvo (Russian Commonwealth) association), had his Pushkin medal confiscated.

Investigative activities were conducted in respect of the historian Yury Pogoda (a well-known researcher of the Great Northern War period), poet and publicist Vladimir Shestakov (head of the Poltava Oblast Russian Community). Criminal proceedings were brought against them under Article 110 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine ("encroachment on territorial integrity").

In May 2019, SBU conducted a search of the head of the Transcarpathian regional association "Rus" Vladimir Saltykov. Mobile communication devices and personal computer equipment were seized.

The arrest (in August 2020) on suspicion of high treason (which is subject to a punishment in the form of imprisonment for a period of 12 to 15 years with confiscation of property) by the SBU officers of a Russian language and literature teacher, head of the Russian National Community "Rusich" non-government organization, a distinguished teacher with long-term experience, Tatyana Kuzmich, who is widely known for her active work to promote the Russian language in Ukraine, has caused great public outcry. The Ukrainian security services accused her of the fact that during her stay in Crimea she allegedly "was involved by the Russian Federal Security Service in espionage activities, transferred materials for conducting subversion activities in the Kherson Oblast and all over Ukraine" and that she was also involved in "creation of a spy network". It is worth noting that Tatyana Kuzmich paid regular visits to the Crimean peninsula since 2008 within the framework of her professional duties for taking part in the Great Russian Word Festival. The measure of restraint chosen for her was remand in custody, however in the beginning of October 2020 she was released on bail.

From the start of the special military operation, the MFA of Russia received applications from over 6,000 Russian citizens staying in Ukraine. In most of the cases, these letters contained requests to inform about safe ways of evacuation from Ukraine to Russia and other countries. Many of our fellow citizens point to the terror unleashed in Ukrainian cities by members of the so-called Territory Defence Forces and others who obtained firearms through uncontrolled distribution and complain about violation of their rights by Kiev authorities.

Among those kept prisoner by Ukrainian authorities were over a hundred Russian sailors in the ports of Odessa and Izmail, as well as students from other countries attending Ukrainian colleges and crew members of maritime vessels. They were treated inappropriately and were subjected to physical abuse. The Russian sailors were released in several exchanges, the last of which did not take place until mid-October 2022. One of the sailors, unfortunately, died in detention. Truck drivers were also detained by the Kiev authorities; they were at the Ukrainian border when the special military operation began.



The Kiev regime's officials are taking steps to limit our citizens' rights. The National Bank of Ukraine became one of the first among such bodies that prohibited to the credit institutions in the country to perform any currency operations using the Russian rouble. This regulator's step left thousands of persons in the country without means of subsistence.

On 1 March 2022, all mobile operators in Ukraine banned communication for phones with Russian numbers.<sup>494</sup>

The private property rights of Russians are also violated. The Ukrainian Law on the Main Principles of Compulsory Seizure of Property in Ukraine of the Russian Federation and its Residents<sup>495</sup> entered into force on 7 March 2022. The law allows for the extrajudicial seizure of movable and immovable property, money, bank deposits, and other items by the decision of the National Security and Defence Council, which was implemented by presidential decree, without providing any sort of compensation.

The decision to halt processing of Russian citizen applications for immigration and residency permits during the martial law was made by the Ukrainian Cabinet of Ministers on 2 November 2022.<sup>496</sup>

On 30 December 2022, Vladimir Zelenskiy signed Law No. 8224 on National Minorities (Communities) of Ukraine, adopted by the Verkhovnaya Rada on 13 December 2022, according to which ethnic Russians, or as they are veiled in the text – "who identify their affiliation by ethnic origin with a state recognized in Ukraine and/or by international organizations as a terrorist state (aggressor state)". For the duration of martial law in Ukraine and for six months after its lifting, virtually all rights and freedoms are restricted, including the right to peaceful assembly, to receive funding, to establish consultative bodies under local administrations, and the right to participate in international activities.

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<sup>494</sup> <https://www.gazeta.ru/social/news/2022/03/03/17376829.shtml>

<sup>495</sup> [https://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc\\_id=33474326&pos=10;-32#pos=10;-32](https://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=33474326&pos=10;-32#pos=10;-32)

<sup>496</sup> <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/02/11/2022/6361c4e79a79478937e28120>

The provisions of this law were criticized in the report of the Venice Commission of 12 June 2023, therefore, in order to remove obstacles to European integration, on 21 September and 8 December 2023, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine voted to amend the law on national minorities. At the same time, these amendments do not imply any real expansion of the rights and freedoms of Ukraine's national minorities, and even impose additional restrictions on Russian-speaking citizens.<sup>497</sup>

This conclusion was also confirmed in the OHCHR report published on 27 March 2024, which states that the law discriminates national minorities whose languages are not official languages of the EU, such as Russian, Armenian or Romani. The report also calls on the Kiev authorities to lift bans on peaceful assemblies of persons who identify themselves as ethnic Russians.<sup>498</sup>

The Kiev regime not only glorifies Nazism and its accomplices of the Great Patriotic War, but also puts into practice many of the attitudes of Hitler's Germany. In the spirit of the best Nazi examples the Kiev authorities are conducting a campaign to purge political circles of undesirable figures and forces that oppose the biased domestic and foreign policy and represent competition to the ruling circles. To this end, the special services and the country's judicial system are actively involved. The main reason for persecution is an independent view of the situation in Ukraine that does not coincide with the official interpretation of the Kiev regime or contains criticism of it. Very often public people who speak Russian are subjected to such far-fetched persecution. Accusations of "working for Russia" are very common – this can be adapted to almost any kind of activity of the accused person.

Moreover, Kiev is creating ever new lists of "enemies of Ukraine". For example, a resource that openly violates the right to privacy and incites interethnic discord – the notorious Myrotvorets website – operates unhindered in the country.

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<sup>497</sup> <https://ukraina.ru/20230922/1049615530.html>

<sup>498</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/countries/ukraine/2024/report-human-rights-situation-ukraine-1-dec-2023-29-feb-2024.pdf>

The site publishes illegally collected personal data of both Ukrainian and foreign citizens who it considers to be "separatists" or "enemies of Ukraine", including reporters, politicians, cultural figures and even Russian diplomats.

Ukrainian special services and radical nationalist structures actively use the said web resource to exert psychological pressure on those whoever they may accuse of "separatism and high treason". Persons who find themselves in the Myrotvorets database automatically become potential targets of reprisals on their part. The most egregious example was the site's publication in 2015 of personal data of the writer Oles Buzina and journalist Pavel Sheremet, including their addresses. They were killed shortly after this information appeared on the site. Ukrainian radicals have been repeatedly accused of involvement in their murder, but these cases have not been investigated despite numerous calls from the international community.

Italian journalist Andrea Rochelli, Party of Regions ex-deputy Oleg Kalashnikov, Russian journalist Daria Dugina and others were also killed. Unwanted Ukrainian public figures were also subjected to illegal persecution. Many of them, like, for example, the supreme ataman of the Faithful Cossacks organization Alexey Selivanov, were forced to leave the territory of Ukraine, fearing for their lives. After the death of someone from the "black list", even for natural reasons, the inscription "liquidated" appears in his profile. This was the case with the Italian businessman and politician Silvio Berlusconi.

In numerous other similar cases of people being included in the database of the extremist Myrotvorets website, such as media representatives, their bank accounts were frozen due to the fact that they are included in the list of "enemies of Ukraine". Moreover, the fact that Ukrainian courts use information on Myrotvorets at all stages of judicial proceedings as an evidence base, was pointed out to by the

NGO Uspishna Varta who discovered more than 100 court decisions on criminal cases with declarations containing materials from Myrotvorets.<sup>499</sup>

Myrotvorets editor-in-chief Roman Zaitsev, in an interview with the Facts on 14 March 2021, made it clear that his web resource was supported by Ukrainian authorities (ministries of foreign affairs, internal affairs and defence, the SBU, border services), as well as foreign (Western) intelligence agencies.

To date, more than 240 thousand people are listed in the Myrotvorets database, about 75 thousand of them are Russians. Among others, the personal information of 300 minors was published on the site. In October 2021, a 12-year old resident of Lugansk F. Savenkova who allegedly "poses a threat to the national security of Ukraine" was included in the Myrotvorets database. The reason thereof was her open appeal to the members of the UN Security Council on the Children's Day where she drew attention to the situation of children in Donbass.

In January 2022, Myrotvorets announced the opening of a new area of activity – combating unscrupulous law enforcement officers who allegedly fabricate criminal cases. However, the site administrators referred to this category only those investigators and prosecutors who conducted criminal proceedings against veterans of the anti-terrorist operation (against the population of Donbass) and members of nationalist battalions, as well as against the deputy Sofia Fedina, who made extremist statements.

International human rights organizations have brought attention to the issues that this vile Internet resource's operation in Ukraine is causing. In November 2021, the Human Rights Committee pointed out the lack of information about the results of criminal investigations into the operation of the odious website Myrotvorets. We are talking about cases of publication of personal data of thousands of Ukrainians and other persons accused by the web resource of

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<sup>499</sup> Use of materials from the Myrotvorets site in court practice. Human rights platform "Uspishna VARTA". 22 January 2019 <https://uspishna-varta.com/ru/news/ispolzovaniye-materialov-sayta-mirotvorets-v-sudebnoy-praktike>

connections with "armed groups" or called "terrorists".<sup>500</sup> The HRCttee attached great importance to this issue. This is indicated, in particular, by the fact that the recommendation to ensure the right to privacy, including in the context of the Myrotvorets website was included by the Committee in the list of issues on which information should be sent during the year.

In September 2022, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) called for the removal of the names and information about the children from the Myrotvorets website. "Publishing information about children in ways that put them at risk is completely unacceptable," the organization stressed.<sup>501</sup>

Another such resource that violates the right to privacy is the recent Internet resource Bacteria of the "Russian World". It contains data on European citizens and organizations that allegedly support the Russian Federation and its policies in various forms. This includes Russian compatriots and their organizations. Moreover, in order to get on this pro-scripture list, it is enough not to condemn Russia or to speak positively about something Russian. The page belongs to the organization "Texty" (texty.org.ua) and contains about 1300 names and 900 names of organizations from 19 European countries. The organization is funded by the Soros Foundation. It is obvious that "the new Myrotvorets", like its prototype, is designed to intimidate those who are on its list, persecute people for dissent and purposefully spread hatred between nations.

The Ukrainian authorities also initiate politically motivated cases against undesirable persons under articles 109 – 114-2, 258 – 258-6, 260, 261, 437 – 442 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine, for crimes against the foundations of national security – articles 109 – 114-2, for offences against civil security – articles 258 – 258-6, 260, 261 (under these articles militias and residents of the DPR and LPR were usually convicted), for offences against peace, security and law

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<sup>500</sup> Concluding observations of the Human Rights Committee on the 8th periodic report of Ukraine. November 2021 (the concluding observations themselves were published in February 2022)  
[https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CCPR%2FC%2FUKR%2FCO%2F8&Lang=en](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CCPR%2FC%2FUKR%2FCO%2F8&Lang=en)

<sup>501</sup> <https://ria.ru/amp/20221207/mirotvorets-1836999067.html>

enforcement – articles 437-442 (episodes directly related to hostilities). In addition, cases are brought for offences related to the disclosure of state secrets; illegal border crossing; evasion of mobilization – articles 328, 330, 332, 335 – 337 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine; military criminal offences (disobedience, unauthorized abandonment of a military unit, desertion) – articles 402-403, 407 – 409, 422, 427, 429 – 431 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine; dissemination of communist or Nazi symbols or propaganda; justification, recognition as lawful or denial of the "military aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine"; and "glorification" of its participants – article 436 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine.<sup>502</sup>

In reality, all provisions of Ukrainian criminal law are used by the Ukrainian authorities to persecute dissidents or those who speak favourably about Russia. As of 6 May 2024, the Prosecutor General's Office of Ukraine opened 17,272 criminal cases on suspicion of committing crimes against national security, including on such grounds as encroachment on the territorial integrity and inviolability of Ukraine (Article 110 of the Criminal Code) – 3,279; high treason (Article 111 of the Criminal Code) – 3,300; collaboration (Article 111-1 of the Criminal Code) – 7,933; aiding and abetting the "aggressor state" (Article 111-2 of the Criminal Code) – 1,199; sabotage (Article 113 of the Criminal Code) – 112.<sup>503</sup> 1,400 convictions have already been made on such cases in 2022 and 2023.<sup>504</sup>

In 2022-2023, the Prosecutor General's Office of Ukraine opened 195,776 criminal cases on military conflict related articles. 74,302 of them were opened for political dissent. Suspicion reports were issued in 16,571 cases and 12,793 cases were brought to court with an indictment.<sup>505</sup>

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<sup>502</sup> Report of the Foundation for Humanitarian Economic Cooperation "On Persecution of Dissidents and Political Repressions in Ukraine" (December 2023 – February 2024)

<sup>503</sup> <https://zmina.info/news/kilkist-vidomyh-ukrayinskym-slidchyh-voyennyh-zlochyniv-vchynenyh-rosiyanamy-perevalyla-za-100-tysyach/>

<sup>504</sup>

[https://supreme.court.gov.ua/userfiles/media/new\\_folder\\_for\\_uploads/supreme/sud\\_pract/Stan\\_zdijsn\\_krim\\_prov\\_2023.pdf](https://supreme.court.gov.ua/userfiles/media/new_folder_for_uploads/supreme/sud_pract/Stan_zdijsn_krim_prov_2023.pdf)

<sup>505</sup> <https://ukraina.ru/20240119/1052773811.html>

A significant number of such persecutions are opened against residents of the eastern regions of Ukraine. Over the past two years, more than 3,000 cases have been brought under Article 111 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine ("high treason") (most of all in the Kharkov and Kiev Oblasts, as well as in Kiev-occupied areas of Donetsk, the Zaporozhye and Kherson Oblasts). In addition, residents of these territories, some of which were temporarily under the control of the AFU, fall under the articles "collaboration" (111-1) and "aiding and abetting the aggressor state" (111-2).<sup>506</sup> Human rights activists note that the above statistics do not cover persons who are missing or victims of enforced disappearances. At the same time, some political and public figures in Ukraine acknowledge the existence of such victims, but the Kiev authorities refrain from covering this unpopular topic in the mass media.

It gets to the point of real terms of imprisonment for Ukrainian pensioners who have "liked" a post on social media Odnoklassniki, VKontakte, etc. For supporting pro-Russian post, they risk imprisonment up to five years, which is equal to the convictions for theft, murder or rape. 99 such convictions have been handed down from March to September 2022, 176 from October 2022 to September 2023.<sup>507</sup>

People detained on such charges are held in terrible conditions and tortured. According to the journalist N. Shmelev, who himself became a victim of groundless criminal prosecution for publishing an article on the killing of civilians by members of the territorial defence forces, the main reason for detaining people is their attempts to express their opinion that differs from the official point of view of the Kiev regime. For any critical statement against it – on social networks, in the press, in public transport or even just in conversation on the street – Ukrainian citizens immediately become "traitors", "separatists" and "collaborators". Most of those accused of "high treason" or "complicity in unleashing a war of aggression"

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<sup>506</sup> Report of the Foundation for Humanitarian Economic Cooperation "On Persecution of Dissidents and Political Repressions in Ukraine" (December 2023 – February 2024)

<sup>507</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/russian/articles/c4nxmxm1ev7o>

are alleged by SBU investigators, prosecutors and judges to have passed information directly to military personnel or citizens of the Russian Federation. And this "secret" information was taken from open sources on the Internet, which was recognised in the indictments. Almost all detainees under "political" articles were severely beaten during detention. The conditions of detention of "political" prisoners differed from the conditions of detention of criminals to a much worse extent; the cramped cells lacked the most basic things and household supplies. Prison staff ill-treated them, including torture. The scale of such illegal detentions was very large. According to N. Shmelev, five other detainees on similar charges were in the cell with him. At the same time, there were many more such prisoners in the detention centre – there were 172 "separatists" in the prison building alone.<sup>508</sup>

The fact of unlawful criminal prosecutions and torture on the above grounds was also confirmed by international human rights organizations. During the 55th session of the UN Human Rights Council, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk said that after Ukraine "regained some territories", some of their residents suffered "at the hands of the Ukrainian authorities". "Using an overly broad definition of "cooperation", the Ukrainian authorities harassed and convicted local residents who were carrying out routine work in their local community." He also indicated that in some cases OHCHR had "documented torture and ill-treatment, arbitrary detention and violations of fair trial rights against persons accused of cooperation".<sup>509</sup>

Public figures and human rights defenders are also prosecuted on falsified charges, mostly those who protect the rights of Russians in Ukraine and support constructive relations with Russia. One of the illustrative examples is the well-known Ukrainian NGO activist Elena Berezhnaya, who actively defends the rights of the Russian-speaking population and national minorities of Ukraine. Her regular

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<sup>508</sup> <https://antifashist.online/item/gluhonemoj-shpion-izmenniki-rodiny-pytki-rossijskih-voennoplennyh-kak-v-sizo-dnepropetrovska-izdevayutsya-nad-lyudmi-svidetelstva-ochevidca.html>

<sup>509</sup> <https://tass-ru.turbopages.org/turbo/tass.ru/s/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/20417189>



statements at the UN, the OSCE and other international organizations most likely have been one of the main reasons for her persecution by the Ukrainian security services. On 16 March 2022, Elena Berezhnaya was detained by SBU under the pretext that she was suspected of high treason; since then, she has been kept in a pre-trial detention facility. A number of human rights defenders drew attention to her fate. She also addressed letters herself to the Council of Europe and the OSCE. However, there is still no progress on her case, and the activist is still detained.

Since the beginning of spring of 2022 there were numerous cases of persecution of public figures in Ukraine who allowed themselves to express their independent judgments about the situation in the country and support for the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church. In March 2022, writer, satirist, publicist and TV presenter Yan Taksyur was arrested. The reason was the satirist's literary works, which allegedly "undermined the sovereignty of the state." Yan Taksyur had been kept in a pre-trial detention facility, although he had serious health issues. A few months later he was released on bail.

In June 2022, Mikhail Pogrebinskiy, well-known Ukrainian political scientist, was charged in absentia with high treason. He was accused of acting as an "expert" and "repeatedly participating in TV programmes and talk shows, disseminating well-written Russian messages aimed at destabilizing the socio-political situation in the country". Earlier, in March 2022, Mikhail Pogrebinskiy's apartment was searched.

In February 2023, journalist and blogger Dmitriy Skvortsov, a defender of canonical Orthodoxy in Ukraine, was detained for "justifying Russian aggression".<sup>510</sup>

On 12 March 2024, SBU searched the editorial office of the Union of Orthodox Journalists, which regularly covers the Kiev regime's atrocities against the canonical UOC, charged fourteen of its employees under various articles of the Criminal Code of Ukraine ("high treason", "collaboration", "creation and participation in a criminal organization", "incitement of religious enmity and

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<sup>510</sup> <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/19638953>

hatred by an organized group") and detained four of them: Vladimir Bobechko, Valeriy Stupnitskiy, Andrey Ovcharenko, and archpriest Sergey Chertilin.

The media also reported on the detention of activist Aleksander Gorbenko, political scientist and journalist Dmitriy Dzhangirov; political scientist Yuri Dudkin, who took part in live broadcasts of the channels 112-Ukraine, NewsOne, and ZIK, which were closed by the Kiev regime; anti-fascist politicians Mikhail and Aleksander Kononovich; political scientist and blogger Gleb Lyashenko; anti-fascist activist Aleksander Mayevskiy (he managed to escape during the burning of the Trade Union House in Odessa on 2 May 2014); communist and anti-fascist Aleksander Matyushenko; journalist of the NewsOne and Nash TV channels Maks Nazarov, head of the public organization "Russia Revived Slavic Movement" Aleksander Tarnashinskiy, lawyer Dmitriy Tikhononkov, who defended activists of Anti-Maidan, journalist Yuri Tkachev, professor of the Nikolaev Institute of Law Sergey Shubin and many others.<sup>511</sup>

Other political prisoners whose fate is of particular concern include: energy expert and commentator Dmitriy Marunich (detained by SBU in April 2022, his current whereabouts are unknown), Kiev historian and publicist, author of books on the common history of East Slavic peoples Aleksander Karevin (arrested by SBU on 9 March 2022 in his own flat, his further fate is unknown), former district council deputy, person with disabilities, Anti-Maidan activist Oleg Novikov (detained by SBU in April 2022, his current whereabouts are unknown).

On 29 July 2024, SBU reported the detention of "six pro-Russian Internet agitators", but their names were not given. One of the detainees was presented by the special service as a "pseudo-expert" who "is the author of several pro-Kremlin publications" and in his "pseudo-scientific works, the author falsifies historical facts of the formation and development of Ukrainian statehood in favour of Russia".<sup>512</sup> Later it became known that the detainee was Oleg Vusatyuk, candidate

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<sup>511</sup> <https://ukraina.ru/20220715/1036459856.html>

<sup>512</sup> <https://ukraina.ru/20240730/1056559813.html>

of philosophical sciences, state expert of the National Institute of International Security Problems in Kiev, who for many years had headed the Ukrainian Academy of Russian Studies public organization.<sup>513, 514</sup> Among other things, he is "incriminated" by the publication, for example, in the Russian journal "Free Thought" No. 3/2020 of an article entitled "The War for Historical Memory. How to stop the "nullification" of the Great Patriotic War".<sup>515</sup>

Sentences have been handed down in the cases of some public figures. Thus, in May 2022, Aleksander Matyushenko was sentenced to three years in prison on charges of "infringement on the territorial integrity of Ukraine".<sup>516</sup> In November 2023, Professor Sergey Shubin, Head of the Department of Humanities at the Nikolaev Institute of Law, was sentenced to 15 years in prison (detained by SBU in June 2022). In April 2024, the previously mentioned head of the Russian community of the Poltava Oblast, one of the active participants of the movement of foreign Russian compatriots, writer and journalist Vladimir Shestakov was sentenced to 15 years in prison for "high treason" and "justification of Russian aggression".<sup>517</sup>

Real terms of imprisonment are imposed, including on elderly people, which, given their age, means a death sentence for them. For example, in January 2024, 82-year-old Afghan veteran, holder of the Order of the Red Star, writer and journalist Yuri Chernyshev was sentenced to 15 years of imprisonment.

After the start of the special military operation, SBU began harassing and intimidating Ukrainian deputies and officials who accepted humanitarian cargoes from Russia or negotiated with the Russian military to organize corridors for evacuating civilians. On 1 March 2022, Vladimir Struk, Mayor of Kremennaya, was kidnapped by men in military uniform. Two days later his body was

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<sup>513</sup> <https://rg.ru/2024/08/06/obnulenie.html>

<sup>514</sup> <https://ukraina.ru/20240730/1056566806.html>

<sup>515</sup> <http://www.svom.info/collection/54/?page=2>

<sup>516</sup> <https://ukraina.ru/20220715/1036459856.html>

<sup>517</sup> <https://russkie.org/news/viktora-shestakova-prigovorili-k-15-godam-lisheniya-svobody/>

discovered with signs of torture. On 7 March 2022, Yuri Prilipko, Mayor of Gostomel, was found dead. He negotiated with the Russian military to establish a humanitarian corridor for civilians. On 24 March 2022, Gennadiy Matsegora, Mayor of Kupyansk, published a video calling on Zelenskiy and his administration to release his daughter, who had been kidnapped by SBU agents to put pressure on the official. The media also reported on the detention of Aleksander Bryukhanov, Mayor of Yuzhnoye, Cherkasy City Council deputy from the Opposition Platform – For Life party Aleksander Zamiraylo, Kherson City Council deputy Ilya Karamalikov, Mariupol City Council deputy Vladimir Klimenko, politician I. Kolesnikov, and Mayor of Stary Saltov Eduard Konovalov, Viktor Ladukh, Mayor of Buryn, Andrey Lazurenko, deputy of Solonitsevskiy village council of the Kharkov Oblast.

In 2023, the Kiev regime continued to cleanse the political space of alternative opinions. On 25 July 2023, SBU accused of high treason former deputy of the Verkhovnaya Rada, leader of the now prohibited party Nashi Evgeniy Muraev.<sup>518</sup> The same month, a criminal case on high treason against Vadim Rabinovich, deputy from the Opposition Platform – For Life party was opened. He was arrested in absentia.<sup>519</sup>

The Ukrainian security forces have also actively begun to persecute civilians, primarily Russian-speaking citizens. A significant number of criminal prosecutions are being carried out in connection with the alleged work of the accused persons for the Russian security services. However, there are also known cases of citizens being persecuted for publicly drawing attention to the improper behaviour of the Ukrainian military. For example, in early April 2024, SBU detained in Kharkov a 54-year-old director of school No. 38 who publicly complained about the use of drugs by AFU fighters on the territory of the educational institution. The woman published photos on social networks showing

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<sup>518</sup> <https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/18353577?ysclid=lmgo78j2vv396866235>

<sup>519</sup> <https://ren.tv/news/v-mire/1128632-ukrainskogo-deputata-rabinovicha-zaochno-arestovali-zagoszmenu?ysclid=lmgoejpg3r636374100>

cleaners collecting used syringes and empty packages of drugs for drug addicts scattered by militants on the school grounds, criticising the "defenders". A few days later, the teacher was detained, a "preventive talk" was held with her and a criminal case was opened.<sup>520</sup>

At the same time, it became known about the arrest in Kharkov of six former employees of Ukrainian design institutes (traditionally, they are often suspected of working for Russia). According to the version of the so-called investigation, they were commissioned by the Russian state corporation Rosatom to develop research and design documentation for the modernisation of Russian nuclear power plants in Kursk, Rostov, Novovoronezh and Balakovo. The detainees were also allegedly supposed to help connect Zaporozhye NPP to the Russian energy system.<sup>521</sup>

Similarly, the director of another Ukrainian factory "Motor Sich", a public and political figure, Hero of Ukraine Vyacheslav Boguslaev, has been imprisoned on suspicion of "collaboration" and "aiding and abetting Russia" since October 2022.

Often representatives of the Ukrainian security services directly inform the detainees that the reason for their arrest is the intention to use them to exchange them for Ukrainian soldiers who surrendered to the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation.

Over 700 citizens' complaints of illegal criminal prosecution in Ukraine for their pro-Russian position are under consideration in the Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights in the Russian Federation Tatyana Moskalkova.

In October 2023, during a discussion at the UN Human Rights Council on the OHCHR's progress report on Ukraine, UN Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights Al-Nashif noted that in Kiev-controlled territory, the authorities had

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<sup>520</sup> <https://antifashist.com/item/inzhenery-atomshhiki-pedagogi-i-informatory-s-trikolorom-sbu-prodolzhaet-shtampovat-absurdnye-ugolovnye-dela-protiv-ukraincev.html>

<sup>521</sup> Ibid.

opened nearly 6,000 criminal cases on charges of "collaboration" and the number of such cases continued to increase. OHCHR expressed concern in this regard.<sup>522</sup>

Numerous detentions of dissenters in Ukraine have also come to the attention of the Western press. For example, a piece on this topic was published on 3 February 2024 in the Guardian British newspaper.<sup>523</sup> It stated, in particular, that SBU had opened more than 8,100 criminal proceedings "related to collaboration and aiding and abetting Russia" in recent years. It was also noted that Ukrainians convicted on these counts were only held in certain prisons, where they are kept away from other inmates. Many of those the Guardian interviewed insisted they had then been pressured into signing confessions. At the same time, it should be noted that although the Guardian has acknowledged the fact of persecution of the opposition and dissenting citizens in Ukraine, nevertheless, all the material is written as a description of the cases of "traitors and collaborators", using appropriate negative language, and does not contain the slightest sympathy towards people (even their colleagues in the profession) who have become victims of the crimes of the Kiev regime.

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<sup>522</sup> <https://news.un.org/ru/story/2023/10/1445597>

<sup>523</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/feb/02/jailed-as-collaborators-the-stories-of-ukrainians-who-ended-up-in-prison>

## **Finland**

The situation with the people of Russian origin in Finland remains difficult. According to Statistical centre of Finland, as of 31 December 2022, the number of people speaking Russian as their mother tongue was 93,500 (1.7 percent of the population) on the same date, making Russian the most widely spoken foreign language in Finland.

Formally, the regulatory framework of Finnish legislation on national minorities consists of multilateral treaties to which Finland is a party, bilateral agreements (this topic is reflected in the Treaty on the Basis for Relations concluded between Russia and Finland in 1992) and national acts (including the Constitution (731/1999), the Non-discrimination Act (1325/2014), the Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration (1386/2010), the Language Act (423/2003), a group of so-called educational acts, including the Basic Education Act (628/1998), etc.).

The most privileged position, in terms of rights, is enjoyed by the Swedish-speaking community (287,000 people, 5.2 percent of the population) whose language has the status of the State language along with Finnish. Besides Swedes, special attention is declared to the Sami community, the only indigenous people of Finland residing compactly in the northern part of the country.

Legally, the Russian and Russian-speaking communities belong to the category of "other groups," which have the right to maintain and develop their own language and culture. Provisions on guarantees for the community are also included in the above-mentioned Russian-Finnish Treaty on the Basis for Relations, as well as in the specialized Agreement on Cooperation in the Field of Culture, Education and Scientific Research (1992) which provides for Finnish support to the people of Russian origin in preserving their identity and cultural heritage.

Despite legislative guarantees, the Russian-speaking community in Finland faces a number of challenges. In addition to unemployment higher than among the

Finnish population, the difficulty of working in a specialty received in the USSR or the Russian Federation remains an important problem for economically active compatriots. Many are forced to agree to low-paid jobs where no high qualification is needed.

The Finnish society is generally wary of immigrants in everyday life (as was pointed out by the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in 2017<sup>524</sup>), and employment and self-realization opportunities for foreigners, especially of non-European origin, are usually worse than for Finnish citizens. In particular, Russian-speaking residents of Finland, as well as other foreigners, have faced negative attitude, including on the basis of language or origin, as evidenced by the results of related surveys.

Discrimination against non-Finnish communities had affected Russian community long before 2022, as reflected by the multilateral human rights mechanisms. Thus, in June 2019, the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities expressed concern about the increased intolerance in Finland observed in recent years, which, as indicated, resulted in higher pressure on local national minorities, including Russians. The Committee emphasized, *inter alia*, that a large share of people of Russian background faced discrimination on the grounds of origin and language. It also pointed out that there was no mechanism for monitoring Russophobic statements.

After the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation started the special military operation for denazification and demilitarization of Ukraine and protection of Donbas civilians, the situation with the rights of Russian compatriots in Finland has deteriorated notably. A large-scale anti-Russian information campaign was launched in the Finnish media, amid which increased negative and discriminatory attitudes were recorded on the part of Finnish society towards Russians and Russian speakers living here, with their public associations being subjected to

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<sup>524</sup> Concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination on the 23rd periodic report of Finland. May 2017. Available at: [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CERD%2FC%2FFIN%2FCO%2F23&Lang=ru](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CERD%2FC%2FFIN%2FCO%2F23&Lang=ru)



powerful pressure. The Finnish authorities, for their part, tried to prevent a possible rise in social tensions by repeatedly appealing to prevent violations of the Russians' rights. They managed to partly stabilize the situation: a social survey conducted between June and July 2022 on request of the Finnish Culture Foundation showed<sup>525</sup> that the vast majority of Russian speakers (82 percent) did not face discrimination or hate speech on the grounds of language after the start of the special military operation. However, despite this generally positive picture, this survey indicated that there is a significant segment of the Russian-speaking community (17 percent) that experienced the effects of anti-Russian rhetoric fuelled by the local press. Individual cases of intolerance that emerged in the press after the survey had been conducted, confirmed the persistence of Russophobic attitudes in various spheres of the Finnish society, including labour, education, culture and sports.

The Finnish government, especially its new composition whose work at the beginning was marked by racist scandals, has been recently pursuing a blatantly discriminatory course against Russian citizens. This can be illustrated by the Finnish government's decision on visa restrictions against Russians, which, in fact, have become a manifestation of discrimination based on nationality. In August 2022, a daily quota was introduced on the total number of applications accepted (500 per day for the whole of Russia, with 100 of them being tourist applications). Later, a decision was taken to completely ban the issuance of tourist visas to Russian citizens from 30 September 2022 and to restrict the entry of Russian citizens to Finland for tourist purposes.

On 6 July 2023, Finnish authorities introduced another package of restrictions, tightening entry rules for Russian students of Finnish educational institutions, businessmen and property owners since 10 July 2023. Businessmen may travel only to Finland and cannot transit to other countries through Finnish territory. In addition, in each case businessmen will have to justify the need to visit the country and personally conduct business there. Property owners, too, have been

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<sup>525</sup> <https://culturas.fi/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Cultura-sa-a-tio-sr-Suomen-vena-ja-nkieliset-2022-selvitys.pdf>

obliged to provide the grounds for staying in the country. Students are allowed to enter Finland only if they receive an academic degree upon completion of their studies.<sup>526,527</sup>

Finland's adherence to the Russophobic course of the "collective West" has also had a negative impact on the situation of many compatriot associations in the country. Amid the dominance of anti-Russian sentiments spread by the Finnish media, and sometimes due to undisguised external pressure, a significant number of compatriot organizations have drastically reduced the scope of their activities. Some of them are forced to refrain from contacts with Russian partners for fear of negative consequences.

Since 2022, many compatriot associations have been subjected to information and propaganda pressure, for example, the Russian-language online edition "Novosti Helsinki" (editor-in-chief Irina Tabakova), as well as the Cossack community operating in Finland, whose ataman Andrei Shestakov was accused of promoting Russian interests and interacting with Russian partners, including the Russian Embassy in Finland.

Russian owners of Finnish property are under special control without due reason. In 2022, amendments to national legislation were adopted strengthening the control and blocking functions of supervisory authorities, in particular the Ministry of Defence of Finland. With reference to the national defence interests, transactions with Russian participation are being blocked: in October 2023, the conduct of three real estate transactions with Russian participation was prevented,<sup>528</sup> and by August 2024, of another two. Minister of Defence Antti Häkkinen established a cross-administrative working group to assess the possibility of a total ban on such transactions for Russian citizens and organizations,<sup>529</sup> even though a similar group formed by his predecessor concluded

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<sup>526</sup> <https://iz.ru/1540403/2023-07-06/finliandiia-uzhestochit-vezd-abiturientam-biznesmenam-vladeltcam-nedvizhimosti-rf-s-10-iiulia>

<sup>527</sup> <https://valtioneuvosto.fi/en/-/finland-continues-to-impose-travel-restrictions-on-russian-citizens>

<sup>528</sup> <https://yle.fi/a/74-20056035>

<sup>529</sup> [https://www.defmin.fi/ajankohtaista/tiedotteet\\_ja\\_uutiset/venalaisten\\_kiinteistonhankinnan\\_tayskieltoa\\_arvioiva\\_tyoryhma\\_aloittaa\\_lainsaadantovalmistelun.14141.news#9042a51a](https://www.defmin.fi/ajankohtaista/tiedotteet_ja_uutiset/venalaisten_kiinteistonhankinnan_tayskieltoa_arvioiva_tyoryhma_aloittaa_lainsaadantovalmistelun.14141.news#9042a51a)

such a measure to be inexpedient.<sup>530</sup> In August 2024, it became known that a bill was being prepared to ban transactions with Finnish real estate for Russian citizens. In September 2024, Antti Häkkinen, country's Minister of Defence, banned real estate transactions for Russians in the localities of Mikkeli, Imatra, Kouvola and Lieksa. Finnish Defence ministry considered that such transactions may threaten national security and hinder the protection of territorial integrity of the country.<sup>531</sup>

In the spring of 2024, the Finnish Ministry of Defence working group established under the program of Petteri Orpo's government on assessing the adequacy of the country's existing legislative norms to control the acquisition of real estate by foreigners, published a report whose authors propose to prohibit Russian individuals and legal entities from acquiring land in Finland and to introduce the monitoring of objects already owned by Russians. The Finnish Ministry of Defence is ready to make an exception for Russian citizens who also have a Finnish citizenship or a permanent residence permit. According to the authors of the report, Russia can use any means to exert "hybrid influence" on Finland, and owning land allegedly creates the opportunity for "intelligence, sabotage and other hostile activities" in the country. Whether the proposals of the Finnish Ministry of Defence will be submitted to Parliament as a relevant bill, will be decided by the Government of Finland.

The Finnish authorities see a threat to national security not only in the fact that Russian citizens own Finnish property, but also from the Russian community as a whole. They cultivate the thesis about the risks posed by holders of Russian passports: they can allegedly be used by our country to exert "hybrid influence" on Finnish society. In this regard, the expediency of revising the relevant legislation to deprive the people of Russian origin of the opportunity to combine Russian citizenship with Finnish ("dual citizenship") is being seriously discussed.

<sup>530</sup> [https://www.defmin.fi/en/topical/press\\_releases\\_and\\_news/press\\_release\\_archive/2022/working\\_group\\_does\\_not\\_recommend\\_total\\_ban\\_on\\_russian\\_real\\_estate\\_ownership.13288.news#9042a51a](https://www.defmin.fi/en/topical/press_releases_and_news/press_release_archive/2022/working_group_does_not_recommend_total_ban_on_russian_real_estate_ownership.13288.news#9042a51a)

<sup>531</sup> <https://www.vedomosti.ru/realty/news/2024/09/06/1060501-minoboroni-finlyandii>

The current international situation has also partially affected the position of the Russian Orthodox Church in Finland. In the heat of a Russophobic fervour, the Turku authorities revoked their previously issued permit to use the municipal building adjacent to the Russian Consulate General in Turku which housed a parish of the Russian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate. As a result, the Church of the Dormition of The Most Holy Theotokos, which had existed there since 2001 and had a regular congregation, was forced to close in the summer of 2022, and its clergymen were forced to seek other ways to continue the activities in demand among the local Russian-speaking residents.

The large-scale anti-Russian information campaign launched in the country since February 2022 has also led, according to media reports, to a decline in the popularity of the Russian language among applicants to some universities and language courses. Bilateral cooperation between Finnish and Russian educational institutions has been frozen. A number of former partners involved in spreading of the Russian language, particularly a major NGO called "Finland-Russia Society", have discredited themselves by their unfriendly stance.

Another measure of influence on Russians and compatriots residing in Finland was the closure of border crossing points on the Russian-Finnish border by the Finnish authorities. This measure adopted in late 2023 under the pretext of a situation with migrants crossing the border to seek asylum in Finland and Russia's allegedly deliberate actions to organize such flows,<sup>532</sup> led to a violation of the right to freedom of movement and the severance of family ties on both sides of the border. Considering the Finnish government's determination to fight against "hybrid threats" and blatant disregard for the rights of groups interested in the proper functioning of the border, such restrictions should be expected to extend.

The scale of the problem turned out to be so large that it came to the attention of the UN Committee against Torture in May 2024. In particular, the CAT pointed out that the full closure of Finland's eastern land border on 30 November 2023 in response to the "alleged instrumentalization by a third

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<sup>532</sup> <https://www.mid.ru/ru/maps/fi/1916021/>

country of the movement of asylum-seekers and migrants" raises "concerns with regard to effective access to means of legal entry for the purpose of seeking asylum" in Finland and may lead to breaches of the principle of non-refoulement and of the prohibition of collective expulsion.<sup>533</sup> These actions by the Finnish authorities have also attracted the attention of the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights.<sup>534</sup>

The Finnish Non-Discrimination Ombudsman also notes that keeping all border crossing points at the eastern border closed and centralizing international protection applications to air and sea border crossing points seriously compromises the real and effective opportunity to submit such applications. In the absence of unhindered access to the asylum procedure, there is a manifest danger of violations of the principle of non-refoulement and the prohibition of collective expulsion.<sup>535</sup>

Evidence of Russophobia persistent in Finland has repeatedly become public. The incident with the exclusion of The Voice of Finland contestant due to her Russian citizenship in October 2022 caused a massive outcry.<sup>536</sup> Employment problems were reported by Russian IT specialists, one of whom was dismissed from the national pension agency Kela following a security check, and another one was not allowed to participate in a commercial project related to this agency.<sup>537</sup> With reference to Europe-wide restrictive measures or security concerns, Russian citizens got denied flight training, participation in promising scientific research and national sporting events.<sup>538</sup> Commenting on such cases, the Finnish authorized bodies emphasize that discrimination is unacceptable. However, it is obvious that such efforts though made on a national level, are not enough.

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<sup>533</sup> Concluding observations of the Committee against Torture on the 8th periodic report of Finland. May 2024. Available at:

[https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CAT%2FCO%2FFIN%2FCO%2F8&Lang=ru](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CAT%2FCO%2FFIN%2FCO%2F8&Lang=ru)

<sup>534</sup> The EU Agency for Fundamental Rights. Fundamental Rights Report 2024.

[https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/fra-2024-fundamental-rights-report-2024\\_en.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2024-fundamental-rights-report-2024_en.pdf)

<sup>535</sup> <https://yhdenvertaisuusvaltuutettu.fi/en/-/keeping-the-eastern-border-crossing-points-closed-continues-to-seriously-compromise-the-right-to-seek-asylum>

<sup>536</sup> <https://yle.fi/a/3-12665460>

<sup>537</sup> <https://yle.fi/a/74-20009664>

<sup>538</sup> <https://yle.fi/a/74-20017058>

In May 2024, the UN Committee against Torture pointed to increased hate speech in Finland,<sup>539</sup> expressing concern about the rise in a significant number of hate crimes and racist prejudice manifestations (according to the CAT, only a small number of such crimes have led to prosecutions). At the same time, the Committee drew attention to the intensification of hostile sentiments towards persons belonging to ethnic or religious minority groups. Among the groups whose situation was of particular concern, in addition to people of African descent, Roma and Muslims (these groups are traditionally considered to be of concern) the CAT highlighted Russian and Swedish speakers. The latter is particularly noteworthy because it only proves that any form of misanthropic rhetoric – in this case, with a Russophobic tone – in the future, unless it is stopped at the very beginning, will only expand at the expense of other ethnic, racial and language elements.

Recently, the Finnish authorities have been making greater efforts to restrict the use of Russian language in the country (which is still the most widely spoken foreign language). The Finnish authorities are particularly persistent in trying to displace Russian-language education. Thus, in the autumn of 2023, the Turku city administration, referring to organizational and financial reasons, announced its plans to cancel since 2024 the enrolment on "Finnish-Russian classes" at the Puolala municipal school which combine teaching in Finnish and partially in Russian. The administrations of three Finnish border towns, Lappeenranta, Imatra and Joensuu, announced their joint plans to close in 2025 the School of Eastern Finland operating in these localities and specializing in teaching in Russian language (the school was established in 1997 and has around 600 students). There are individual cases of harassment of Russian-speaking children in schools on a national basis.

The anti-Russian course is being consistently followed by Finnish sports officials who share the Nordic countries' common position that "now is not the

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<sup>539</sup> Concluding observations of the Committee against Torture on the 8th periodic report of Finland. May 2024. Available at: [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CAT%2FC%2FFIN%2FCO%2F8&Lang=ru](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CAT%2FC%2FFIN%2FCO%2F8&Lang=ru)

right time for Russians to return to international sports." Related public statements were also made by Finnish officials. In particular, in December 2022, former Minister of Science and Culture Petri Honkonen stated that "Russia, as well as Belarus, which supports it, should not be allowed to international sports competitions." In this regard, the conditions for the admission of Russian and Belarusian athletes to international sports competitions announced by the International Olympic Committee in late March 2023, and to the Summer Olympic Games in Paris made public in early December 2023, were met by official Helsinki with clear resentment.<sup>540</sup>

As for the detention of Russian citizens abroad, a high-profile case was that of Vojislav Torden (Jan Petrovsky). The Russian citizen was detained in July 2023 at Vantaa airport for violating the order of entry into Finland. Later, in August of the same year, he was transferred to prison as an interim measure due to the extradition request from the Prosecutor General's Office of Ukraine on charges of "committing criminal offenses in the Donetsk region in 2014-2015."<sup>541</sup> After reviewing the request and all the circumstances, the Supreme Court of Finland decided to refuse extradition on the grounds that expulsion to Ukraine could endanger Vojislav Torden's life and health.<sup>542</sup> As a result, the Russian citizen was transferred to the detention unit of the immigration service to resolve the issue of his deportation. However, soon afterwards, the Office of the Prosecutor General of Finland decided to launch its own investigation into the case based on the so-called universal jurisdiction which allows considering cases involving serious and socially significant crimes, regardless of where they were committed and the nationality of the perpetrator or victim.<sup>543</sup> To this end, on 18 December 2023, the District Court of Helsinki authorized that Vojislav Torden was again taken into custody as an interim measure for the investigation. The Finnish Prosecutor's office

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<sup>540</sup> <https://www.helsinkitimes.fi/finland/finland-news/dornestic/24610-chief-of-finnish-olympic-committee-rejects-calls-to-boycott-paris-2024.html>

<sup>541</sup> <https://yle.fi/a/74-20047065>

<sup>542</sup> <https://yle.fi/a/74-20047065>

<sup>543</sup> <https://ria.ru/20240112/torden-1920859418.html>

has presented no charges against Vojislav Torden for the war crimes he allegedly committed in Ukraine, but the Russian citizen remains in custody.



## **France**

After the start of the special military operation to demilitarize and denazify Ukraine and to protect the civilian population of Donbass, the growth of Russophobic sentiments has become extremely relevant in France. The situation of Russian citizens and Russian-speaking persons in France was particularly alarming in the spring of 2022. Many faced and continue facing manifestations of Russophobia and aggression at the domestic level, being discriminated by banks, educational institutions and service organizations. Cases of damage to the property and personal vehicles of Russian compatriots as well as cases of psychological pressure and threats against priests of the Russian Orthodox Church have been recorded. The anti-Russian rhetoric of the French authorities and media, as well as the activity of the radicalized Ukrainian diaspora, greatly contributes to all of this.

The French authorities are consistently working to identify and "freeze" the assets of Russian individuals included in the EU sanctions lists. The Ministry of Economy and Finance has set up a special unit consisting of tax, financial intelligence (Tracfin) and customs officials to track down movable and immovable property, as well as bank accounts not only of those on the sanctions lists, but also of their relatives and trusted persons.

It is estimated that private Russian assets worth approximately 1.75 billion EUR have been "frozen" in France, of which 1 billion EUR held in bank accounts of Russian individuals. The market value of their movable and immovable property is 750 million EUR. Two Russian vessels have been arrested: the Vladimir Latyshev, a cargo ship on 28 February 2022 (it is kept in the port of Saint Malo), the Viktor Andryukhin, a cargo ship on 1 March 2022 (it is kept in the port of Fos-sur-Mer).

As part of the Western sanctions, French financial institutions, often proactively, blocked bank accounts and cards of compatriots, their bank transfers to and from Russia, and refused to open new accounts. There were reports of politicized denials of loans and insurance contracts. Tracfin uses its powers to

block "dubious" financial transactions to restrict fund transfers by Russian individuals from their accounts in France to other jurisdictions.

In fact, a separate discriminatory "regulation" is still in place for Russians in French banks. It is practically impossible to open new bank accounts. Banking restrictions often prevented Russian citizens and natives of Russia from paying for basic services such as accommodation, food, and medical care.

Financial institutions are still selectively suspending the operations of Russian citizens under the pretext of "conducting additional checks", and the practice of arbitrary refusals to issue loans, transfer funds due to inheritance is known. The organizations related to Russian culture are also facing problems. The Paris-based Rachmaninoff Conservatory (Conservatoire Rachmaninoff) encountered difficulties in managing bank accounts. In April 2023, the owner of the Pirojki Bar café, member of the Coordinating Council of Russian Compatriots (CCRC) in France E. Biktimirova had to file a complaint with the police to have a money transfer to a supplier returned to her account, which had been frozen by the bank without explanation.

In October 2024, CIC Bank unilaterally terminated its cooperation with the Russian Consulate General in Strasbourg by closing its operational accounts.

On 22 August 2022, more than 70 citizens of Russia, Belarus and France filed a class action lawsuit against French banks for discrimination on the basis of nationality.<sup>544</sup> The lawsuit was artificially delayed by the judicial authorities and then dismissed. On appeal, the court imposed an inadequately high security deposit on the plaintiffs in an attempt to force them to abandon their claims.

There have been cases of unmotivated refusal by the French authorities to extend a residence permit in France.

Against the backdrop of anti-Russian hysteria in the spring of 2022, everything that reminds of Russia was threatened with a ban. Thus, in March 2022,

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<sup>544</sup> <https://www.lefigaro.fr/actualite-france/guerre-en-ukraine-interdits-bancaires-des-russes-portent-plainte-20220824>

a number of bookstores were instructed to remove Russian-language publications from sale, including pedagogical literature for teaching Russian.

In some grocery stores there were notices about the withdrawal of "Russian products" from sale. Owners of Russian restaurants in different regions of France received threatening letters with the same content, requiring them to leave the country. The scale of the mailing of such letters has not been fully assessed, as not all owners reported receiving them. For instance, G. Kazaryan, owner of the oldest Parisian Russian cuisine restaurant La Cantine Russe, had to contact the police after receiving several threatening and insulting letters and a series of anonymous calls to his personal mobile number with threats to his life. The owner of Roi Alexandre restaurant in Lyon also received a threatening and abusive letter and a series of anonymous calls to her personal mobile cell phone with threats to her life. Letters and calls were also received by the owners of the restaurants La Volga in Lyon and Baba Yaga in Lille.

The latest known case is the Pirojki Bar café in Paris, whose employees regularly face threats and insults from a number of French organizations and local Franco-Ukrainian community leaders. Ukrainian activists are spreading calls on the Internet to boycott the café, which has been attacked twice with property damage and theft of products. The walls of the restaurant were covered with posters with the hashtag "pas de vacances pour les terroristes russes" ("let's not let the Russian terrorists relax"). Police complaints were filed for all incidents, but no action was taken by law enforcement.

On 1 March 2022, Jean Thevenot, President of the Valenciennes Bar Association and concurrently President of the Autonomous Financial Settlement Fund for Lawyers (CARPA) of the Bar Association of the Hauts-de-France region, sent a blatantly racist letter to the five bar associations of the said region instructing them to "block all money transfers to clients whose names sound Slavic".

In April 2024, Banque Populaire Auvergne Rhône-Alpes blocked the accounts of a French lawyer simply because a number of Russian citizens were its clients, although they were not subject to any personal sanctions.

Russian diplomatic missions, consular offices and cultural centers are still being subjected to aggression. The attackers pelted the building of the Russian Embassy in France with bags filled with paint and sprayed swastikas on the sidewalks in front of the Embassy. Walls outside the Consulate General in Strasbourg were also painted with swastikas. Unknown attackers smeared paint on the buildings of the Military Attaché's Office, the Russian Orthodox Spiritual and Cultural Center, the Permanent Delegation to UNESCO, the Consulate General in Marseille and the Consulate General's Office in Marseille in Villefranche-sur-Mer. The Russian House of Science and Culture in Paris (RHSC) is subjected to regular provocations. On the night from 6 to 7 March 2022, unknown perpetrators threw a Molotov cocktail at its gate. Several times RHSC's stands were covered with insulting inscriptions. The most recent vandalism case was in August 2024. The Russian Embassy in Paris continues to receive messages with threats to diplomats. An envelope containing white powder and a replica of an explosive device were received via mail. Some employees' service cars were painted in the colours of the Ukrainian flag.

In March 2022, the private French security bureau Phaz Sécurité that had controlled the outer perimeter of the Russian Embassy in France under contract informed about the early termination of the contract with the diplomatic mission. The reason given was that the union of security agencies in France had recommended "terminating contracts with Russian clients in connection with the events in Ukraine". Otherwise, the bureau may be subject to restrictions up to license revocation.

Since June 2022, French insurance firms have been massively refusing to renew and closing existing contracts with any organizations linked to the Russian Federation. These restrictions have also affected Russian diplomatic missions in

France (there are cases of refusal to insure their motor vehicles and immovable property).

Facts of exerting pressure on priests of the Russian Orthodox Church have been reported. Father Andrei (Eliseev), senior priest of the Saint Nicholas Cathedral (Cathédrale Saint-Nicolas) in Nice, and the clergy of the Holy Trinity Cathedral (Cathédrale de la Sainte-Trinité) in Paris received anonymous letters threatening to kill them in case of refusal to leave French territory any time soon. Death threats against the priests "as henchmen of the Russian authorities" were also posted on social media.

French authorities have completely forced Russian broadcast media out of the country. On 2 March 2022, following a decision by the EU Council, the French media regulator banned the activities of RT-France TV channel and Sputnik news agency in France. On 14 December 2022, Eutelsat, a French satellite operator, stopped broadcasting three Russian TV channels (Russia-1, NTV and Channel One) following a decision of the national media regulator ARCOM. On 20 January 2023, the accounts of RT-France were blocked in France on the instructions of the Ministry of Economic Affairs. As a result, the work of the news agency in the country was completely paralyzed. The decision was made to close RT's office in France and 131 employees were left out of work.

Overall, many of our compatriots experienced threats against them. Svetlana Terekhova-Mayorgas, coordinator of the Immortal Regiment action in Lyon, reported that representatives of the Ukrainian diaspora had conducted correspondence containing insulting remarks and threats to her life. There were also cases of verbal threats and insults against our compatriots on the streets of cities simply because they were speaking Russian in a public place. In some schools, Russian-speaking children were verbally harassed by other students, provoked into fights or beaten. In September 2024, leader of the CCRC in France G.Shepelev reported to the Embassy that his personal data, including his phone number and the Russian address where his parents lived, as well as the information

about CCRC members in various countries, had been published on the Ukrainian website kiborg.news.

There are cases of Russian citizens, including cultural figures, being denied visas on spurious pretexts, especially those who openly support their country's foreign policy. To counter accusations of "abolishing Russian culture," the French provide venues for performers who have left Russia, whose performances are often accompanied by anti-Russian outbursts and statements in support of Ukraine.

Episodes of a discriminatory approach by French judges to the imposition of unreasonably harsh preventive measures and penalties on Russian citizens are a cause for serious concern. In 2016-2022, A. Vinnik, I. Girnov, M. Ivkin, P. Kosov, V. Balakhnitchev, A. Melnikov, spouses I. Druzhinin and M. Druzhinina, and O. Basov had to deal with shortcomings in the administration of justice, including unsatisfactory conditions of detention in penitentiary institutions and untimely submission of case files to lawyers and their clients. In some cases, Russian consular officials were prevented from visiting the defendants, as in the case of compatriot E. Vinogradova.

A significant number of Russian citizens (267 persons) are currently in custody in France. They are indicted by the French authorities for criminal offences or being prosecuted.

Of particular concern is the situation with the wives of Russians suspected of involvement in money-laundering through cryptocurrency who are being held in the Fleury-Mérogis Prison (convictions have not yet been handed down), namely: E. Vinogradova and M. Druzhinina. According to information from the detainees and their lawyers, due to the lack of evidence for convictions during the investigation, the women are being used by French justice as a tool to pressure their spouses. Judges even refused to transfer them to house arrest, regardless of M. Druzhinina's health problems or the fact that E. Vinogradova, a mother of many children, had to give birth to her fourth child in prison.

Most of the mentioned cyber fraud cases are presented in the local media as a fight "against Russian hackers" and are definitely politicized. Suspects are being

abused, they are under pressure, and after the arrest they are not allowed to contact their relatives by phone immediately. The details of the investigation and the grounds for the charges are not disclosed by lawyers in connection with the secret investigation. Permission to visit detainees in their places of detention is granted exclusively by judges.

Russian citizens I. Druzhinin and M. Druzhinina were arrested in Italy on 25 August 2023 on the basis of a warrant issued by Interpol and were deported to France on request of the French law enforcement bodies in October 2023. They are currently kept in the prisons of Villepinte and Fléury-Mérogis respectively. Investigations into their case continue. Currently, the defence is seeking the transfer of M. Druzhinina to house arrest with the obligation to wear an electronic bracelet. In response to the defence's request, the Embassy prepared an agreement for M. Druzhinina to be accommodated in one of the Embassy's residential flats.

O. Basov was arrested at Paris Roissy-Charles-de-Gaulle airport on 16 October 2023 on charges of writing the Ragnar Locker malware, which was used to blackmail major companies around the world. In December 2023, he was cleared of 7 of 9 charges, but continues to be accused of organizing a criminal hacker group, for which he is being held in Nanterre prison. The staff of the consular department is in contact with E. Kovaleva, the wife of O. Basov, and at her request a power of attorney was issued for her. On 1 August 2024, O. Basov was released on personal recognizance.

On 5 December 2023, E. Vinogradov, permanently residing on Cyprus with his family, was detained in Paris and charged by the French authorities for cryptocurrency fraud. E. Vinogradova was not informed about the detention of her husband and flew to Paris on 8 December 2023 to find out the fate of her husband. On 12 December 2023, after attending a court hearing, while flying to Cyprus, she was detained and placed in the women's wing of Fleury Mérogis prison (the men's wing of this prison holds E. Vinogradov), despite the fact that she was four months pregnant. The French side refused the Embassy's repeated appeals to mitigate the conditions of detention, arguing that all the necessary conditions had been created

on the territory of the prison. On 1 May 2024, E. Vinogradova gave birth to a child. E. Vinogradova's lawyers request to change the preventive measure and place her under house arrest with the obligation to wear an electronic bracelet. Despite paying bail of 60,000 EUR and having a flat, her transfer to house arrest was repeatedly refused.

In the run-up to and during the Olympic and Paralympic Games in Paris, the French media actively discussed the possibility of "Russian interference" in their organization in order to disrupt them. Thus, on 21 July 2024, French law enforcement agencies detained a Russian citizen K. Gryaznov on suspicion of preparation for "destabilisation activities", but after the end of the Paris Olympics he was released on personal recognizance.

The detention of Russian citizen Pavel Durov on 24 August 2024 evoked a wide response. He was charged with six counts of failure to cooperate with French authorities, as well as complicity in providing digital tools for the distribution of child pornography, drug trafficking and fraud. At present, Pavel Durov has been released from custody and can move freely on the territory of mainland France.

Overall, France regularly disregards its obligations under international treaties and fails to inform about Russian nationals placed in custody in a timely manner and rarely reports on the release of detained Russian nationals.

A series of blatant manifestations of Russophobia was connected with the preparations for the 2024 Summer Olympic Games in Paris (26 July – 11 August). Thus, on 30 March 2024, being in Kiev, the mayor of the French capital A. Hidalgo stated that "Russian and Belarusian athletes are not welcome" in Paris.<sup>545</sup> In May 2024, it became known that under the far-fetched pretext of ensuring security, volunteers from Russia and Belarus and even volunteers with Russian and Belarusian surnames living in France would not be allowed to participate in the provision of the Olympics.<sup>546</sup>

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<sup>545</sup> [https://www.lemonde.fr/sport/article/2024/03/30/a-kiev-anne-hidalgo-dit-aux-athletes-russes-et-bielorusses-qu-ils-ne-sont-pas-les-bienvenus-aux-jeux-de-paris-2024\\_6225142\\_3242.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/sport/article/2024/03/30/a-kiev-anne-hidalgo-dit-aux-athletes-russes-et-bielorusses-qu-ils-ne-sont-pas-les-bienvenus-aux-jeux-de-paris-2024_6225142_3242.html)

<sup>546</sup> <https://www.leparisien.fr/jo-paris-2024/ils-nous-traient-comme-des-terroristes-des-volontaires-russes-et-bielorusses-ecartes-des-jo-paris-2024-03-05-2024-P4YUQUSR5ZHYVCD4NUMDD5FK3M.php>



During the Summer Olympic Games, the acting Interior Minister Gérald Darmanin in an interview with the *Journal du Dimanche* reported that persons suspected of possible espionage activities for foreign countries, including under the guise of journalists and volunteers, were not allowed to attend the Games. In this regard, a large number of journalists from Russia were denied accreditation to cover the games.

The situation of persons from the Chechen Republic of the Russian Federation living in France deserves special attention. Recently, there has been an increase in the number of cases of revocation of refugee status from foreigners suspected of radicalization or convicted of breaching public order, with a view to their subsequent expulsion to their country of origin. In 2020, the French National Bureau for Refugees and Stateless Persons revoked refugee status from 312 people. Almost a quarter of those involved are Russians, most of them Chechens. This is significantly higher than for other ethnic groups. For example, Afghans, the leading group of asylum seekers in France, accounted for only five percent of revocations. The human rights community notes that these are often claims and suspicions that are not sufficient grounds for deprivation of refugee status.

## **Federal Republic of Germany**

After the start of the special military operation to denazify and demilitarize Ukraine and protect the peaceful population of Donbass, there was a sharp increase in cases of discrimination, insults, threats and direct violence against Russian-speaking citizens living in Germany. According to the German Federal Criminal Police Office, at its height there were up to 200 criminal offenses motivated by Russophobia per week.<sup>547</sup>

After the start of the Russian special military operation there was a sharp increase in discrimination directed against all representatives of the Russian-speaking diaspora, including Jews and Russian Germans from among the late resettlers, who are also citizens of Germany. Since late February, many incidents were recorded, even those coming beyond the legal framework and cases of violence: the use of physical force, threats, insults, deliberate damage to the property of Russian-speaking people, refusal to provide them with services, including medical and bank services, illegal dismissal from work, forced public repentance and condemnation of actions of the Russian authorities, etc. Psychological harassment and persecution of Russian-speaking children in schools – by both classmates and teachers – have become widespread. Many schools held classes in which teachers, following centralized instructions, assigned homework which discredited Russia and its authorities and distorted information about what was happening in Ukraine and in the Russian regions, including the Crimea, the Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republics, and Zaporozhye and Kherson Oblasts. Russian-speaking children who refused to attend such classes and complete assignments were threatened with expulsion from school.

Both German human rights activists and the police recognized the facts of discrimination against Russian-speaking residents of Germany, i.e. the entire community of German residents for whom Russian is their native language or one

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<sup>547</sup> BKA registriert Dutzende Delikte: Angriffe auf Russen und Ukrainer in Deutschland. N-TV. 19 April 2022 <https://n-tv.de/politik/Angriffe-auf-Russen-und-Ukrainer-in-Deutschland-article23275758.html>

of the main means of communication, as well as against citizens of Russia and Belarus.<sup>548</sup>

According to the NGO VADAR, from June 2022 to September 2023, about 1,600 Russian-speaking residents of Germany faced discrimination on ethnic grounds. The organization considered more than 400 appeals, which it received, as a matter of priority, and more than 100 appeals required specific legal support. In 2023 alone, VADAR received nearly 700 appeals. According to Ulrich Oehme, the head of the organization, blocking of bank accounts and confiscations of cars, registered in Russia, on the German territory were particular problems for Russian-speaking residents.<sup>549</sup>

The Russian Embassy readily receives feedback from Russian compatriots to collect information about cases of discrimination and harassment of Russian-speaking people, as well as to respond promptly to their concerns about such discriminatory incidents. The Embassy takes into account and structures the information received on specific cases of violation of the rights of Russian-speaking citizens in Germany.

The wave of Russophobia manifested itself in the cultural and religious areas. A campaign to force Russian cultural figures to publicly condemn the actions of the Russian leadership was launched in Germany. This was followed by demonstrative refusals to cooperate with Russian cultural figures and institutions, as well as attempts to eliminate works of Russian authors from programs. In March 2022, attacks on and desecration of Russian Orthodox churches of the Moscow Patriarchate in Düsseldorf, Essen, and Krefeld and of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad in Hanover, Berlin, and Bielefeld were recorded.

The German authorities have been putting pressure on and intimidating activists of the Russian-speaking community who express their disagreement with the ongoing demonization of Russia in Germany and show a loyal attitude to our

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<sup>548</sup> Wegen Angriffskrieg gegen die Ukraine. Anfeindungen gegen Deutsche aus Russland: So bekommen Betroffene Hilfe. SWR. 09.03.2022. <https://www.swr.de/swraktuell/baden-wuerttemberg/diskriminierung-deutsche-aus-russland-100.html>

<sup>549</sup> Blind Law: 1,600 Russians were discriminated against in Germany during the year. Izvestia. 4 September 2023 <https://iz.ru/1567626/semen-boikov/slepoi-zakon-za-god-v-frg-podverglis-diskriminacii-16-tys-rossii>

country. The German media publish articles claiming that such activists are under the control of the Kremlin, accusing them of working with the Embassy and collaborating with the so-called "extremists." This is mainly in line with the general approach of the German authorities to the activities of public organizations whose members are under surveillance. The EU Agency for Fundamental Rights pointed out surveillance of NGOs, stressing, *inter alia*, that the German authorities have been monitoring and searching the homes of activists involved in climate change activities.<sup>550</sup>

A striking example of the persecution of Russian citizens in Germany is the criminal proceedings initiated by the German authorities against the pro-Russian activist Yelena Kolbasnikova, who had lived in the country for many years and was a Ukrainian citizen at that time, and her husband Maxim Schlund. They are known for their active participation in the organization of several pro-Russian automobile rallies in Germany.

In her interview, Yelena Kolbasnikova told that quite a large number of ethnic Germans participated in the actions organized by her. However, ever fewer ethnic Germans participated in next rallies, because the police came to search them, and people became afraid to publicly express their position.<sup>551</sup> This means that under the pretext of countering the "Russian threat", the authorities have been creating an atmosphere of general fear, which, generally, has already affected the population of this country and the ability of specific individuals and groups to enjoy their rights and freedoms.

In a criminal case against Yelena Kolbasnikova, the Cologne District Court found her guilty and fined her with EUR 900 for her statements in support of Russia on 8 May 2022 during the Victory Day event in June 2023. At the same time, she was charged with "war propaganda" under Article 140 of the German

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<sup>550</sup> The EU Agency for Fundamental Rights. Fundamental Rights Report 2024 [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/fra-2024-fundamental-rights-report-2024\\_en.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2024-fundamental-rights-report-2024_en.pdf)

<sup>551</sup> The volunteer said that Germans supporting the Russian special military operation are forced to emigrate to the Russian Federation. TASS. 21 June 2024 <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/21166377>

Criminal Code for publicly supporting Russia's "aggression against Ukraine". An appeal was filed against the court's decision.

Yelena Kolbasnikova and Maxim Shlund were investigated on suspicion of violating the Foreign Trade and Payments Act of the Federal Republic of Germany, which prohibits the export and transfer of goods subject to EU sanctions (the maximum penalty under this law is up to five years in prison). In particular, as the investigation believes, they handed over insulated tents, helmets, cash, etc. to the Russian military during a trip to Donbass in the fall of 2022. As part of this investigation, the apartments of Yelena Kolbasnikova and Maxim Shlund were searched on 27 March and 21 August 2023.<sup>552</sup>

The International Association of Russian Speaking Lawyers (IARL) and the International Council of Russian Compatriots (ICRC) issued a statement calling on the German authorities to stop politically motivated persecution of Yelena Kolbasnikova and suggesting that international human rights organizations provide an objective assessment of the gross ideologically motivated actions of the German authorities.<sup>553</sup>

Yelena Kolbasnikova's husband Maxim Schlund was also persecuted. Because of his participation in the pro-Russian rallies, he was first denied access to his workplace because his employer allegedly had reason to doubt his trustworthiness, then suspended from work, and in March 2023, he was fired. He tried to defend his rights in court, get financial compensation from his former employer and be reinstated.

Due to persecution by the German authorities, Yelena Kolbasnikova and Maxim Schlund were forced to leave Germany in May 2024. In July 2024, German

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<sup>552</sup> The trial of Yelena Kolbasnikova, accused of war propaganda, began in Germany. Fund for the Support and Protection of the Rights of Compatriots Living Abroad 10 March 2023 [https://pravfond.ru/press-tsentr/v-germanii-nachalsya-sudebnyy-protsess-nad-rossiyankoy-elenoy-kolbasnikovoy-obvinyayemoy-v-propagande/?sphrase\\_id=3344](https://pravfond.ru/press-tsentr/v-germanii-nachalsya-sudebnyy-protsess-nad-rossiyankoy-elenoy-kolbasnikovoy-obvinyayemoy-v-propagande/?sphrase_id=3344); В Германии провели обыск у организатора крупных пророссийских акций. RIA Novosti, 27 March 2023 <https://ria.ru/20230327/obysk-1861092501.html>; A pro-Russian activist fined in Germany. Lenta.RU. 7 June 2023 <https://lenta.ru/news/2023/06/07/germany/>; A court in Cologne sentenced pro-Russian activist Yelena Kolbasnikova. Fund for the Support and Protection of the Rights of Compatriots Living Abroad, 7 June 2023 [https://pravfond.ru/press-tsentr/sud-kyelna-vynes-prigovor-prorossiyskoy-aktivistke-elene-kolbasnikovoy/?sphrase\\_id=3344](https://pravfond.ru/press-tsentr/sud-kyelna-vynes-prigovor-prorossiyskoy-aktivistke-elene-kolbasnikovoy/?sphrase_id=3344)

<sup>553</sup> ICRC and IARL adopted a Statement in connection with the criminal prosecution in Germany of Elena Kolbasnikova, a German citizen. The International Council of Russian Compatriots. 8 June 2023 <https://www.msrs.ru/news-orb/item/609-2023-047>

authorities issued a decision to expel the activists from Germany with a 20-year entry ban, justifying it with the necessity to prevent threats to state security and public order.

On 22 June 2024, Amidullah Saidi, the pro-Russian activist, was detained in Munich during a "Candle of Remembrance" event on the basis of a court decision in a case of inciting ethnic hatred.

During the preparation of festive events dedicated to the Victory Day in 2022, Amidullah Saidi got into a conflict with one of the participants of a thematic chat in the messenger Telegram, after which a denunciation to the police was written against him because of "threats to life and health".

On 24 November 2022, the court ruled that the Russian citizen was guilty and sentenced him to 150 days in prison or a fine of EUR 11,300. At the same time, he did not receive any summons to the court and was not informed that the court judgment had entered into force. He was not hiding from the police.

On 24 June 2024, after being detained, the activist was taken to Munich prison and then transferred to Augsburg prison on 28 June. The Consulate General in Bonn provided him with consular support.

In this case, there are doubts that the actions of the German law enforcement authorities were legal: Amidullah Saidi was notified of the verdict by mail and had no opportunity to hire a lawyer or appeal against the actions of the state prosecutors. In addition, the charges were based solely on copies of social media chats. After his release, Amidullah Saidi plans to file a lawsuit for compensation for moral damage. He also wants to further engage in activities concerning preservation of war memorials.

In June 2024, Olga Petersen (Russian and German citizen), a member of the Hamburg Bürgerschaft (Land Parliament) and the Alternative for Germany (AfD) party, moved to Russia due to political persecution and fear of having her minor children taken away from her. She was an observer at the Russian presidential elections on 15-17 March 2024 and said they were open, democratic and free. She was then expelled from the AfD faction due to "fundamental differences." She had

previously criticised sex education lessons in German schools, as well as discrimination against Russian-speaking citizens in Germany. She claimed that because of her stance she was harassed in the German press and by her colleagues in parliament.<sup>554</sup>

There are other cases of persecution of Russian citizens by the German authorities. The following should be mentioned.

From 1 November 2019 to 9 January 2020, the Hanseatic Higher Court in Hamburg tried V. Dekanov, a Russian citizen, who was accused of smuggling dual-use goods into Russia, forging accompanying documents, misleading customs authorities and colluding with Russian companies involved in the procurement of military goods and technologies. According to the lawyer, there was pressure exercised with regard to trial due to the sensitivity of the issue and the increased public attention. The Russian citizen was found guilty on all charges and sentenced to seven years in prison.

In the spring of 2022, the Ingolstadt prosecutor's office charged a Russian citizen, A. Gevorkov, with "approving a war of aggression and distributing Nazi symbols". The sentence was based on the photos he posted on social networks of a Russian hero who died during the special military operation, as well as photos and caricatures from the Great Patriotic War with the swastika. The Foundation for the Support and Protection of the Rights of Compatriots Living Abroad in partnership with a Berlin lawyer provided legal assistance to Gevorkov. At the end of 2022, the court sentenced Gevorkov to a fine of EUR 10,000.

In October 2022, a Russian citizen, Yury Orekhov, was detained in Hamburg at the request of the United States. The US side accused him of transferring dual-use goods and technologies, which are under Western sanctions, to Russian entities and demanded his extradition. The Russian side sent its request for the extradition of the detainee to the Russian Federation, however, this was not granted. During its investigation, the German Prosecutor General's Office found that Yury Orekhov had not violated German law or EU anti-Russian sanctions. On

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<sup>554</sup> <https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2024/06/09/19218691>

29 August 2023, the Hanseatic Higher Court in Hamburg ruled against his extradition and released him from custody. The court proceedings were conducted in a closed session and the results were not publicized. It seems that the main argument which supported his release was the lack of guarantees from the American side that he would not face criminal prosecution in the United States for episodes not stated in the extradition request. At the same time, it should be mentioned that the German side allowed Russian consular officials to visit Yury Orekhov during his detention.

In October 2022, the Landshut prosecutor's office initiated an investigation against Russian citizen Yulia Prokhorova basing on materials published by her in the messenger Telegram and qualified by the German authorities as "glorification of war in social networks". She told this the Russian Consulate General in Munich.

In November 2022, the local court in Darmstadt accused Russian citizen M. Gatzemeier of posting photos of Russian military personnel on the Internet and using the "Z" symbol, which is banned in Germany. She reported this persecution to the Russian Consulate General in Frankfurt am Main.

Both Russian citizens were searched. Since no pre-trial restrictions in the form of restriction of liberty were imposed on them, they managed to leave Germany and enter the Russian Federation.

In addition to criminal prosecutions, since 2023 there have been a significant number of cases when personal vehicles of the Russian citizens residing in Germany or staying in the country for the purpose of transit of vehicles registered in Russia and temporarily imported to Germany were seized under the EU Council Regulation No. 833/2014 of 31 July 2014. Article 31 of this document establishes a ban on the import of a number of cargoes and goods from Russia to the territory of EU countries, including personal cars, telephones, computers, bags, clothes, cosmetics, hygiene products, etc. In response to the Russian Embassy's notes on the invalidity and illegality of the German authorities' actions, the German Foreign Ministry noted that the possibility of exemption from the sanctions regime is



considered by the competent customs and judicial authorities on a case-by-case basis.

There are frequent manifestations of "double standards". Various methods of pressure are used against Russian media operating in Germany. Facts confirming such pressure have been recorded for several years before 2022. German law enforcement agencies are stepping up measures to combat Russian "propaganda and disinformation" which Moscow allegedly uses to influence public opinion in a way that favours Russia and "splits the German society and sows discord in it". Special units have been established in the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of the Interior to detect "information manipulation from abroad". The broadcasting of the main sources of the "Kremlin propaganda machine" (RT DE, SNA News (formerly Sputnik Deutschland)) is forbidden in Germany in accordance with EU sanctions. There are serious obstacles to broadcasting of other popular Russian-language channels and media outlets (Channel One, VGTRK, RIA Novosti, Rossiyskaya Gazeta, Izvestia). The Russian video agency Ruptly, affiliated with RT DE and headquartered in Berlin, was repeatedly subject to attacks in the media.

Journalists of Russian state media officially accredited as foreign correspondents in Germany (Ivan Blagoy, Dmitriy Volkov (both working for Channel One), Sergei Feoktistov (Rossiya Segodnya), and Mikhail Antonov (VGTRK)) have been increasingly under pressure. Due to the actions taken by local authorities (refusal to extend residence permits, etc.), conditions for their safe life and work have been constantly deteriorating and their legal status has become worse. In their reaction to numerous diplomatic demarches, official German authorities recommend that journalists defend their interests in court with the help of qualified lawyers.

## Croatia

According to the 2021 population census, about 1,500 Russians live in Croatia, making up 0.04% of the country's population (identified as the Russian national minority). Members of the Russian-speaking community mainly reside in Zagreb, Pula, Rijeka, Split, Dubrovnik, Cakovec and Pozega.

The situation of Russian nationals in Croatia in general can be viewed as satisfactory. No cases of the removal of children born to Russian couples or in mixed marriages have been reported. According to the Coordinating Council of Russian Compatriots in Croatia, in 2023 and 2024, there has been no discrimination on the part of the official authorities against persons of Russian origin on the grounds of citizenship, nationality, language, sex or religion.

However, in 2022, certain manifestations of Russophobic attitudes in everyday life on the part of Croatian nationalists and members of the Ukrainian community were reported. There have been cases of local banks blocking accounts that belong to Russians on the basis of EU Council regulations. A number of financial institutions unlawfully conditioned further provision of banking services to Russian citizens upon the account holders' signature of a statement that contained a clause on their agreement with the measures adopted by the EU in response to the "destabilizing measures taken by Russia on the territory of Ukraine".

In March 2022, at the port of Trogir, a vessel owned by a Russian citizen was seized pursuant to a decision of the Croatian Ministry of the Sea, Transport and Infrastructure on the pretext of applying international restrictive measures.<sup>555</sup> In May 2022, upon Ukraine's request, the court of Split ruled to freeze the vessel and introduced a two-year ban on any registration measures, in order to allow for its possible confiscation in favour of the Ukrainian side. According to the information available, the encumbrance has not been removed from the vessel so

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<sup>555</sup> <https://www.vecernji.hr/viesti/jahta-putinova-oligarha-usidrena-u-trogiru-bit-ce-prodana-na-drazbi-sva-sredstva-idu-ukrajini-1639155>

far, nor has it been restored to its legitimate owner; the court hearings continue to be postponed without any explanation. At the same time, the Ukrainian side has already included the vessel in Ukraine's property register.

Croatia has ceased its bilateral interaction with Russia. Zagreb keeps ignoring requests for legal assistance in the matters of protecting the interests of Russian entities and individuals made by the Prosecutor General's Office and Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation.

Since April 2022, there has been an increase in anti-Russian fake news, and the mass media have been swept by a wave of fake stories about Russia. Hostile rhetoric always makes part of the political discourse, the "Russian issue" being referred to in parliamentary and electoral debates. The Ukrainian diaspora with the assistance of the official authorities, including funding, organized anti-Russian rallies in the centre of Zagreb to show their support for the Kiev regime.

After the beginning of the special military operation to denazify and demilitarize Ukraine and protect civilians in Donbass, Croatia withdrew from its cultural and humanitarian collaboration with our country. Zagreb backed up the European Commission's discriminatory decision of 2 March 2022 to ban the broadcasting of the Russia Today channel and the activities of the Sputnik agency as well as their subsidiaries in the EU territory.

At the same time, despite the attitudes adopted by the Croatian public, first of all the youth, interest in studying the Russian language and culture persists, and the Croatian society is not inclined to support the "cancellation" of Russian culture.

## Montenegro

Montenegro has not been immune to the Russophobic campaign being ramped up in Europe after the Russian Armed Forces launched the special military operation to denazify and demilitarize Ukraine and protect civilians in the Donbass. Official Podgorica's ever-strengthening stance of unconditional adherence to the course pursued by Washington and Brussels-based EU structures contributed to that. For example, in June 2022, Montenegrin operator Mtel switched off all Russian TV channels operating in the country, including Russia Today, RT Documentary, RTR Planeta, and Russia 24.

On 3 July 2024, following instructions from Brussels, Montenegro blocked access to a number of Russian media, including Pervyi Kanal, REN TV, a few VGTRK channels, in particular Russia 1, Russia 24, RT TV channel and its branches in other countries, as well as Sputnik and other media.<sup>556</sup>

In the context of the aforementioned Russophobic campaign, the activities of the Ukrainian embassy in Montenegro cannot but attract attention – after the special military operation was launched, its senior officials conducted several "protest" actions in Podgorica using extremist and neo-Nazi symbols. They came out with aggressive and racist statements (including on social media) against Russian servicemen, Russian Embassy officials and Russian diaspora. There have been no reports on the Montenegrin authorities suppressing or disassociating themselves from such hateful activities.

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<sup>556</sup> <https://amu.me/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/01-053-24-307-Obavjestenje-o-restriktivnim-mjerama-EU-prema-ruskim-medijima.pdf>

## Czech Republic

In recent years, the situation of Russian citizens and compatriots living in Czechia has deteriorated significantly due to artificial fuelling of Russophobia by the Czech authorities and fostering of an unhealthy atmosphere around the Russian diaspora.

In 2021, the school at the Russian Embassy in Prague was forced to suspend its work due to unfriendly actions of the Czech authorities.

Czechia has seen a sharp increase in manifestations of discrimination against Russian citizens and compatriots fuelled by statements made by the officials after the start of the special military operation to demilitarise and denazify Ukraine and to protect the civilian population of Donbass. In June 2023, the president of the Czech Republic, Petr Pavel, called for surveillance of all Russians residing in the West, invoking a similar monitoring regime introduced in the United States during the Second World War with respect to the Japanese population living in the country.<sup>557</sup> Czech Foreign Minister, Jan Lipavský, stated that Russian special services were allegedly using the Russian minority abroad to achieve their goals.<sup>558</sup>

In this context, "individual sanctions" against Russians in various spheres (banks, public eating facilities, educational establishments) are not surprising. In fact, the Czech authorities have used the Ukrainian crisis as a pretext to adopt restrictive measures against Russians.

On several occasions, it has been explicitly stated that exceptions from these discriminatory practices could be made if clients distanced themselves from the policies of the Russian authorities on Ukraine in writing or in verbal form. In several cafés in Prague, notifications have been put on display to indicate that Russians would not be served or would only be served if they condemned Russian foreign policy and Russian leadership (including in writing) and apologized for the

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<sup>557</sup> We should monitor all Russians living in the West, Czech leader says. Politico.eu. 15 June 2023. <https://www.politico.eu/article/petr-pavel-russia-czech-republic-surveillance/>

<sup>558</sup> Ruská menšina v Česku může být nástrojem politiky Kremlu, varuje ministr zahraničí. HlídacíPes.cz. 4 July 2023. <http://hlidacipes.org/ruska-mensina-v-cesku-muze-byt-nastrojem-politiky-kremlu-varuje-ministr-zahranici/>

situation in Ukraine. Some Czech hotels and real estate companies have displayed similar approaches. There have been publications about denial of medical care.

Moreover, there have been incidents in the field of education with Russians residing in Czechia facing discrimination in local universities – professors have refused to teach and examine them<sup>559</sup>; admission committees have refused to consider secondary education documents obtained in the Republic of Crimea; national security concerns have been used as a pretext to limit the choice of fields of study (mainly for technical specialities). Czech universities are known to have terminated cooperation agreements with Russian education establishments.

Manifestations of aggression in Czechia have been directed not only against Russian citizens, but also against diplomatic representatives. On 24 February 2022, unidentified persons attacked the building of the Russian Embassy in Prague. The attackers attempted to break into the premises of the mission and pelted the embassy building with various objects.

In line with the EU policy, the regulation of the Czech government No. 130 of 25 February 2022 suspended the issuance of visas along with long-term and permanent residence permits to Russian citizens, including on the basis of applications submitted before the regulation's entry into force. Exceptions were envisaged only in cases involving Czech "foreign policy interests". It was also stated that visas would be issued for humanitarian reasons. Commenting on the Czech approach in this regard, Czech Minister of the Interior, Vít Rakušan, clarified that humanitarian reasons referred to family reunification and threat of prosecution in Russia. Subsequently, the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs further expanded the list of possible grounds: "A humanitarian visa is granted to an individual whose life is in danger because of repression, opposition to or criticism of the regime, or if there is a risk of persecution for political or other reasons". The Czech authorities do not even consider medical treatment or death of a close relative to be valid reasons for granting a visa to a Russian citizen. On 2 March

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<sup>559</sup> [https://prazsky.denik.cz/zpravy\\_region/rusko-ukrajina-sankce-praha-zastupitel-dlouhy-profesor-20220224.html](https://prazsky.denik.cz/zpravy_region/rusko-ukrajina-sankce-praha-zastupitel-dlouhy-profesor-20220224.html)

2022, the Czech government issued a regulation restricting the rights of Belarusian citizens as well.

Russian citizens are being stripped of their residence permits under the pretext of a "threat to state security". Among those affected are the head of the Coordinating Council of Russian Compatriots in the Czech Republic, Alexander Stepanov<sup>560</sup>, and the Rector of the Metochion of the Russian Orthodox Church in Karlovy Vary, Archpriest Nikolai (Lischenyuk)<sup>561</sup>.

In June 2023, the Czech Government banned Russian and Belarusian athletes from participating in competitions in the territory of the country.<sup>562</sup>

A concert of Russian opera singer Anna Netrebko scheduled to take place in Prague in October 2023 was cancelled due to the pressure from the capital's administration which gave the organizers a corresponding "recommendation" after consultations with the Ukrainian Embassy in the Czech Republic.<sup>563</sup>

In addition to persecution of Russian citizens, Czechia has seen reprisals against sensible citizens of this country who have had the courage to express their opinions publicly. Those who have openly supported Russia, especially in the context of the Russian special military operation (or those whose statements and actions can be interpreted in such a way), risk punishment envisaged by Section 365 "Approval of criminal offense" and Section 405 "Denial, Impugnation, Approval and Justification of Genocide" of the Criminal Code of the Czech Republic. They face up to three years in prison.

Back in February 2022, the Prosecutor General of the Czech Republic, Igor Stříž, stated that public support for the Russian authorities and Russian actions in Ukraine could lead to criminal liability and imprisonment. According to the

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<sup>560</sup> "Mohl by ohrozit bezpečnost státu." Česko se snaží vyhostit šéfa ruských krajanů. DeníkN. 8 April 2024. [Denikn.cz/1393518/mohl-by-ohrozit-bezpecnost-statu-cesko-se-snazi-vuhostit-sefa-ruskych-krajanu](https://denikn.cz/1393518/mohl-by-ohrozit-bezpecnost-statu-cesko-se-snazi-vuhostit-sefa-ruskych-krajanu)

<sup>561</sup> Ruský pravoslavný duchovní Luščenjuk musí opustit Česko. Novinky.cz 13 August 2024.

<https://www.novinky.cz/clanek/domaci-rusky-pravoslavny-liscenjuk-musi-opustit-cesko-40484009>

<sup>562</sup> Vláda souhlasila se zákazem účasti ruských sportovců na soutěžích v Česku. Novinky.cz. 28 June 2023. <https://www.novinky.cz/clanek/domaci-vlada-souhlasila-se-zakazem-ucasti-ruskych-sportovcu-na-soutezich-v-cesku-40436306>

<sup>563</sup> Nētrebková si stěžuje na cenzuru. Novinky.cz. 17 August 2023. <https://www.novinky.cz/clanek/kultura-netrebko-si-stezuje-na-cenzuru-40440983>

Prosecutor General's Office of the Czech Republic, as of March 2023, courts had already passed nine verdicts of guilty, several dozen other people had been charged, and besides, 90 criminal proceedings had been initiated.<sup>564</sup>

According to open sources, between February 2022 and November 2023, the police of the Czech Republic initiated 384 criminal cases in connection with public support for the actions of Russia, its leadership and armed forces in the context of the Ukrainian crisis, and in 99 cases, charges were brought.<sup>565</sup>

On 25 February 2022, the Czech authorities called for the blocking of Internet resources which, in their view, were spreading "pro-Russian disinformation". A request to this effect was sent to Internet providers. Neither the Municipal Court in Prague nor the Supreme Administrative Court of the Czech Republic found the state's actions unlawful, arguing that the request sent to providers had not been an order and that blocking had been voluntary.<sup>566</sup> On 6 December 2023, the Constitutional Court of the Czech Republic upheld this reasoning.<sup>567</sup>

Local law enforcement agencies have not paid due attention to violations of the rights of Russian citizens and their persecution in the Czech Republic.

In terms of discrimination against a particular ethnic group, specifically Russians, it is revealing that in 2014 there was a questionable incident when the owner (of Ukrainian origin) of the Brioni Hotel in Ostrava refused to accommodate Russian citizens because of the reunification of Crimea with Russia. Later, as a condition of accommodation, the hotel management required Russian guests to sign a statement condemning the "annexation" of the peninsula. This case was brought to Czech judicial authorities and referred to the Constitutional Court, which sided with the hotel owner and reversed lower-instance judgments and that of the Supreme Administrative Court, stressing that entrepreneurs should not be

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<sup>564</sup> Nejvyšší státní zastupitelství: Za schvalování ruské agrese padlo devět trestů. Česká justice.cz. 15 March 2023. <https://www.ceska-justice.cz/2023/03/nejvyssi-statni-zastupitelstvi-za-schvalovani-ruske-agrese-padlo-devet-trestu/>

<sup>565</sup> [https://www.irozhlas.cz/zpravy-domov/policie-stihani-schvalovani-invaze-rusko-ukrajina\\_2311110500\\_pik](https://www.irozhlas.cz/zpravy-domov/policie-stihani-schvalovani-invaze-rusko-ukrajina_2311110500_pik)

<sup>566</sup> <https://vyhledavac.nssoud.cz/DokumentOriginal/Text/713474>

<sup>567</sup> [https://nalus.usoud.cz/Search/GetText.aspx?sz=Pl-5-23\\_1](https://nalus.usoud.cz/Search/GetText.aspx?sz=Pl-5-23_1)



politically neutral. This verdict is incompatible with the obligations of the Czech Republic under international law, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Czech experts criticised this odious decision, pointing out that it was legally incorrect. Notably, the President of the Constitutional Court of the Czech Republic, Pavel Rychetský, strongly disagreed with the final decision and recommended that the case be taken to the Court of Justice of the European Union in Luxembourg<sup>568</sup>, which, in his view, could "deal with this phenomenon".

The Czech Government Council for Human Rights also took note of this case and included it in its review in the section on discrimination on racial and ethnic grounds.

At the same time, the actions of the Czech authorities are becoming increasingly Russophobic and are taking on the aggressive form of a "war" against monuments honouring Soviet soldiers on Czech territory. As a result, instead of the previously observed careful and respectful attitude of the Czech population towards monuments to Red Army soldiers and victims of Nazism, recently, there have been more and more cases of Czech authorities "fighting" against Soviet memorials. In early April 2020, this cynical campaign culminated in the demolition of the monument to Ivan Konev in the Praga-6 district.<sup>569</sup>

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<sup>568</sup> The highest judicial authority of the European Union, whose decisions are not subject to appeal.

<sup>569</sup> Detailed information on the actions of the Czech authorities to demolish monuments to Red Army soldiers who died fighting for the liberation of this country from Nazism, acts of vandalism against such memorials and efforts to whitewash Nazi collaborators is provided in the Ministry's report regarding the situation with the glorification of Nazism and the spread of neo-Nazism and other practices that contribute to fuelling contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

## Switzerland

In 2024, Switzerland saw a certain decline in anti-Russian sentiments, however the authorities and the Swiss mainstream media continued to strongly criticize Russia and its citizens.

The manifestations of Russophobia peaked during the initial stage of the special military operation to denazify and demilitarize Ukraine and protect the civilian population of Donbass (SMO). Swiss banks conducted massive checks to verify<sup>570</sup> the grounds for opening accounts for Russian clients who resided in Switzerland, were not subject to sanctions and did not hold Swiss or EU citizenship. Decisions by Swiss banks to deny them further service,<sup>571</sup> often without explanation, have been reported.<sup>572</sup> There are still serious problems with postal deliveries,<sup>573</sup> i.e. many parcels sent by our fellow citizens to/from Russia do not reach the recipient or are returned to the sender without explanation. According to social media group "Protection of the Rights of Russians in Switzerland",<sup>574</sup> 2022 saw cases of bullying against Russian children in local schools, refusal to employ Russians, and termination of contracts with Russian companies.

According to the report by the Swiss Federal Commission against Racism (Commission fédérale contre le racisme, CFR) for 2023, 15 cases of racism against Russians were registered in Switzerland.<sup>575</sup>

During rallies in support of the neo-Nazi regime in Kiev held in February-March 2022, mayors of some Swiss cities made offensive and hateful statements against the Russian leadership. Cédric Wermuth, co-president of the Social Democratic Party of Switzerland (Sozialdemokratische Partei der Schweiz) and member of the National Council (Nationalrat, lower house of parliament), called

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<sup>570</sup> Swiss Banks to Tighten Control over Russian Accounts. RBK. 13 April 2023.

<https://www.rbc.ru/finances/13/04/2023/6436c63c9a79470f578ebbc6?ysclid=m2d3rkwui201868301>

<sup>571</sup> Swiss Banks are Checking and Closing Russian Accounts. Delovoy Kvartal. 13 April 2023.

<https://www.dk.ru/news/237182554>

<sup>572</sup> [https://t.me/discrimination\\_v\\_ch](https://t.me/discrimination_v_ch)

<sup>573</sup> [https://t.me/switzerland\\_rf\\_covid19\\_chat](https://t.me/switzerland_rf_covid19_chat)

<sup>574</sup> [https://www.facebook.com/groups/7206479459422664/?locale=ru\\_RU](https://www.facebook.com/groups/7206479459422664/?locale=ru_RU)

<sup>575</sup> <https://www.news.admin.ch/newsd/message/attachments/87244.pdf>

for<sup>576</sup> sabotaging "Kremlin disinformation" by joining the cyberattack spree against Russian websites through malicious links.

Between February and March 2022, a Swiss citizen and his Ukrainian-born wife publicly and repeatedly disseminated<sup>577</sup> hate speech in Russian on various social media pages against Russians and Belarusians, including those in the country, up to and including death wishes. The Russian Embassy in Switzerland asked the prosecutor's office to check whether criminal proceedings had been initiated against the couple. In October 2022, the Ukrainian woman was found guilty of violating the provisions of the Swiss Criminal Code on the prohibition of discrimination and the dissemination of information defaming the honour and dignity of third parties and sentenced to a suspended sentence and a fine. Her husband was found not guilty.<sup>578</sup>

In May 2022,<sup>579</sup> October 2022<sup>580</sup> and October 2023,<sup>581</sup> some unidentified persons damaged the monument to the associates of Aleksander Suvorov in Andermatt, canton of Uri (swastikas, yellow and blue paint were applied). The local authorities refused to participate in the clean-up of the memorial, which was done by volunteers from among our fellow citizens and Swiss sympathizers of Russia. Following appeals from the Embassy, the police opened criminal cases, but the search for the vandals was unsuccessful.

In October 2022, unidentified persons sprayed paint on the Orthodox Church of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary and left inscriptions on the gate with

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<sup>576</sup> SP Co-Präsident Cédric Wermuth ruft zu illegalen Cyber-Attacken auf. Nau.ch. <https://www.nau.ch/politik/bundeshaus/sp-co-prasident-cedric-wermuth-ruft-zu-illegalen-cyber-attacken-auf-66121156>

<sup>577</sup> "Russen sind Nazis und Faschisten": Verein Rodnik aus Menziken zeigt Ukrainerin wegen Rassendiskriminierung an. Aargauer Zeitung. <https://www.aargauerzeitung.ch/aargau/kanton-aargau/strafantrag-russen-sind-nazis-und-faschisten-verein-rodnik-aus-menziken-zeigt-ukrainerin-wegen-rassendiskriminierung-an-ld.2281900>

<sup>578</sup> <https://www.aargauerzeitung.ch/aargau/kanton-aargau/strafbefehl-sie-beschimpfte-russen-als-nazis-und-faschisten-ukrainerin-aus-dem-aargau-verurteilt-ld.2355158?reduced=true>

<sup>579</sup> Russian Embassy in Switzerland Thanks Those Who Condemned Desecration of Suvorov's Memorial. TASS. 8 May 2022. <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/14663613>

<sup>580</sup> Yet Another Desecration of the Monument Commemorating Suvorov's Crossing of the Alps in Switzerland. TASS. 12 October 2022. <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/16038091>

<sup>581</sup> In Andermatt, Fellow Citizens and Swiss Nationals Clean the Paint Off the Suvorov Memorial. TASS. 14 October 2023. <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/19015473>

insults in Russian and the Latin letter "Z". The parishioners repaired the damage the next day.

In 2022-2024, only following a lengthy approval process, the Swiss authorities granted the Russian Embassy permission to hold a traditional wreath-laying ceremony at the monument to Soviet soldiers at the Hörnli cemetery (Friedhof am Hörnli), canton of Basel-Stadt).<sup>582,583</sup>

There are still some attempts to "cancel" Russian culture. In May 2024, under pressure from the cantonal government, Anna Netrebko's concert scheduled for 1 June 2024 in Luzern was cancelled,<sup>584</sup> on the pretext of "temporal and geographical proximity" to the "peace conference" on Ukraine in Bürgenstock (15-16 June 2024), despite assurances from her representatives that the singer had repeatedly spoken out against the "war in Ukraine".<sup>585</sup> In February 2022, the Verbier Classical Music Festival announced<sup>586</sup> the termination of its cooperation with the world-famous conductor Valery Gergiev and the Neva Foundation which had been one of the main sponsors of this annual event. In September 2024, under pressure from Ukrainian representatives, the Zürich Film Festival (ZFF) announced<sup>587</sup> that "for security reasons" they had cancelled public screenings of the documentary film "Russians at War", made by Russian-Canadian filmmaker Anastasia Trofimova in the SMO zone.

Violations of the right to freedom of opinion and expression were also reported. In March 2022, Switzerland's largest cable network operators (Swisscom,

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<sup>582</sup> Citizens of CIS Countries Lay Flowers at the Monument to Soviet Soldiers in Basel. TASS. 9 May 2023. <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/17707575>

<sup>583</sup> Citizens of CIS Countries Honour the Memory of Soviet Soldiers in Basel. TASS. 9 May 2024. <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/20755533>

<sup>584</sup> KKL sagt Konzert mit Anna Netrebko auf behördlichen Druck ab. Tages-Anzeiger. <https://www.tagesanzeiger.ch/anna-netrebko-auftritt-im-kl-luzern-abgesagt-322242526622>

<sup>585</sup> "Es wäre ein politisches Konzert gewesen". SRF. 3 May 2024. [www.srf.ch/news/schweiz/absage-von-anna-netrebko-es-waere-ein-politisches-konzert-gewesen](http://www.srf.ch/news/schweiz/absage-von-anna-netrebko-es-waere-ein-politisches-konzert-gewesen)

<sup>586</sup> Warum das Schweizer Festival sein russisches Geld loswerden will. SRF. <https://www.srf.ch/kultur/gesellschaft-religion/verbier-festival-warum-das-schweizer-festival-sein-russisches-geld-loswerden-will>

<sup>587</sup> Zurich Film Festival website: Public Screenings of "Russians at War" Cancelled. <https://zff.com/de/stories/news/publikums-vorfuehrungen-russians-at-war-abgesagt>

Sunrise UPC, Teleboy, Salt) decided to stop broadcasting the RT and Sputnik channels.<sup>588</sup>

According to the Russian Embassy in Bern, at least two Russian citizens were held in detention centres on Swiss territory as of October 2024. At the same time, the Swiss authorities only inform the Embassy about the arrest and detention of Russian citizens if they request a visit from a consular officer. The Embassy has no information on significant violations of prisoners' rights, including on ethnic grounds. If the relevant information is received, Russian foreign missions monitor the situation of this category of our citizens and provide them with the necessary consular assistance. The Embassy maintains a database of lawyers and jurists working in Switzerland, who are ready to provide counselling and legal assistance to our fellow citizens living there. In March 2022, Switzerland unilaterally suspended legal assistance to Russia in criminal cases "until the need arises to reassess the situation" because of Moscow's withdrawal from the Council of Europe and the European Convention on Human Rights, which allegedly made it impossible to guarantee respect for human rights in relations with our country.

There were cases of attacks on pro-Russian compatriot organizations in the local media. In October 2022, the Ministry of Education of the canton of Basel-Stadt revoked<sup>589</sup> the Russian Basel association's permission to teach in Russian at its school, as part of the mother tongue programme, because a member of the association had publicly displayed a "Z" badge. Attempts by Russian Basel's management to attribute the incident to a misunderstanding were to no avail. The Association challenged the decision in court. The Court of Appeal of the canton of Basel-Stadt twice rejected its appeals, citing the Swiss Federal Council's (government) assessment of Russia's "war of aggression" as a "substantial violation of basic rules of international law" and, therefore, the overriding public interest in preventing solidarity with the "warmongering Russian state" and maintaining

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<sup>588</sup> Ukraine Krieg: Swisscom & Co. sperren russische TV-sender. Nau.ch. 28 February 2022.

<https://www.nau.ch/news/wirtschaft/ukraine-konflikt-swisscom-co-sperren-russische-tv-sender-66119183>

<sup>589</sup> Russischer Verein in Basel darf keine Kinder mehr unterrichten. SRF.

<https://www.srf.ch/news/schweiz/nach-z-symbol-am-esaf-russischer-verein-in-basel-darf-keine-kinder-mehr-unterrichten>

neutrality in the educational process. The association declined to pursue further litigation.

The Swiss press, through separate publications, organized a virtual harassment against our fellow citizens and Swiss nationals who did not hide their pro-Russian views, including Svetlana Konev, editor of the news portal "The Whole of Switzerland in the Palm of Your Hand" (Blick, April 2022), Ferdinand Muheim,<sup>590</sup> chairman of the Suvorovtsy Foundation dissolved in May 2024, and Rolf Roland Schäffler,<sup>591</sup> head of the Swiss branch of the Night Wolves motorcycle club and the Suvorov Detachment Association.

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<sup>590</sup> Der Russen-Freund aus Uri ist in Zürich unerwünscht. Landbote.

<https://www.landbote.ch/der-russen-freund-aus-uri-ist-in-zuerich-unerwuenscht-564743954772>

"Russen-Freund" aus Andermatt darf doch nicht ans Sechseläuten kommen. NZZ.

<https://www.nzz.ch/zuerich/zuerich-russen-freund-darf-doch-nicht-ans-sechselaeuten-ld.1680132>

<sup>591</sup> Schweizer Motorradclub verbreitet Russen-Kriegspropaganda. Blick.

<https://www.blick.ch/schweiz/nachtwoelfe-mc-zaehlen-5000-mitglieder-in-russland-schweizer-motorradclub-verbreitet-russen-kriegspropaganda-id17361510.html>

## Sweden

After Russia started the special military operation to demilitarize and denazify Ukraine and to protect the civil population of Donbass, violations of the rights of Russian fellow citizens living in Sweden (approximately 26,000) have become more common.

The idea that Russian citizens and compatriots should publically distance themselves from the policy on Ukraine pursued by the Russian President, Vladimir Putin, has been insistently propagated in the mass and social media. Those who disagreed have received various threats, ranging from dismissal to physical violence. Russian-speaking children have been actually bullied in Swedish schools.

There have been not only incidents of discrimination against Russian citizens by the Swedish authorities and of cultivation of extreme Russophobia in the local media, but also beatings of people speaking Russian, dismissals with no explanation and bullying of children. The attitude of the Swedish social services towards Russians has consistently remained biased, since migrant families are considered a priori socially disadvantaged and as a result are subjected to “surveillance” by local competent authorities. Heads and employees of small and medium-sized enterprises and civil society organizations associated with Russia have been socially stigmatized.

There have also been noted temporary removals of children from Russian citizens by social authorities in accordance with the law on compulsory guardianship of minors. In September 2023, Archpriest of the Sergievsky parish in Stockholm, Vitaly Babushin, was forced to leave Sweden, because social services threatened to take away his minor children.

Against the backdrop of the Swedish authorities' hard line Russophobic policy, the persecution of the Russian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate has begun. In 2022, the Swedish Agency for Support to Faith Communities announced that parishes of the Moscow Patriarchate would no longer be funded, as the Swedish Security Service (SÄPO) had characterized the

Orthodox community as "not meeting the democratic criteria". In particular, it was stated that representatives of the church in Sweden had maintained contacts with individuals working for the Russian security services, and that the community had "on multiple occasions received significant funding from Russia" and supported Russia's actions in Ukraine. In the past, parishes of the Moscow Patriarchate had received about 20,000 US dollars from the Agency for Support to Faith Communities.

Russian educational centres for children have been among the first victims of unbridled Russophobia in Sweden. In fact, they have become hostages to their managers' attitude towards the current events: everyone has been required to publicly disassociate oneself from the actions of the Russian armed forces and preferably to denounce the Russian President, Vladimir Putin, personally. Furthermore, almost all Russian-speaking children have encountered assaults and bullying in schools due to their ethnicity. Swedish teenagers, "freely expressing their opinions in a free country", have simply humiliated Russian-speaking children, demanding their expulsion and in the worst case beating them up. In this regard, not only children of Russians but also children of individuals from other former republics of the USSR have been subjected to such treatment. Parents' appeals to administrators of these schools to stop bullying haven't necessarily improved the situation.

It is noteworthy that in March 2024, during the review of the Sweden's periodic report, the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights noted with concern the increasing harassment and hate speech in Swedish schools. In the light of this information, the CESCR deplored the lack of clarity on the remedial measures available to students and their parents by way of the Equality Ombudsman, the Schools Inspectorate, the courts or other recourse mechanisms. The Committee regretted the lack of specific information provided on the mandate of the School Inspectorate, particularly with respect to the enforcement of the requirement that education providers prevent and identify discrimination and harassment. Besides, in a broader context, the CESCR expressed concern about the



rise in socioeconomic stratification of schools, disparities in students' performance, and discrimination in access to education, based, in particular, on the grounds of gender, race, ethnicity, religion, disability, status and national origin. In addition, the Committee pointed out that the scientific progress and its applications, including information and communication technologies, were not accessible in Sweden in the languages spoken and used by the national minorities residing in the territory of Sweden.<sup>592</sup> Moreover, in 2023, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child noted manifestations of racism and xenophobia among children.<sup>593</sup>

Fellow citizens' organizations have encountered considerable obstacles in their activities. The Swedish authorities have refused to provide budget financing to the associations "Union of Russian Societies in Sweden" (Stockholm), "Alliance of Russian Societies in Sweden" (Gothenburg) and "Sputnik" (Luleå) under the pretext of "undemocratic nature of their activities".<sup>594</sup>

Being pressured by the Sweden's special services and faced with the authorities' refusal to provide state budget funding to public associations, the largest fellow citizens' organization, the Union of Russian Societies in Sweden (Stockholm), was compelled to decide on voluntary dissolution. Along with this, the Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society obliged this organization to return the funds allocated to it for 2022-2023. The Union of Russian Societies in Sweden had to return the funds remaining in its bank accounts and subsequently declared bankruptcy. The Union's long-time chair, Lioudmila Siegel, who had been targeted by a humiliating propaganda campaign in the Swedish press, returned to Russia in December 2023.

The largest Swedish trade union, the ABF, which had been providing the above-mentioned associations with premises free of charge, suspended cooperation

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<sup>592</sup> Concluding observations of the CESCR on the seventh periodic report of Sweden. March 2024.  
<https://www.undocs.org/Home/Mobile?FinalSymbol=E%2FC.12%2FSWE%2FCO%2F7&Language=E&DeviceType=Desktop&LangRequested=False>

<sup>593</sup> Concluding observations of the CRC on the combined sixth and seventh periodic reports of Sweden. February 2023.  
[https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRC%2FC%2FSWE%2FCO%2F6-7&Lang=ru](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRC%2FC%2FSWE%2FCO%2F6-7&Lang=ru)

<sup>594</sup> Svenska skattebetalare finansierade Putinpropaganda – nu stoppas pengarna. Dagens Nyheter. 25 September 2023. [www.dn.se](http://www.dn.se)

with them. On 23 May 2023, the chair of the fellow citizens' association in Gothenburg, the Alliance of Russian Societies in Sweden, Inna Khromova, was dismissed from the ABF's Gothenburg branch after 15 years of work. The ABF refused to provide premises to her, thus the organization's activities were practically frozen.

In 2023, the Swedish police launched several investigations against Russian nationals on suspicion of espionage without sufficient evidence. The nominally independent Swedish media covered these investigations in great detail and in a rather one-sided manner.

A story of our fellow citizen who had served in the police and had to quit the job because her colleagues and the media organized a bullying campaign due to "her friendly attitude to the policies pursued by Vladimir Putin" was widely discussed. Eventually, a settlement agreement was signed, and the aggrieved party was paid 14 months' salary.

Representatives of the Russian non-systemic opposition bear a great share of responsibility for the organized bullying and persecution of compatriots still loyal to Russia. Primarily, it is the entities of Mikhail Khodorkovskiy (the so-called "Russian Anti-War Committee in Sweden") that are engaged in such activities.

Recently, it has been a common practice to mail anti-Russian materials, cynically stating that the actions taken by Sweden and other Western countries are directed against Russian authorities rather than the Russian people, to a target audience. Such documents often include insistent recommendations to condemn Russia's actions on social media and during public rallies.

## **Estonia**

In the Republic of Estonia (RE), a situation has developed in which Russian-speaking residents of the country and Russian citizens are subjected to discrimination. Throughout the entire period of "independence," nationalist circles in power in the country have systematically and persistently instilled a distorted interpretation of the shared history of Russia and Estonia, based on nationalist ideology and Russophobia. Accordingly, operating within this paradigm, the Estonian authorities subject the Soviet period, which is presented by contemporary Estonian historiography as "the occupation of 1940-1991," and the events of the Great Patriotic War on the territory of the country to the greatest falsifications.

Along with this, the Estonian authorities, as in other Baltic countries, are pursuing a policy of discrimination against the Russian-speaking population, the purpose of which is the elimination of the ethnic, linguistic, and national diversity of the country's population. The current Estonian authorities continue a consistent course toward building a mono-ethnic society in which there is no place for national minorities, in particular the Russian-speaking population. The ongoing assimilation is also confirmed by the fact that the state integration program is focused mainly on the formation of an Estonian mentality among Russian speakers and the destruction of their historical memory of the past. In this regard, the Estonian authorities' assertions about building a state with a developed democratic society do not correspond to reality.

It should be noted that measures to glorify the Nazis and their accomplices are being carried out in Estonia very actively, often to the detriment of other policy areas, especially in the social sphere. As for the ideological "camouflage," until recently, the legalization of Nazis in Estonia relied on poorly concealed state support and the virtual absence of resistance from the population. Since 2022, the Estonian authorities have stopped hiding and openly embarked on the path of

supporting Nazism and glorifying its collaborators.<sup>595</sup> The country is actively whitewashing Estonian collaborators, and their crimes are being justified. For these purposes, a myth is being constructed about "freedom fighters" who fought against "Soviet aggressors" in the ranks of the 20th Waffen-SS Grenadier Division<sup>596</sup> ("Estonian Legion"), security and punitive units, and anti-Soviet bandit formations. Assessments are being promoted that the presence of Hitler's troops on Estonian territory was a "lesser evil" than the "Soviet occupation," which allegedly prompted the titular population to voluntarily join the Nazis to resist the "return of the Soviets." The organization "Union of Former Forest Brothers of Estonia," which also works to glorify the "partisans," operates unhindered.

At the same time, it is not just concealing the facts of the crimes of Estonian collaborators and Forest Brothers, their active participation in reprisals against civilians in Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine, the mass extermination and torture of concentration camp prisoners and Soviet prisoners of war, the mass murder of Jews, but also the glorification of such "figures" as heroes of the "struggle for independence." Estonians who fought in the ranks of the Red Army and liberated the territory of the Estonian SSR have been implicitly removed from the local "pantheon of heroes" and are presented as accomplices of the "Soviet occupiers."

Estonian authorities had been engaging in the "fight" of the vandals targeting Soviet war memorials long before the large-scale campaign of 2022 to demolish memorials began. By that time, the process of dismantling monuments and desecrating graves of participants in the Great Patriotic War had been ongoing for years across all Baltic States. One of the first steps in this direction was the relocation of the monument to those who fell in the Great Patriotic War, erected in Tallinn on Tõnismägi Hill on 22 September 1947, and unofficially named the "Bronze Soldier." In April 2007, the Estonian Cabinet of Ministers decided to

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<sup>595</sup> Detailed information on Estonia's efforts to glorify Nazi collaborators, falsify the history of the Second World War and the Great Patriotic War and wage war on monuments and memorials in honor of Red Army soldiers who died in the battles to liberate Estonia from Nazism, are cited in the relevant section of the report of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the situation with the glorification of Nazism and the spread of neo-Nazism and other practices that contribute to the escalation of contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance (available on the official website of the Ministry at [www.mid.ru](http://www.mid.ru)).

<sup>596</sup> The "Waffen-SS" was recognized as criminal by the Nuremberg Tribunal.

relocate the memorial and the remains of the soldiers to a military cemetery on the outskirts of Tallinn. This decision provoked unrest involving thousands of people. The most tragic episode of those events was the murder of Russian citizen Dmitry Ganin.

Despite the relocation, the memorial retained a central role in the celebration of Victory Day. Every year, on the day of the end of the Great Patriotic War, tens of thousands of Tallinn residents gathered at the Bronze Soldier to commemorate the fallen heroes. Moreover, representatives of the Estonian Defence Forces, with the permission of their command, also laid a commemorative wreath at the monument. However, the memorial also continued to be attacked by vandals.

The Estonian authorities used the Ukrainian crisis to accelerate the destruction of the Soviet memorial heritage in the country and erase historical truth from people's memories. This position is aggressively imposed on all residents of the country, including Russian speakers, as well as independently minded Estonians who believe that the task of protecting historical monuments is to preserve memory. All the activities of the Estonian authorities in the memorial sphere were presented under the slogan "Estonia is in an information war, in which Russia uses Soviet symbols as a weapon."<sup>597</sup>

The process of destroying the memorial heritage began with a ban on Soviet and Russian symbols. On 21 April 2022, the Estonian Parliament passed a law banning the public display of symbols "used in the commission of an act of aggression, genocide, crimes against humanity, or war crimes, with the aim of supporting or justifying these crimes." The law also introduced penalties of up to five years' imprisonment for "joining the armed forces of a foreign state committing an act of aggression, or another armed group of a foreign state participating in an act of aggression; participating in the commission or preparation of an act of aggression, or knowingly supporting an act of aggression by a foreign state, including its financing."

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<sup>597</sup> <https://iz.ru/1432352/viktor-nedelin/vandaly-v-zakone-estoniia-obiavila-voinu-sovetskim-pamiatnikam>

Even without any legislative pretexts, the Estonian authorities created obstacles for the celebration of Victory Day by the Russian-speaking (and not only) population of Estonia. Thus, the head of the Central Criminal Police of the Police and Border Guard Board, A. Alavere, stated on 22 March 2022, that the attitude of law enforcement officers towards the appearance of the St. George ribbon in public spaces would have to be reviewed, since this symbol is worn by Russian soldiers who "are killing Ukrainian citizens."

A similar position was voiced on Estonian Public Broadcasting (ERR) by the head of the Police and Border Guard Board, E. Vaher, who stated that the Estonian police would take increased measures to counter the display of Russian military symbols on 9 May (this included Soviet army uniforms and St. George ribbons), since "the situation is not comparable to previous years." He also expressed hope that the Estonian Parliament would introduce some amendments to the legislation by 9 May to give the police free rein regarding those who come with these symbols.

Public gatherings related to Bronze Night and Victory Day were officially banned by the Estonian police from 26 April to 10 May, which, according to Estonian law enforcement officials, express support for the "aggressor country" and use military symbols, including the flags of the USSR and Russia, St. George ribbons, and Soviet military uniforms. Initially, the ban was imposed in Tallinn, Harju County, and Ida-Viru County, and then extended to the whole country. Police control, including social media monitoring, was intensified on the eve of 9 May. A total of about 30 "provocative" symbols were recorded in various regions of Estonia that day, about 30 citizens were detained for this, and 12 "malicious violators" were fined.

Then, formal reasons for the demolition of monuments began to be created. In July 2022, the Estonian government ordered the removal<sup>598</sup> of all monuments to

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<sup>598</sup> Subsequently, in the spring of 2023, President A. Karis rejected this law on the demolition of Soviet monuments, noting that the ban was "vaguely worded" and that the very first article of the law was "legally unclear" and contrary to the country's constitution. On 27 September 2023, the Estonian parliament did not re-adopt this law.

Soviet soldiers who died in World War II by the end of the year, as well as the reburial of the remains of soldiers located under military monuments.<sup>599</sup>

On 10 November 2022, the Estonian authorities adopted several amendments to laws, including the Building Code, the Law on Application of the Building Code, the Law on Planning, and the Law on State Assets. These changes were aimed at creating a legislative basis for the dismantling of Soviet war memorials. The document cynically calls these memorials "unsuitable for public spaces," since the parts of the buildings, monuments, sculptures, and other structures visible to the public cannot support or justify the "occupation regime, acts of aggression, genocide, crimes against humanity, or war crimes,"<sup>600</sup> and must be brought into compliance.

In practice, all these innovations mainly resulted in the removal of red stars from the monuments to Red Army soldiers by local authorities, and all those who died are simply called "victims of World War II." It turns out that Soviet soldiers are equated with collaborators in Estonia, because the current Estonian authorities also call them "victims of World War II."<sup>601</sup>

The noticeable difference in the attitude of the Estonian authorities towards memorials honouring Soviet soldiers and monuments dedicated to Nazi soldiers and collaborators is striking. The graves and memorials of Estonians who fought on the side of the Third Reich remain untouched. In news reports, rare acts of attacks on such "memorials" are described emotionally, using appropriate terminology ("desecration of the memorial," "vandals," etc.). And the objects themselves in honour of Nazi collaborators are called memorials "in honour of those who fell for the freedom of Estonia." The media also reported that the working group on the Soviet memorial heritage had not made any decisions regarding the burial places of fascist soldiers located on the territory of Estonia.<sup>602</sup>

<sup>599</sup> <https://ren.tv/news/v-mire/1003115-v-estonii-do-kontsa-goda-snesut-vse-pamiatniki-sovetskim-voinam>

<sup>600</sup> <https://ria.ru/20221110/pamyatniki-1830494289.html?in=t>

<sup>601</sup> <https://ruskiymir.ru/news/309301/>

<sup>602</sup> <https://www.kp.ru/daily/27434.5/4635281/>

It is also indicative that the Estonian authorities categorically opposed proposals from the public to hold public debates on the fate of each monument. In particular, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Estonia, U. Reinsalu, strongly opposed this. In his opinion, the people, by voting for the ruling politicians, have already given them carte blanche for any action, and "this public discussion is only hindering us now." He noted: "The red monuments must be removed. The goal is to do this within this year. This process has now moved forward, it no longer stands still. This cannot but please us."

Representatives of the Estonian authorities did not even hide the fact that their efforts to destroy Soviet monuments are aimed at erasing the truth about the events of the Great Patriotic War from the memory of Russian residents of Estonia. Thus, Minister of Justice L. Danilson-Jarg (a member of the right-wing Fatherland party) said in 2022: "The task of the draft law [referring to the draft law on combating the Soviet memorial heritage] is simple: to rid the country of symbols that threaten our security. In addition, if we expect the integration of Russian-speaking residents of the country so that we have the same understanding of history, then this is difficult to achieve if we have monuments that symbolize a false representation of history." She also expressed concern that rallies of representatives of the Russian community of the country, protesting against the infringement of their rights, are being held at Soviet monuments in Estonia, and called for an end to this practice.<sup>603</sup>

In February 2023, an amendment to the Law on State Assets, the Law on Application of the Building Code, the Law on Planning, and the Building Code<sup>604</sup> was approved by the Parliament and signed by the President. In accordance with them, landowners, including municipalities, on whose land there are monuments with "prohibited symbols" must bring their appearance into line with the new standards. The adopted law simplifies and at the same time accelerates the

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<sup>603</sup> Ibid.

<sup>604</sup> <https://rus.postimees.ee/7713483/riygikogu-prinyal-zakonoproekt-o-snose-sovetskih-pamyatnikov>



procedure for demolishing monuments in honour of Red Army soldiers who died during the liberation of Estonia from Nazism.

Along with this, it should be noted that the "fight" against Soviet monuments announced in Estonia is not limited to monuments honouring Red Army soldiers who died in battles to liberate the country from Nazism. In the country, through the efforts of the authorities, "actions" to "rebury" the remains of Soviet soldiers began to be actively carried out.

Thus, in November 2023, the Estonian War Museum announced the "reburial" of the remains of 18 servicemen of the Soviet Army and Navy at the Tallinn Military Cemetery under the pretext of "clearing a passage" to the monument to the Knights of the Cross of Liberty. This action covered the burials of military personnel who died after the war. This "action" has taken on horrific proportions. On 31 January 2024, the Russian Embassy in Estonia reported that information signs notifying of the upcoming "reburial" have appeared on 38 graves of soldiers. These actions of the cemetery administration are aimed at quietly, without attracting attention and notifying relatives of the buried, waiting six months from the moment the signs are installed, and "in the absence of objections" dismantling the tombstones, thus desecrating the remains beneath them. The Russian Embassy called these actions a blasphemous act of state vandalism in relation to objects of the Soviet (Russian) military memorial heritage, aimed at revising the results of World War II. A list of burial sites<sup>605</sup> planned to be "relocated" was published on the Embassy's website. Chairman of the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation A.I. Bastrykin instructed the central office of the Committee to conduct a pre-investigation check in connection with information about such intentions of the Estonian authorities.<sup>606</sup> The exhumation and reburial procedure was launched in May 2024.

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<sup>605</sup> [https://estonia.mid.ru/ru/press-centre/news/kommentariy\\_posolstva\\_v\\_svyazi\\_s\\_planami\\_po\\_oskverneniyu\\_zakhoronenykh\\_krasnoarmeytsev\\_na\\_tallinskom/](https://estonia.mid.ru/ru/press-centre/news/kommentariy_posolstva_v_svyazi_s_planami_po_oskverneniyu_zakhoronenykh_krasnoarmeytsev_na_tallinskom/)

<sup>606</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/01022024-sledkom-rossii-otreagiroval-na-plan-tyallina-oskvernit-mogily-sovetskikh-voinov/>

The Estonian authorities have intensified their fight against the memory of the Great Patriotic War. In the spring of 2023, a fine of 1,200 euros was introduced for celebrating Victory Day on 9 May. Residents of Estonia were forbidden to gather in groups on this day, use Soviet symbols from the times of the Great Patriotic War, and even play music from the war and post-war years, which was declared "aggressive."<sup>607</sup>

A symbol of the confrontation between the Estonian authorities and the country's residents who advocate for the preservation of historical memory was the situation surrounding the T-34 tank monument in Narva (the city where many Russian-speaking citizens live). The Estonian government's decision to demolish all memorials and monuments to Red Army soldiers, and in particular this monument, caused outrage among Narva residents, who spoke out in favour of preserving the monument in the city. The city authorities also supported the preservation of the monument.<sup>608</sup> Representatives of the Estonian leadership predictably spoke out against the memorial, emphasizing that monuments like the T-34 tank in Narva, under the conditions of the Russian special military operation, are dividing Estonian society.<sup>609</sup> It is not surprising that the monument was eventually demolished.

In addition, Narva residents were prohibited from celebrating the 79th anniversary of the city's liberation from the Nazi invaders. The Estonian police imposed an official ban on holding any public gatherings in Narva from 26 July to 2 August 2023. Estonian security forces did not even allow a group of former child prisoners of Nazi concentration camps to lay flowers at the mass grave of Soviet soldiers. Police officers were on duty at all potential sites of memorial events. Further evidence of the ideological alignment between Estonian authorities and Nazis came in the words of I. Püvi, head of the Narva police

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<sup>607</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/article/politika-i-obshchestvo/20230803-korichneveyut-na-glazakh-vlasti-estonii-perestali-skryvat-svoi-politicheskie-predpochteniya/>

<sup>608</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/11082022-izvestny-rezultaty-oprosa-zhiteley-narvy-o-dalneyshey-sudbe-sovetskogo-pamyatnikatanka/>

<sup>609</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/080822-pravyashchaya-koalitsiya-v-narve-prinyala-reshenie-o-perenose-sovetskogo-pamyatnikatanka/>

department, who stated that "laying flowers on the day the Red Army invaded Estonia is an obvious endorsement of Russian propaganda narratives."<sup>610</sup>

It is important to emphasize that all actions by Estonian authorities to destroy monuments to Red Army soldiers and desecrate their remains lacked legal support: in March 2023, Estonian President A. Karis refused to approve the corresponding legislative bill due to its "inconsistency with the Estonian Constitution."<sup>611</sup> Nevertheless, Estonian authorities persistently carried out and continue to wage their "war" against monuments.

As a result of the blasphemous activities of Estonian authorities in their "fight" against Soviet monuments and Red Army mass graves, as of early May 2024, 160 tombstones with Soviet symbols had been replaced with neutral ones, and 95 monuments had been destroyed. Currently, 24 monuments remain in public spaces due to a lack of landowner permission for their removal. According to the director of the War Museum, H. Lill, the "reburial" of nearly 2,000 people from military graves in public areas had been organized.<sup>612</sup>

As noted earlier, the noticeable difference in the attitude of the Estonian authorities towards memorials honouring Soviet soldiers and monuments dedicated to Nazi soldiers and collaborators is striking. Accordingly, incidents of attacks on such "memorials" are used to persecute the Russian population of the country. In particular, on 1 February 2024, it became known that the Estonian Internal Security Service (KaPo) had arrested two men suspected of desecrating the Sinimäe memorials on 23 and 31 January of the same year. They were accused of allegedly acting on the orders of Russian special services. One of the detainees is a Russian citizen, the other has dual Estonian and Russian citizenship. Both defendants were remanded in custody. One of the arrested, according to Estonian law enforcement officials, was also involved in defacing the bas-relief of Alfons

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<sup>610</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/article/politika-i-obshchestvo/20230803-korichneveyut-na-glazakh-vlasti-estonii-perestali-skryvat-svoi-politicheskie-predpochteniya/>

<sup>611</sup> <https://rus.err.ee/1608906860/prezident-ne-provozglasil-tak-nazyvaemyj-zakon-o-sovetskih-pamjatnikah>

<sup>612</sup> <https://baltija.eu/2024/05/09/v-estonii-v-publichnom-prostranstve-ostalos-vsego-24-pamyatnika-voinam-osvoboditelyam/>

Rebane<sup>613,614</sup> with paint. This incident, as well as a number of others similar to it, in which the Estonian authorities acted very quickly, confirms that through their actions, the Estonian authorities unequivocally demonstrate their sympathies for Nazi collaborators.

Russian law enforcement agencies are paying close attention to the blasphemous activities of the authorities of the Baltic states aimed at destroying Soviet war memorials. In September 2023, the Investigative Committee of Russia reported that investigators are handling 16 criminal cases investigating 143 incidents of desecration, destruction, or damage to military graves, monuments, and memorials to Soviet soldiers. For committing these crimes, 173 foreigners have been charged in absentia – citizens of Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Poland, and Ukraine.<sup>615</sup>

In February 2024, the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russia put the Prime Minister of Estonia, K. Kallas, and the Secretary of State, T. Peterkop, on the wanted list.<sup>616</sup>

The encouragement of Russophobia directly affects the general situation in the country with manifestations of hatred: the strengthening of the political influence of right-wing nationalist forces, which the authorities are nurturing to fight the "Soviet legacy," also causes an increase in manifestations of xenophobia, anti-Semitism, neo-Nazism, and the activation of right-wing radical groups. Human rights defenders who defend the rights of the Russian-speaking population of the country have repeatedly pointed this out.

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<sup>613</sup> <https://rus.postimees.ee/7953504/rassledovanie-kapo-zakaz-na-oskvernenie-pamyatnikov-v-sinimyaie-mog-postupit-iz-rossii>

<sup>614</sup> Alfons Rebane was in the service of the Nazis from 1941 in various SS units. He finished the war with the rank of Standartenführer (colonel), was commander of the 20th SS Division and a Knight's Cross with oak leaves. A. Rebane was the only Estonian to receive the oak leaves to the Knight's Cross. After the war, the SS man found refuge in Great Britain, and from 1961 he lived in Germany. He died in March 1976. In June 1999, with the direct participation of the Estonian Foreign Ministry and the financial support of the Estonian government, the ashes of the Nazi criminal were transported from Germany and reburied in the Tallinn cemetery with all military honors. The ceremony was attended by the then Minister of Defense A. Eevel, the commander of the Estonian Defense Forces Lieutenant General J. Kert, many officers, members of parliament and veterans of the Union of Estonian Freedom Fighters. A black granite monument was unveiled on the grave of the Nazi collaborator with the inscription: "To the Knight Commander of the Knight's Cross with Oak Leaves". ([http://old.redstar.ru/2004/05/28\\_05/7\\_15.html](http://old.redstar.ru/2004/05/28_05/7_15.html))

<sup>615</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/12092023-sk-rossii-zaochno-obvinil-grazhdan-stran-baltii-i-polshi-v-oskvernenii-sovetskikh-pamyatnikov/>

<sup>616</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/13022024-gossekreter-estonii-obyavlen-v-rozysk-v-rossii/>

The growth of xenophobic sentiments is noted primarily among ethnic Estonians. Activists of the Conservative People's Party of Estonia (EKRE, Estonian abbreviation for the name of the party), who do not hide their racist views, make a significant contribution to inciting hatred towards migrants and national minorities. In February 2021, M. Kallas, the head of the Conservative faction in the Tallinn City Council, on his Facebook page called opponents of the relocation of the Liberator Soldier memorial from the centre of Tallinn in 2007 and their sympathizing compatriots "intruding human garbage with a Soviet mentality."

It is also known that in 2017, the book "Handbook for Estonians. A Hundred Things a Real Estonian Does" was sold in Estonia, authored by a TV presenter and musician, former member of the Riigikogu M. Raud. The book contains a chapter entitled "An Estonian Addresses a Russian," which lists more than 30 offensive expressions that, according to the author, "real Estonians" use to refer to Russians.

In addition, the EKRE party publication *Uued Uudised* (New News) daily publishes materials that incite hatred towards people of African and Asian descent and other "foreigners," and exaggerate the threat of their "displacement" of the indigenous population. As a result, there has been an increase in cases of public insults and physical attacks on people from Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. Interethnic and interracial discord is increasingly spilling onto the pages of social networks, but in practice, the authorities are not taking any steps to reduce the level of interethnic tension.

The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) also pointed to these xenophobic sentiments among EKRE activists. In particular, the Commission noted that since 2017, public discourse in Estonia has become less tolerant, and the statements of politicians have begun to divide the country's population more along ethnic lines and set groups against each other. This has been especially evident in relation to refugees and migrants, and ethnic or religious minorities. It is also noted that in the 2019 general elections, EKRE openly proclaimed its program to combat "indigenous displacement." Thanks to this, the party gained almost 18 percent of the vote and entered the governing coalition. In

addition, ECRI pointed to numerous racist statements by EKRE members, including their posts on social networks. For example, during the 2019 election campaign, an EKRE candidate called the Mayor of Tallinn a "useless Asian." ECRI also separately noted that EKRE members have publicly spoken in a derogatory manner about the Russian-speaking population, especially in the context of minority education policy and the ongoing discussion about Russian-language schools in the country. Along with this, attention is drawn to anti-Muslim, anti-Semitic, and anti-migrant statements by party members, mostly in the form of verbal insults in public places.<sup>617</sup>

Human rights defenders also note that the level of Russophobia is high among Estonians. 50 percent of Russians maintain contact with Estonians, while among Estonians this figure is 30 percent.

It is quite remarkable that Ukrainian labour migrants are also targeted by nationalists. In March 2021, J. Kukk, adviser to the EKRE parliamentary faction, complained in a note for the party's Internet portal New News that the workers who arrived from Ukraine were "making the public space of our national state Russian." The threat of Russification of Estonia, according to him, "comes not only from Putin, but also from the Ukrainian labour force." At the same time, the leader of the Conservatives, M. Helme, stated back in the fall of 2020 that the Language Department (until 1 August 2020, the Language Inspectorate), a special supervisory and punitive body that monitors the purity of the Estonian linguistic space and is not subject to parliamentary or public control, should be involved in identifying illegal migrants, primarily from neighbouring Russian-speaking countries. Its functions are reduced exclusively to identifying an insufficient level of knowledge or use of the Estonian language, followed by the imposition of sanctions and large fines on individuals and legal entities.

It should be noted that issues related to the spread of far-right ideologies in Estonia and the intensification of manifestations of hatred, as well as the

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<sup>617</sup> Sixth Report of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance on Estonia. Adopted on 29 March 2022, published on 9 June 2022. <https://rm.coe.int/6-th-ecri-report-on-estonia/1680a6d5e6>

unwillingness of the authorities to take measures to combat these phenomena, have fallen into the field of view of multilateral universal and regional human rights monitoring mechanisms. Thus, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) in August 2014 expressed concern about the absence in the Penal Code of a ban on racist organizations, as well as the qualification of hate speech and incitement to hatred as a criminal offense. In addition, according to the Committee, excessively lenient measures (a fine of 100 euros) were provided for in 2011 under section 151(1) of the Estonian Penal Code for posting comments online whose content is recognized as inciting hatred and incitement to violence.<sup>618</sup> In April 2022, the Committee again noted that the Penal Code does not fully provide for a ban on racist organizations, the dissemination of ideas based on racial superiority or racial hatred, and the fact that Estonian law does not provide for punishment for hate speech and incitement to hatred. It again expressed concern about the leniency of punishment for cases provided for by law. It was also noted that there are political parties and public figures in the country who use hate speech. The use of such rhetoric occurs uncontrollably and is not investigated by the competent authorities, and the perpetrators are not held accountable. Along with this, CERD noted with concern that hate crimes in Estonia are often not recorded and investigated as such. This, in its opinion, is confirmed by the small number of reports of hate speech and hate crimes in Estonia.<sup>619</sup>

The UN Human Rights Committee (HRCttee) indicated in March 2019 that Estonian legislation does not provide equal protection against discrimination on all grounds prohibited in accordance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in all spheres of life. The HRCttee was most concerned that Estonian legislation does not provide comprehensive protection against hate speech and hate crimes due to rather lenient penalties and stringent requirements for their imposition for crimes in the form of incitement to hatred, violence, or

<sup>618</sup> Concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination on the combined 10th and 11th periodic reports of Estonia. August 2014.

<sup>619</sup> Concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination on the combined 12th and 13th periodic reports of Estonia. April 2022.

[https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CERD%2FC%2FEST%2FCO%2F12-13&Lang=en](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CERD%2FC%2FEST%2FCO%2F12-13&Lang=en)

discrimination (in such cases, Article 151 of the Estonian Penal Code requires the presence of a "threat to the life, health, or property of the victim"). At the same time, other offenses, such as publicly denying, condoning, or justifying crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity or war crimes, or propaganda of hatred that is racist in nature, or otherwise incites discrimination, are not prohibited by law. Against this background, the frequent cases of hate speech noted by the Committee, including from politicians and persons who shape public opinion, as well as hate crimes, are not surprising.<sup>620</sup>

ECRI also pointed to alarming trends in the spread of hatred in Estonia in 2022, thereby confirming the opinion of the UN Human Rights Committee. Thus, referring to data from Estonian official bodies, in particular the Ministry of Justice, it is noted that in most cases of incitement to hatred in Estonia, Article 151 (incitement to hatred) of the Penal Code is applied, while the punishment provided for by this article is quite mild – a fine or detention (up to thirty days). According to official statistics, in the period from 2016 to 2020, not a single case considered by the prosecutor's office under this article reached criminal prosecution. In 2016, two cases of incitement to hatred were recorded, in 2017 – five, in 2018 – one, and in 2019 and 2020 – none. At the same time, NGO data are given selectively: referring to reports on Internet monitoring by the NGO OpCode, it is indicated that a total of 100 incidents were recorded as illegal content on Facebook. The number of officially registered hate crimes is also small: 15 incidents in 2016, four in 2017, six in 2018, 10 in 2019, and three in 2020.<sup>621</sup>

A blatant manifestation of Estonia's virtually neo-Nazi state policy is discrimination on linguistic and ethnic grounds. First of all, this is expressed in the continued practice of mass statelessness through the presence in the country of such a category as "non-citizens."<sup>622</sup> As of 1 January 2023, there were

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<sup>620</sup> Concluding observations of the Human Rights Committee on the 4th periodic report of Estonia. March 2019. [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CCPR%2fC%2fEST%2fCO%2f4&Lang=en](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CCPR%2fC%2fEST%2fCO%2f4&Lang=en)

<sup>621</sup> Sixth Report of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance on Estonia. Adopted on 29 March 2022, published on 9 June 2022. <https://rm.coe.int/6th-ecri-report-on-estonia/1680a6d5e6>

<sup>622</sup> "Non-citizens" in Estonia are officially referred to as 'persons of undetermined citizenship'. The passport of a non-citizen is called an "alien's passport".



64,297 "non-citizens" in Estonia, or about 5 percent of the population (66,592 a year earlier, and 68,992 in 2020, 6 percent). The vast majority of these people are Russian compatriots and their descendants. Estonia is still among the top ten countries in the world with the largest number of stateless persons.

"Grey passport holders"<sup>623</sup> are significantly restricted in their civil rights: they are not allowed to vote or be elected in Estonian parliamentary elections, as well as in elections to the European Parliament, are prohibited from being members of political parties, holding state and municipal leadership positions, and serving in the army and law enforcement agencies. In 2016, stateless persons received the right to vote in local elections, but they cannot be elected to local authorities. However, even this right of stateless persons may be abolished by the Estonian authorities. On 21 April 2022, members of the Pro Patria party faction in the Riigikogu, under the pretext of the "disloyalty" of foreigners (primarily Russian citizens and stateless persons), introduced a bill to deprive these categories of the population of the right to vote in local elections.

In accordance with the Estonian Law on Ratification of the Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, "non-citizens" are excluded from the number of persons covered by this international treaty. Only for this category is registration at the place of residence a mandatory condition for the realization of social and economic rights. "Grey passport holders" also face serious difficulties during international travel.

In 1992, residents of the country who did not have citizenship of the first Republic of Estonia (1920-1940) or were not descendants of its citizens became stateless. The Estonian authorities justify this infringement of rights by the fact that they or their parents, grandfathers, and grandmothers were "brought" into the country during the "Soviet occupation." By this decision, Estonia grossly violated the norms and principles of the Treaty on the Foundations of Interstate Relations of 12 January 1991, between the RSFSR and the Republic of Estonia, in particular Article 3, which states that "the Parties will provide the opportunity to obtain

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<sup>623</sup> Named after the color of the passport's cover.

citizenship of their countries to all permanent residents of the respective territories in accordance with his/her freely expressed wishes." Accordingly, children born in Estonia to stateless persons also became stateless. Estonia has not yet acceded to such key international treaties as the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons, the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, and the 1997 European Convention on Nationality.

Despite regular criticism from international organizations, including the UN, OSCE, and the EU (the European Parliament in particular), as well as human rights NGOs, the Estonian authorities, following the course set in 1991 to build a mono-ethnic and monolingual state, refuse to grant full citizenship status to this category of residents of the country, requiring them to pass exams in Estonian at a high level.

The 1995 Law on Citizenship determined that only a person whose parent was a citizen of the Republic of Estonia at the time of their birth can be a citizen of Estonia by birth. Others are offered "naturalization," that is, obtaining citizenship through acquisition.

The current conditions for foreigners who have reached the age of 15 are as follows: to have a long-term residence permit or the right of permanent residence; to have resided in Estonia for at least eight years before applying for Estonian citizenship, including the last five years permanently; to have a registered place of residence in the country; to be proficient in Estonian at the B1 level<sup>624</sup>; to know the Constitution of Estonia and the Law on Citizenship; to have a permanent legal income, to "be loyal to the Estonian state"; and to take an oath of allegiance to the constitutional order of Estonia.

The reproduction of "non-citizens" stopped only on 1 January 2016, after the amendment to the Law on Citizenship came into force, which allowed children born in Estonia to "grey passport holders" to acquire Estonian citizenship if, at the time of the child's birth, they legally resided in the country for at least five years.

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<sup>624</sup> As of 1 July 2015, persons who successfully pass the Estonian language exam are reimbursed the tuition fee for studying it.

As a symbolic "concession," stateless persons were given the opportunity in June 2018 to study Estonian language courses at the expense of the state budget for the subsequent passing of the citizenship exam. The decrease in the number of "non-citizens," as in neighbouring Latvia, where this shameful phenomenon also takes place, but, judging by the lack of proper reaction, is acceptable to the European Union, occurs mainly due to their natural decline.

A certain shift was the entry into force in February 2020 of amendments to the Republic of Estonia Law on Citizenship, which allowed minors born in Estonia whose parent or grandparent has a "grey" passport and resided in the country before 20 August 1991, and whose other parent is a citizen of another state, to apply for citizenship under a simplified procedure. However, if a minor wishing to obtain Estonian citizenship is a citizen of another state, they must renounce that citizenship in advance. About 1,500 children under the age of 18 live in Estonia who could obtain Estonian citizenship under a simplified procedure. However, most of them (about 1,300) have Russian citizenship, while Russian legislation does not allow renouncing it and obtaining another passport before reaching adulthood.<sup>625</sup> Thus, the vast majority of people covered by the amendments cannot actually take advantage of this provision.

The problem of statelessness in Estonia is given considerable attention by international human rights monitoring mechanisms. In January 2017, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) noted the limited nature of the amendments to the citizenship law and strongly recommended that the Estonian authorities ensure expedited naturalization of children of non-citizens.<sup>626</sup> Following her visit to Estonia (11-15 June 2018), the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights raised the issue of easing naturalization conditions for persons over

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<sup>625</sup> Article 8 of the Federal Law on Citizenship of the Russian Federation formulates that "Citizenship of the Russian Federation of a child may not be terminated if as a result of termination of citizenship of the Russian Federation the child becomes a stateless person". Thus, this norm is a legal guarantee aimed at preventing the emergence of statelessness.

<sup>626</sup> Concluding observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on the combined 2nd to 4th periodic reports of Estonia. January 2017. [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRC%2fC%2fEST%2fCO%2f2-4&Lang=en](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRC%2fC%2fEST%2fCO%2f2-4&Lang=en)

65, pointing out that many elderly Russian speakers cannot obtain Estonian citizenship due to their inability to learn Estonian.<sup>627</sup>

In February 2019, the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) expressed concern in this regard (according to the Committee, as of 1 January 2019, non-citizens constituted 5.5 percent of the total population). At the same time, CESCR criticized the 2015 amendments to the Law on Citizenship, which, in its opinion, are limited in nature and do not apply to a number of categories of children.<sup>628</sup> In April 2019, the UN Human Rights Committee also expressed concern about the limited scope of the amendments to the Law on Citizenship, excluding some categories of "non-citizen" children; stringent requirements for knowledge of the state language required for the naturalization procedure; adverse consequences of the status of "undefined citizenship" for the possibility of stateless persons participating in political life, and recommended taking measures to eliminate these shortcomings.<sup>629</sup>

In April 2022, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination noted a particular problem: members of national minorities and "non-citizens" are more likely than other residents of Estonia to be imprisoned. In particular, the Committee pointed out that non-Estonians, as well as "non-citizens," still make up a large proportion of prisoners. It also expressed concern about cases in Estonian penitentiary institutions where prison administrations refuse to accept and translate complaints from prisoners if they are not written in the state language. CERD experts indicated that this practice limits the ability of prisoners from national minorities to file complaints. In this regard, the Committee reiterated its recommendation to Estonia to eliminate discrimination against prisoners due to their lack of knowledge of Estonian, and to ensure that prisoners do not suffer from

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<sup>627</sup> <https://rm.coe.int/report-of-the-council-of-europe-commissioner-for-human-rights-dunja-mi/16808d77f4>

<sup>628</sup> Concluding observations of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on the 3rd periodic report of Estonia. February 2019.

[https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=E%2fC.12%2fEST%2fCO%2f3&Lang=en](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=E%2fC.12%2fEST%2fCO%2f3&Lang=en)

<sup>629</sup> Concluding observations of the Human Rights Committee on the 4th periodic report of Estonia. March 2019.

insufficient understanding of Estonian when administrative and disciplinary matters are considered.<sup>630</sup>

The above comments and recommendations are ignored by the Estonian side, which further worsens the situation in the country for Russians and Russian speakers. At the same time, right-wing nationalist politicians from the ruling parties do not hide the fact that they are counting on resolving the "non-citizen" problem naturally (that is, through their decline, migration, etc.).

The infringement of the rights of national minorities and Russian speakers remains an acute problem in Estonia (the latter, according to human rights defenders, make up about 30 percent of the country's population). This problem is closely related to the problem of "non-citizens", since it is the Russian-speaking population that makes up the bulk of the "grey passport holders". The situation is particularly dire in the area of native language education, given that the dominance of the Estonian ethnos, its language and culture<sup>631</sup> over other peoples living in the country is enshrined at the constitutional level in the country, and the political, social, economic, and cultural rights of the non-titular population are openly restricted. The Estonian Ministry of Education and Science developed a program for the development of the Estonian language for 2021-2035, which provides for the complete elimination of education in Russian, starting with pre-school institutions.

The Estonian ruling elite, in principle, did not hide their intention to destroy the Russian-speaking space in the country. Statements about the need to eliminate Russian-language education are voiced by representatives of the authorities at the highest level. For example, in December 2019, K. Kaljulaid, who was then President of the Republic of Estonia, publicly stated that "we have actually decided to switch to a single Estonian-language education system." On 24 February 2021, she insisted in her address on the occasion of Estonia's Independence Day that

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<sup>630</sup> Concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination on the combined 10th and 11th periodic reports of Estonia. August 2014.  
[https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CERD%2fC%2fEST%2fCO%2f10-11&Lang=en](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CERD%2fC%2fEST%2fCO%2f10-11&Lang=en)

<sup>631</sup> The preamble of the 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Estonia declares that "the state is called upon to ensure the preservation of the Estonian nation, language and culture for centuries to come".

sending Russian children to Estonian schools is not only the right of Russian parents, but also their duty.<sup>632</sup> On 28 December 2022, K. Kaljulaid, no longer President of the country (A. Karis took office as President of the Republic of Estonia on 11 October 2021), tried to give a respectable look to the actions of the Estonian authorities to dismantle education in Russian, stating that for a small country this is a security issue so that "we are all in the same information space and there is no situation where our Russian-speaking people receive a worse education, and therefore have fewer opportunities." At the same time, she gave the real reason for the actions of official Tallinn, indicating that students receiving education in Russian probably have a "completely different worldview."<sup>633</sup>

A number of Estonian political figures openly and with impunity express their dissatisfaction with the use of the Russian language and call for its complete ban. For example, Indrek Luberg, a member of the board of the Parempoolsed (Right-wingers) party, called for the eradication of the Russian language in Estonia. "Anyone who notices the use of Russian in public can take a few minutes to contact the relevant company or organization and ask them to stop supporting bilingualism in Estonia. As citizens, we can contribute by reporting it to organizations, supporting those who are already taking such measures, and choosing which goods and services to support", the politician said.<sup>634</sup>

Similar statements are made by commercial firms. In September 2024, it became known that the Maxima supermarket chain in Estonia commented on a man's complaint about the predominance of Russian speakers among customers and staff on the social network Facebook (owned by Meta, which is recognized as extremist in Russia) in the following racist manner: "Unfortunately, we have many people in Estonia whose native language is Russian". After the public outcry that followed the publication of the comment, the company admitted that its statement was inappropriate. "We apologize to everyone who might have been offended by

<sup>632</sup> <https://www.president.ee/ru/official-duties/speeches/16451-2021-02-24-16-28-05/index.html>

<sup>633</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/28122022-premer-estonii-dlya-bezopasnosti-strany-nuzhno-otkazatsya-ot-russkoyazychnogo-obrazovaniya/>

<sup>634</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/09102024-estonskiy-politik-prizval-iskorenit-russkiy-yazyk-v-respublike/>

our unfortunate statement – it was an ill-considered message that we could have worded differently. We will learn from this", said a representative of the Estonian division of Maxima.<sup>635</sup>

In recent years, the media in the country has been actively processing public opinion on the topic of the "necessity and demand" for the transition to a "unified school" and a "unified education system" under the pretext of caring for the Russian population, whose worse socio-economic situation is allegedly associated with poor command of the state language. This approach assumes the abolition of the division into Estonian and Russian schools and kindergartens in favour of uniform Estonian-language institutions with some optional opportunities to maintain their native language for students from non-titular communities.

To date, all opportunities for education in Russian have been eliminated in the country. The Estonian authorities continue to ignore the "Hague Recommendations regarding the Rights of National Minorities to Education" prepared at the initiative of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities in October 1996. The document contains references to fundamental international documents in this area – the UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities (art. 4), the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education (art. 5), the document of the Copenhagen Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the CSCE (paragraph 34), and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (art. 14).

The Russian language has been almost completely ousted from the higher education system. For example, at the University of Tallinn and the University of Tartu, it is only possible to partially study in Russian in the specialties "Russian Philology" (bachelor's degree) and "Slavic Languages and Cultures" (master's degree). Russian-language study programs are still available at the private Estonian Entrepreneurship University "Mainor" and the Estonian Academy of Arts. As a

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<sup>635</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/26092024-v-seti-supermarketov-v-estonii-izvinilis-za-kommentariy-o-russkoyazychnykh-zhitelyakh/>

consequence, no more than 30 percent of graduates of Russian-language gymnasiums enter Estonian universities, while more than 50 percent of Estonian-language schools do.

The systematic forced Estonianization of gymnasium and vocational secondary education (grades 10-12) and pre-school education is almost complete. With the adoption of another legislative innovation by the country's authorities, all opportunities to study in their native language are completely eliminated (until the end of the current academic year, the previously established quotas are still in effect, when no more than 40 percent of subjects could be taught in Russian at the gymnasium level). On 19 December 2022, the President of Estonia approved amendments<sup>636</sup> to the Law on Basic School and Gymnasium. In accordance with the new version of the law, from 1 September 2024, students in the first and fourth grades, as well as preschoolers, switched to studying in Estonian. From 1 August 2024, teachers and educators are required to have a certificate of Estonian proficiency at (academic) level C1 as a qualification requirement, and for directors – from 1 August 2023. Control over this is carried out by the Language Department,<sup>637</sup> which can impose a fine of up to 9,600 euros on the employer. Grades 10-12 will be able to continue studying according to the 60/40 scheme (i.e., no more than 40 percent of the volume of subjects in Russian) until the 2029/2030 academic year (Russian will be completely phased out in middle school by 2029, and in high school by 2033). After that, educational institutions are required to provide the educational process exclusively in the state language within three years. Shortly before the amendment was adopted, on 16 December 2022, a specialized Action Plan until 2030 for the transition of Russian schools to Estonian-language instruction was approved.<sup>638</sup>

Some municipal Estonian officials began to implement this discriminatory government decision "ahead of schedule." For example, the municipal authorities

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<sup>636</sup> Adopted by the Estonian Parliament on 12 December 2022.

<sup>637</sup> In essence, it is a repressive structure, which until 1 August 2020 was called the Language Inspectorate. After the renaming, it was given expanded functionality, including the authority to develop language policy.

<sup>638</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/17122022-ministr-obrazovaniya-estonii-utverdil-plan-perevoda-russkikh-shkol-na-estonskiy-yazyk/>



in Tartu announced that two local schools and three kindergartens would switch to the state language by 2025. Vice Mayor L. Kaplinski said on this occasion: "The state has set a goal to complete the reform by 2033. But this is the maximum, and we can do it faster; we have good starting positions".<sup>639</sup>

The remaining formal clauses that supposedly provide the opportunity to conduct lessons in "native language and culture" cannot cover the educational needs of Russian-speaking children. The measures developed by the Estonian authorities put Russian school teachers in a discriminatory position: those who did not pass the Estonian language proficiency exam at the academic level by August 2023 were subject to dismissal, despite the fact that there was no one to replace them in the country.<sup>640</sup>

On 15 January 2024, Estonian Prime Minister K. Kallas, answering questions from deputies in the Estonian parliament about a single Estonian school, confirmed the government's intention to stop funding education in Russian. At the same time, K. Kallas disguised such steps by the authorities to destroy all opportunities to study in Russian with claims that the Estonian government "does not intend to Russify Estonian children." To this end, according to her, the authorities will strive to ensure that "all residents of Estonia are in a single information space, so that Estonian is spoken in Estonia, and so that the number of people using Estonian is increasing".<sup>641</sup>

Along with this, the Estonian government has been implementing a program to merge Russian and Estonian schools and gymnasiums in recent years under the pretext of "optimization" and cost savings, as well as transferring them from the jurisdiction of local governments to the jurisdiction of the Estonian Ministry of Education and Science. As a result, without taking into account the interests of Russian students and their parents, completely Estonian-language educational institutions are emerging (Keila, Tartu, Rakvere, Haapsalu, Viljandi, Kohtla-Järve,

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<sup>639</sup> <https://iz.ru/1443747/khariton-galitckii/iz-uchitelei-v-kassiry-kak-estoniia-likvidiruet-russkie-shkoly>

<sup>640</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/22122022-zakharova-vlasti-estonii-obyavili-voynu-vseму-russkomu/>

<sup>641</sup> <https://www.dp.ru/a/2024/01/16/vlasti-jestonii-perestanut?ysclid=lsknebyfxm921427828>

Põlva, Võru, etc.). Moreover, Estonian courts often support the actions of local authorities.

Here are a few illustrative examples of this approach. First of all, this is the merger in 2019 of Russian and Estonian gymnasiums in Kohtla-Järve (75 percent of the city's population is Russian) into a completely Estonian-language state gymnasium without discussing this step with the Russian-speaking community. From the first days of study at this educational institution, Russian-speaking students faced undisguised discrimination based on language and ethnicity from the administration and Estonian teachers. In addition, plans were announced at one time to implement the same reformatting by 2022 in Russian educational institutions in Narva (where more than 90 percent of the population is Russian-speaking) and the Mustvee municipality.

Similar events took place with a school in Kallaste (Peipsiääre municipality, the city is inhabited by descendants of Russian Old Believers), which was transferred to the village of Kolkja, and with a school in Kiviõli (Lüganuse municipality of Ida-Viru County). At first, both schools were transformed from gymnasiums into basic schools. A decision was made to transfer the school in Kallaste to the village of Kolkja, where there is also a Russian school. On 1 July 2021, the Russian school in Kallaste was closed. Earlier, as a result of the 2017 administrative reform aimed at enlarging municipalities, the municipalities of the descendants of Prichud Old Believers were liquidated by merging them with Estonian municipalities. As a result, the new municipalities became predominantly Estonian, and the descendants of Russian Old Believers lost self-government. Thus, the authorities were able to make decisions without taking into account the opinion of the Russian population.<sup>642</sup>

The alarming situation with the school in Kiviõli has been developing similarly since 2021. As a result of the administrative reform to merge Kiviõli with surrounding settlements with an Estonian population, the percentage of the

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<sup>642</sup> Human rights in Estonia. Russian schools. REGNUM. 10 August 2021. <https://regnum.ru/news/polit/3338792.html>

Estonian population increased in the new entity. As a result, the local authorities planned to merge it with the Estonian-language school as part of the municipal school network reform, but they did not discuss this process with the school administration. The school staff was outraged by the authorities' dismissive attitude towards them: questions about the form and how the reform would be carried out were left unanswered.<sup>643</sup>

Another negative example is the liquidation by the municipal authorities in November 2019 of the only Russian-language school in Keila, also under the pretext of "optimization." This was not prevented by the objections of the students' parents and the protest actions they organized in favour of preserving the Russian-language educational institution. It is very indicative that at a meeting of the city council, where the decision to close the Russian school was made, the mayor stated that the goal of its closure was to create a single Estonian community in the city (according to civil activists, this was included in the minutes of the meeting).<sup>644</sup>

In February 2021, the Tallinn District Court ruled to dismiss the parents' appeals and uphold the decision of the administrative court of 19 August 2020, to refuse to overturn the decision of the Keila authorities to reorganize school education in the city. On 21 June 2021, the Estonian State Court also dismissed the cassation appeal challenging this decision to close the school. The plaintiffs announced their intention to appeal this decision to the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR).

As a result of such cynical actions by the Estonian authorities, the number of Russian-language educational institutions in the country has significantly decreased in recent years. As of 2021, there were 74 Russian-language secondary schools operating in Estonia, where 20 percent of all schoolchildren in the country

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<sup>643</sup> The attitude towards Russians is outrageous: school director on the reform in Estonia's Ida-Viru County. Sputnik Meedia. 3 March 2021. <https://sputnik-meedia.ee/society/20210303/120400/Vozmuschaet-otnoshenie-russkij-direktor-shkola-reforma-estonski-Ida-Virumaa.html>

<sup>644</sup> Human rights in Estonia. Russian schools. REGNUM. 10 August 2021. <https://regnum.ru/news/polit/3338792.html>; <https://dokole.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/29.10volikoguprotokoll.pdf>

studied.<sup>645</sup> The largest school in the country is the Tallinn Linnamäe Russian Lyceum, with about 2,000 students.<sup>646</sup>

Civil activists in Estonia who defend the right to maintain education in Russian note that the transfer of Russian children to Estonian-language instruction leads to a decrease in their competitiveness in the educational sphere. This thesis is supported by a reasoned scientific opinion. Professor A. Pulver and Professor A. Toomela acknowledge in the study "A Foreign Child in an Estonian School" (Institute of Psychology, Tallinn University, Tallinn, 2012) that Russian-speaking children studying in Estonian schools cannot realize their abilities and show results at a lower level. Highly capable children show average results. Children with average abilities show low results, respectively. This does not happen when studying in their native language: in this case, children develop and maintain their level of academic performance. As a result of the difficulties faced by Russian-speaking children in Estonian schools, their self-esteem decreases. Such changes do not occur in children studying in their native language. Thus, one cannot speak of equal opportunities for education. Showing results below their abilities, Russian children are limited in their access to education, and especially in continuing it at a higher level (in gymnasium and university).<sup>647</sup>

Public activists also point out that the main problem in the integration of Russian-speaking students is not a low level of Estonian proficiency, but the inability of the Estonian authorities over the years of independence to provide quality education in the state language. In addition, the cessation of training and professional development of Russian-speaking teachers since the 1990s has had a very negative impact on the sphere of Russian-language school education. As a result, there are not enough textbooks and teachers among Russians. Estonians are extremely reluctant to teach in Russian schools and gymnasiums. The situation is aggravated by the fact that the entire education sector in Estonia is in a rather

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<sup>645</sup> <https://www.fondsk.ru/news/2021/07/03/estonija-minus-esche-odna-russkaja-shkola.html>

<sup>646</sup> <https://www.dp.ru/a/2024/01/16/vlasti-jestonii-perestanut?ysclid=lsknebyfxm921427828>

<sup>647</sup> Human rights in Estonia. Russian schools. REGNUM. 10 August 2021. <https://regnum.ru/news/polit/3338792.html>; <https://dokole.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/29.10volikoguprotokoll.pdf>

deplorable state. The Estonian budget does not allocate enough funding for this sector, and, accordingly, teachers' salaries are low, which causes dissatisfaction among employees. In November 2023, school and kindergarten staff in Estonia held a warning strike due to the government's inaction on the issue of low wages. Three-quarters of the country's educational institutions joined the strike demanding higher wages.<sup>648</sup> Since the authorities did not make concessions, claiming that there were no funds in the budget to increase wages, Estonian teachers began a new strike on 22 January 2024. It was originally declared indefinite, but the terms of participation in it for specific teachers are voluntary. According to the Education Workers' Union, 9,471 teachers from 330 schools are participating in it. The strikers' demand is to increase the minimum monthly salary for teachers in general education schools by 150 euros (so that it reaches 1,950 euros), since the high workload amid low salaries leads to a growing shortage of teachers.<sup>649</sup> The strike ended on 30 January 2024 with an agreement with the government, according to which the minimum wage for teachers was slightly increased (1,820 euros). Schools resumed work on 31 January 2024.

Despite the intensified actions of the Estonian authorities to displace the Russian language from the field of education, A. Chaplygin, a member of the Riigikogu, stated on 31 August 2024, that Russian private schools in Estonia are facing an unprecedented influx of students due to the policy of "de-Russification" of education. According to the deputy, many parents send their children to private Russian schools in Estonia because they do not want them to study only in Estonian. Or this is done by those who understand that it will be difficult for them to cope with Estonian-language education, since many students do not understand assignments in Estonian.<sup>650</sup>

As a result, under the conditions of Tallinn's implementation of the Estonianization course in all spheres of public life, primarily education, not only is the assimilation of Russian-speaking children taking place, but they are also being

<sup>648</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/10112023-v-estonii-nachalas-zabastovka-uchiteley-shkol-i-vospitateley-detsadov/>

<sup>649</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/22012024-v-estonii-nachinaetsya-zabastovka-uchiteley/>

<sup>650</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/31082024-russkie-shkoly-v-estonii-stolknulis-s-rezким-naplyvom-uchenikov/>

deprived of the right to receive education in their native language, which automatically leads to limiting this category of students' access to quality education and, accordingly, limiting their opportunities to maintain a decent standard of living. A. Chaplygin, editor-in-chief of the Tallinn Russian-language newspaper *Stolitsa*, pointed out that the transfer of education to Estonian will deal a blow to children's academic performance. In particular, he noted the following: "It is initially more difficult to get an education in a non-native language. No special methods are provided; children are thrown into the water without a life preserver. Schools will produce underachievers whose career peak will be working as a janitor or cashier. Apparently, lawmakers want to cut off Russians from higher education". N. Mezhevich, President of the Association of Baltic Studies, also noted that in Estonia they are striving to eliminate the Russian-speaking diaspora and destroy Russian education, Russian culture, and Russian journalism in a short period of time.<sup>651</sup>

The NGO "Russian School of Estonia" continues to deal with issues of protecting Russian-language schools, taking active measures to bring information about these violations to the attention of multilateral universal and regional human rights mechanisms. In August 2022, its leadership notified the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (AC FCNM), operating within the Council of Europe, about a gross violation of the provisions of this document in Estonia.<sup>652</sup> At the Congress of the Federalist Union of European National Minorities in Berlin on 1 October 2022, a resolution prepared by the organization condemning the closure of Russian schools and kindergartens and discrimination against the Russian minority in the country was adopted.<sup>653</sup> Assessments of the forced Estonianization of Russian education were

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<sup>651</sup> <https://iz.ru/1443747/khariton-galitskii/iz-uchitelei-v-kassiry-kak-estoniia-likvidiruet-russkie-shkoly>

<sup>652</sup> <https://baltija.eu/2022/08/11/russkaya-shkola-estonii-protiv-planov-pravitelstva-po-uskorennoj-estonizaczii-russkih-shkol-i-detskih-sadov/>

<sup>653</sup> <https://baltija.eu/2022/10/04/alisa-blinczova-nko-russkaya-shkola-estonii-dobrym-slovom-i-800-000-evro/>

brought to the attention of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, K.K. Abdrakhmanov, at a meeting in Tallinn on 10 November 2022.<sup>654</sup>

In mid-December 2022, an open appeal by the "Russian School of Estonia" to local (Estonian) governments was published on the information portal [www.baltija.eu](http://www.baltija.eu), calling for the initiation of constitutional review mechanisms and demanding that amendments to laws concerning education in Russian be declared unconstitutional.<sup>655</sup>

In March 2023, representatives of the NGO "Russian School of Estonia" held a working meeting with E. Lotti, Senior Adviser to the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, where they announced the plans of the Republic's government to fully Estonianize educational institutions in the country.<sup>656</sup>

The issue of discrimination in Estonia based on knowledge of the state language has been addressed by international human rights monitoring procedures, which largely served as the basis for legitimizing the Estonian authorities' efforts to forcibly assimilate the Russian-speaking population. However, even they could not completely ignore the flagrant violations of the rights of Russian-speaking residents of Estonia. In August 2014, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination noted with concern the discrepancies between the levels of employment and income of the Estonian and non-Estonian populations depending on language proficiency.<sup>657</sup> In 2022, the Committee was again forced to return to this issue, noting the lack of progress on it. It also pointed to the differences in the levels of employment and income of the Estonian and non-Estonian populations, including due to language proficiency.<sup>658</sup>

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<sup>654</sup> <https://baltija.eu/2022/11/11/nko-russkaya-shkola-estonii-obsudila-s-verhovnym-komissarom-obse-situacziyu-v-estonii/>

<sup>655</sup> <https://baltija.eu/2022/12/15/otkrytoe-obrashhenie-nko-russkaya-shkola-estonii-k-mestnym-samoupravleniyam-estonii/>

<sup>656</sup> <https://baltija.eu/2023/03/02/russkaya-shkola-estonii-soobshhila-obse-o-diskriminaczii-russkih/>

<sup>657</sup> Concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination on the combined 10th and 11th periodic reports of Estonia. August 2014.

<sup>658</sup> Concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination on the combined 12th and 13th periodic reports of Estonia. April 2022. <https://docstore.ohchr.org/SelfServices/FilesHandler.ashx?enc=6QkG1d%2fPPRiCAqhKb7yhsq90DTob4ikPW5%2fsylCWY%2bsTv4D7bkEbOqgPC2IgX%2bZhrsC0>

In 2015, the ECRI, operating within the Council of Europe, drew attention to the problems related to language-based discrimination in Estonia. Among other things, it noted that Estonian legislation (primarily the Law on Equal Treatment) does not provide protection against discrimination based on language or citizenship, and also pointed out the excessive complexity of the requirements for national minorities to pass the Estonian language exam.<sup>659</sup>

ECRI also focused on this issue in 2022. Thus, it noted that during a contact visit of the Commission's delegation to a number of Estonian regions, representatives of the Russian-speaking population spoke about their concerns about the introduction of a 60 percent quota for teaching in Estonian in high school. The difficulties faced by some Russian-speaking students in mastering basic subjects taught only in Estonian, especially in high school, were also noted; the shortage of teachers with the necessary language qualifications in Russian-language schools, and the lack of flexibility in implementing the 60 percent quota were also highlighted. ECRI noted with concern the continuing gap in academic performance between Estonian and Russian schools, which, in its opinion, exacerbates regional differences and hinders mobility across the country due to the language barrier. It was also indicated that the situation of the Russian-speaking population is characterized by a high level of social isolation.<sup>660</sup>

In January 2017, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child expressed concern about the language policy of secondary schools, which often hinders Russian-speaking students from mastering basic subjects. It also pointed to the general discrimination against children belonging to ethnic minorities in education.<sup>661</sup>

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<sup>659</sup> Fifth Opinion of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance on Estonia. Adopted on 16 June 2015, published on 13 October 2015. <https://rm.coe.int/fifth-report-on-estonia/16808b56f1>

<sup>660</sup> Sixth Opinion of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance on Estonia. Adopted on 29 March 2022, published on 9 June 2022. <https://rm.coe.int/6th-ecri-report-on-estonia/1680a6d5e6>

<sup>661</sup> Concluding observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on the combined 2nd to 4th periodic reports of Estonia. January 2017.

[https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRC%2fC%2fEST%2fCO%2f2-4&Lang=en](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRC%2fC%2fEST%2fCO%2f2-4&Lang=en)



In February 2019, the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights criticized the lack of flexibility in applying percentage quotas for teaching in Estonian in Russian-language gymnasiums. This, according to CESCR experts, becomes an obstacle for Russian-speaking students of Russian-language schools to master basic subjects taught only in Estonian, and, in the case of vocational schools, leads to a shortage of qualified teachers who can teach specialized subjects. The situation is aggravated by the punitive approach of the Estonian authorities to ensuring compliance with the Language Act, including through the mandate and functions of the Language Inspectorate<sup>662</sup> (since 1 August 2020 – the Language Department).

The UN Human Rights Committee expressed concern about the impact of language policy and practice, which continue to prevent the full realization of the rights of the Russian-speaking population on an equal basis with the rest of the country's population. It also supported the CESCR's view on the inflexibility of applying the Estonian language teaching quota.<sup>663</sup>

The Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities drew attention to the lack of constructive dialogue between the Estonian authorities and national minority communities on language issues, including the functioning of the language inspectorate, in 2015.<sup>664</sup> In 2022, the AC FCNM also paid considerable attention to the problem of education in Russian in Estonia. Thus, the Committee pointed out that the Estonian education system, divided into Russian-language schools and Estonian-language schools, does not contribute to the development of intercultural dialogue, but can only strengthen the dividing lines between communities, while creating risks for the formation of parallel societies. This observation is also relevant for Roma and other minorities

<sup>662</sup> Concluding observations of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on the 3rd periodic report of Estonia. February 2019.

[https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=E%2fC.12%2fEST%2fCO%2f3&Lang=en](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=E%2fC.12%2fEST%2fCO%2f3&Lang=en)

<sup>663</sup> Concluding observations of the Human Rights Committee on the 4th periodic report of Estonia. March 2019.

[https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CCPR%2fC%2fEST%2fCO%2f4&Lang=en](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CCPR%2fC%2fEST%2fCO%2f4&Lang=en)

<sup>664</sup> Opinion of the Advisory Committee of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities on Estonia (fourth monitoring cycle). Adopted on 19 March 2015, published on 21 October 2015.

<https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=090000168047d0e5>

attending Russian-language schools. It pointed out that among the Russian minority there is a strong desire to preserve the Russian language as the language of instruction for a significant part of the curriculum, along with Estonian. A worrying trend is that Russian-speaking students drop out of school due to insufficient knowledge of Estonian. The point of view of organizations defending the interests of the Russian-speaking community regarding Estonian research, which allegedly shows that students attending Russian-language schools lag behind their peers studying in Estonian-language schools by 1-1.5 years in terms of learning outcomes, was also presented. In particular, it is indicated that such results are a consequence of the increased use of the Estonian language in public schools since 2007, which initially puts students for whom Russian is their native language at a disadvantage, and is not a flaw in the system itself. The AC FCNM expressed concern about the unequal learning outcomes of Russian-speaking students compared to the majority and called for independent research into the causes of such differences. In this regard, it pointed out that the Committee itself, as well as the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, had previously expressed concern about this issue to the Estonian authorities when the transition of education to Estonian began. At that time, they warned Tallinn that the lack of analysis of the quality of education raises questions about the compatibility of the transition with the right to education of students studying in Russian-language schools. Along with this, the Advisory Committee noted that the population of Estonia as a whole knows very little about national minorities due to the low presence of minority issues in school curricula. Among other things, the AC FCNM pointed out that the limited scope of subjects taught in Russian in "integrated" secondary schools does not reflect the full richness of Russian culture and, accordingly, does not provide a complete picture of it. The Committee considered that the introduction of classes for in-depth study of the Russian language or, more broadly, Russian culture, even in optional formats, could help to rectify the current situation. In its opinion, thanks to this step, students will be able

to gain a deeper understanding of Russian culture through such a broader curriculum.<sup>665</sup>

Problems with the use of the Russian language are noted in Estonia not only in the field of education, but in general regarding the possibility of its use in various spheres of public life. Estonia, which ratified the Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities at the end of the 1990s, evades fulfilling the provisions of Art. 11, which directly oblige the recognition of patronymics of national minorities, and refuses to enter these data in national identity documents issued to Russian residents. The Estonian authorities also ignore the recommendations of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on the official recognition of patronymics of Russian speakers. CESCR, in particular, noted in February 2019 that the Estonian authorities' obstruction of the use of patronymics by national minorities in official personal documents limits their ability to exercise the right to protect their cultural identity.<sup>666</sup>

Cases of the ruling party's initiatives to introduce a legislative ban on the Russian language have been recorded. For example, in 2022, EKRE introduced amendments to the Estonian Parliament that would prohibit the use of any language other than the state language in the public sphere. The draft law also included a provision stating that "Estonian texts may be accompanied by a translation into a foreign language, but not into Russian." E. Odiets, Chairman of the Riigikogu Constitutional Commission (Social Democratic Party of Estonia), pointed out that if this draft law had been adopted, public and private law legal

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<sup>665</sup> Opinion of the Advisory Committee of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities on Estonia (fifth monitoring cycle). Adopted on 3 February 2022, published on 9 June 2022. <https://rm.coe.int/5th-op-estonia-en/1680a6cc9e> It should also be noted that the analysis of the situation, as well as the Committee's visit, was conducted before the Estonian authorities had completely eliminated all opportunities for education in Russian. This formal approach essentially allowed the Committee to avoid assessing Tallinn's recent measures aimed at eliminating all Russian-language education and to limit itself to pointing out that the ongoing reform of school education should be accompanied by a dialogue between the authorities and national minorities, as well as guarantees of opportunities for national minorities to use their mother tongue in education without compromising the quality of education.

<sup>666</sup> Concluding observations of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on the 3rd periodic report of Estonia. February 2019. [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=E%2fC.12%2fEST%2fCO%2f3&Lang=en](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=E%2fC.12%2fEST%2fCO%2f3&Lang=en)

entities in Estonia would no longer be able to use Russian in their work. According to him, the authors of the draft law wanted to ban Russian-language channels on public broadcasting, private media outlets in Russian, and the Russian Theater. "EKRE [Estonian abbreviation for the Conservative People's Party of Estonia] has reached the peak of absurdity with its desire to inflict pain on national minorities living in Estonia and show them their place. This party wants to discriminate against one national group and all people for whom Russian is their first language," E. Odiets said. He also wondered about further initiatives in this regard, suggesting that one might expect the "burning of books published in Russian." According to him, it is already shameful that the parliament of one of the EU countries was forced to discuss a ban on the use of one of the languages in the public space.<sup>667</sup> In November of the same year, this scandalous initiative was rejected. A number of experts noted that the introduction of such an odious draft law was part of EKRE's election campaign before the next parliamentary elections. In particular, J. Aab, a member of the Riigikogu (Centre Party), pointed this out.<sup>668</sup>

Infringement of the rights and interests of Russian-speaking residents of Estonia is recorded in the socio-economic sphere. According to statistics, the unemployment rate among Russian speakers is almost twice as high as in the Estonian-speaking environment. A clear imbalance is observed in the civil service, where the number of non-Estonians does not exceed 3 percent (while the share of the non-titular population is about 30 percent). CESCR drew attention to this problem in February 2019, criticizing the Estonian authorities for the continuing discrimination against the non-Estonian-speaking population, which, due to insufficient proficiency in the state language, faces systemic discrimination in all spheres of public life. According to the Committee's experts, this is evidenced by

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<sup>667</sup> <https://infosila.ee/main/3516-eduard-odinec-zakonoproekt-ekre-o-zaprete-russkogo-yazyka-eto-uzhe-verh-absurda.html>

<sup>668</sup> <https://eadaily.com/ru/news/2022/11/19/estonskiy-parlament-otverg-zakonoproekt-o-polnom-zaprete-russkogo-yazyka>

the high level of unemployment and poverty among the non-Estonian-speaking population.<sup>669</sup>

ECRI and the AC FCNM also pointed to this problem. Thus, ECRI noted that the unemployment rate among Russians in 2020 was still significantly higher (9.4 percent) than among Estonians (5.8 percent). 29.3 percent of residents of Ida-Viru County, which the ECRI delegation visited during their visit, could fall below the poverty line in 2019. The Commission emphasized a very important and revealing negative trend: Russians occupy the most unfavourable positions in the Estonian labour market. Along with this, a number of problems faced by the Russian-speaking community in the field of education due to the language of instruction were highlighted. The Commission noted that the spread of coronavirus had a negative impact on the employment rate among Russian speakers, as their work often did not provide for the possibility of remote work. In addition, many hid the first symptoms of the disease for fear of being fired.<sup>670</sup>

In August 2024, in order to save budget funds, the Ministry of Justice and Digital Technologies announced its intention to no longer translate the texts of laws into Russian. According to Lisa Pakosta, Minister of Justice and Digital Technologies, the refusal to translate into Russian will not affect the clarity of the legal order or the accessibility of law enforcement.<sup>671</sup> According to him, only the texts of legal acts published in the Riigi Teataja application in Estonian will have legal force.

The AC FCNM also noted a higher unemployment rate among the Russian-speaking population than among the Estonian-speaking population. Regarding Ida-Viru County, the Committee indicated that the unemployment rate there increased more than the national average, reaching 12.3 percent in 2020 (compared to 8.7 percent in 2019). Across the country, there was also a greater increase in

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<sup>669</sup> Concluding observations of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on the 3rd periodic report of Estonia. February 2019. [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=E%2fC.12%2fEST%2fCO%2f3&Lang=en](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=E%2fC.12%2fEST%2fCO%2f3&Lang=en)

<sup>670</sup> Sixth Report of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance on Estonia. Adopted on 29 March 2022, published on 9 June 2022. <https://rm.coe.int/6-th-ecri-report-on-estonia/1680a6d5e6>

<sup>671</sup> <https://www.just.ee/ru/novosti/prekratitsya-perevod-zakonov-na-russkiy-yazyk>

unemployment among "non-Estonians" than among Estonians (3 percent versus 2 percent).<sup>672</sup>

As of 4 August 2024, the highest unemployment rate is still observed in the Russian-speaking region in northeastern Estonia, where it increased from 12.9 percent to 13.1 percent.<sup>673</sup>

The problem of unequal representation of the titular and non-titular communities in local government bodies, primarily in Tallinn, remains unresolved. Based on the principle of proportional representation, in the Estonian capital, with a population of about 350,000 voters, one city council member (79 seats) should be elected from approximately 4,430 eligible voters. However, according to the local elections law, 16 deputies are elected to the Tallinn City Council from the largest "Russian" metropolitan district of Lasnamäe (more than 100,000 voters), while six members are elected from the predominantly "Estonian" district of Piritä (slightly more than 13,000 voters). Thus, to elect one council member, the "Russian" district needs about 6,000 votes, while 2,000 are enough for the "Estonian" district.

The UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination drew attention to the whole range of problems faced by the Russian-speaking population and representatives of national minorities in Estonia in April 2022.<sup>674</sup> In particular, the Committee expressed concern about the disproportionate measures taken by the authorities to impose the Estonian language, promote its use, and the opportunities for national minorities to exercise their rights to their native language, which, among other things, is reflected in the goal set by the authorities to switch school education to Estonian. CERD also pointed out that the Estonian authorities continue to rely on punitive elements in the dissemination of the official language, especially in the field of employment. The Committee examined this issue in

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<sup>672</sup> Opinion of the Advisory Committee of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities on Estonia (fifth monitoring cycle). Adopted on 3 February 2022, published on 9 June 2022. <https://rm.coe.int/5-th-op-estonia-en/1680a6cc9e>

<sup>673</sup> <https://baltija.eu/2024/08/06/v-russkoyazychnom-regione-na-severo-vostoke-estonii-uroven-bezrabotichy-dostig-13/>

<sup>674</sup> Concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination on the combined 12th and 13th periodic reports of Estonia. April 2022. [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CERD%2FC%2FEST%2FCO%2F12-13&Lang=en](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CERD%2FC%2FEST%2FCO%2F12-13&Lang=en)

detail, emphasizing that although the Equal Treatment Act prohibits discrimination against an employee or potential employee on such grounds as nationality and ethnic origin, different treatment based on knowledge of Estonian is not considered discrimination in practice. CERD noted with concern the differences in employment and income levels between the Estonian and non-Estonian populations, which depend, among other things, on the level of language proficiency. It was noted that the Language Act restricts the use of minority languages in the sphere of public administration only by local authorities. In addition, the needs of national minorities for self-identification are not sufficiently taken into account, including due to the impossibility of using patronymics.

In this regard, Tallinn was recommended to create an optimal balance between recognizing diversity and the extent to which it makes Estonian a condition for employment and resolving other issues of vital importance for non-Estonian-speaking citizens. In order to eliminate discrimination against national minorities in the labour sphere, CERD again recommended that Estonia ensure that language requirements for employment are applied on the basis of objective criteria and are linked to the needs of each specific job, and also take into account the indirect discriminatory consequences of state policy for vulnerable groups. In addition, the Estonian authorities were reiterated the recommendation to intensify efforts to eliminate the continuing unfavourable situation of minority groups in terms of employment and wage levels depending on knowledge of the state language. In addition to the above, Estonia was recommended to revise legislation to provide broader opportunities for the use of minority languages in the sphere of public administration, and also to take measures to meet the needs of minorities for self-identification.

The UN Special Rapporteurs on minority issues, F. de Varennes, on cultural rights, A. Xanthaki, and on the right to education, F. Shaheed, in August 2023 called the educational reform being carried out by the Estonian authorities a *de facto* liquidation of minority languages as a medium of instruction. In a joint statement, they noted with concern that the amendments adopted in December

2022, which provide for the transfer of education to Estonian, seriously restrict education in minority languages in Estonia, essentially eliminating education in minority languages as such. They expressed particular concern about how the legislative changes could affect representatives of the Russian-speaking minority, which make up a significant part of the country's population. It was also noted that, despite protests from Russian-speaking parents and children, several Russian-language schools have been closed in Estonia in recent years.<sup>675</sup>

The recommendations of human rights monitoring mechanisms are confirmed by many civil activists who also note that Russian residents of Estonia are practically excluded from many important sectors of the economy. This is facilitated by the policy pursued by the authorities aimed at "integrating" the non-Estonian population, while socio-economic integration is not given due attention. For example, it is much more difficult for a Russian entrepreneur to get a loan than for an Estonian. In addition, even Russians who know Estonian cannot compete with Estonians. As a result, inequality between ethnic communities in the country continues to grow. The unemployment rate among Estonians is 5.8 percent, and among Russians – 9.4 percent. The largest number of unemployed is observed in regions populated by Russians (mainly in Ida-Viru County).

Regardless of the development of the economic situation, regional units of the country with a predominantly Russian population do not receive enough state funding. As a result, the poorest municipalities in Estonia are regions with a Russian population. Among the poorest are the cities of Narva, Kohtla-Järve, Sillamäe in Ida-Viru County, and Maardu located near Tallinn.

The report on the results of integration monitoring published by the Estonian Ministry of Culture on 10 May 2021, testifies to a sharp deterioration in the situation of the Russian-speaking population. These results confirm the actual failure of the state reform in the field of integration in Estonia. Forced Estonianization does not contribute to the harmonious involvement of national

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<sup>675</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/08/estonia-new-law-banning-mother-tongue-education-minorities-may-violate-human>



minorities in Estonian society. Thus, 29 percent of representatives of the non-titular population of the country believe that "they are not welcome here" (in 2016, only 16 percent of respondents). 38 percent of non-Estonians feel like "second-class people" in Estonia (2016 – 21 percent). 26 percent of respondents said that they are subject to intolerance (2016 – 10 percent). Up to 70 percent of people from the target group believe that they are in no way able to influence the development of society and the state, another 73 percent – that their career prospects are obviously worse than those of ethnic Estonians. There is a rigid dependence of socio-economic and career advancement on national and linguistic affiliation, ethno-discrimination in terms of wages; on average, non-Estonians in identical positions earn 15 percent less. 50 percent of schoolchildren studying in non-native Estonian have difficulty learning the educational material, experiencing severe stress.

Following other Baltic states, the Estonian authorities launched campaigns to rename topographic objects in the country. In early September 2024, a branch of the Tallinn City Museum, known as the Tallinn Russian Museum, was renamed the Museum of the Peoples of Tallinn, which is located at the branch of the Tallinn City Museum at 29a Pikk Street.<sup>676</sup>

On 15 October 2024, the Tallinn authorities renamed Moskovsky Boulevard in the Mustakivi district by merging it with Saaremaa Boulevard. Previously, part of the pedestrian and bicycle path already bore the name Saaremaa Boulevard, while another section, 250 meters long, was known as Moskovsky Boulevard. Now the entire path, 1,200 meters long, is called Saaremaa Boulevard.<sup>677</sup>

The efforts of activists who defend the rights of the Russian-speaking population of the country, as well as those who fight for the preservation of the historical truth about the events of World War II, cause noticeable irritation in official Tallinn. To suppress such activity, powerful repressive forces have been created and used in the Estonian state. Thus, over the past 30 years, total

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<sup>676</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/07092024-v-estonii-pereimenovali-tallinskiy-russkiy-muzej/>

<sup>677</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/15102024-v-talline-pereimenovali-moskovskiy-bulvar/>

censorship has been formed in the country, which is directed primarily against Estonian alternative media platforms that speak out against the official agenda (especially those published in Russian), and also serves the purpose of ousting Russian state and private media resources. Accordingly, the Estonian authorities are actively purging the country's socio-political space of alternative opinions. For these purposes, spy mania and anti-Russian (and in recent years, anti-Belarusian) hysteria are being whipped up, and the Estonian special services practice various methods of pressure on politicians, public figures, human rights defenders, and journalists who are disloyal to the authorities, as well as civil society activists who express views that differ from the official line on the country's domestic and foreign policy and its history. A constant figure in the KaPo yearbook, which lists "threats to national security," for example, is the human rights NGO Human Rights Information Centre. The NGO Russian School of Estonia is also constantly subjected to such public attention.

Indicative in this regard is the interview given by A. Sinisalu, Director of the Estonian Internal Security Service, to the Delfi news portal on June 1, 2020, in which he directly pointed out the "disloyalty" of the NGO Human Rights Information Centre (the oldest organization in the country specializing in the legal protection of the Russian and Russian-speaking community), and also openly stated the undesirability of having in Estonia those who disagree with the violation of the rights of national minorities.

One of the methods practiced by the special services to exert pressure on dissenters is the initiation of criminal cases under far-fetched pretexts. Thus, until 2018, a criminal case was being investigated for "providing false information" and "forgery of documents" against A.G. Kornilov, editor-in-chief of the Baltnews and Baltija portals, who was named a "propagandist and agent of Kremlin influence" in the KaPo yearbook for 2014 (after paying a large fine, the case was closed). In February 2019, a court verdict came into force against A.B. Krasnoglazov, a prominent Estonian Russian scholar and director of the NGO Tallinn Pushkin Institute, who was accused of "embezzlement of funds" and "forgery of

documents." In July 2019, M.Y. Rusakov, head of the human rights NGOs Kitezh and Russian School of Estonia, was detained and subjected to many hours of interrogation by the police. A purely civil lawsuit against him related to internal disagreements in the Estonian United Left Party was used by security forces to seize all his computer media and means of communication. In March 2020, the case against him was closed, but in April 2021, tax authorities launched an audit against M.Y. Rusakov.

At the end of March 2021, it became known that human rights defender and lawyer S.N. Seredenko had been detained in connection with a criminal charge brought against him for committing a crime against the Republic of Estonia (in August 2021, the case was sent to court). At the same time, the Estonian authorities concealed information about his arrest for almost a month.<sup>678</sup>

Estonian human rights defenders, as well as their colleagues from other Baltic countries, note that the reason for these illegal actions was the active work of S.N. Seredenko and other Russian activists in Estonia to preserve Russian-language education and protect monuments to Red Army soldiers who died in the battles for the liberation of the Republic from Nazism (including the Night Watch movement). S.N. Seredenko voluntarily performed the functions of the "Russian ombudsman" of Estonia for a long time. In addition, Estonian media outlets are processing public opinion in order to create a negative impression of the human rights defender. At the same time, many facts of pressure on him are deliberately hushed up. For example, it is not mentioned that S.N. Seredenko, having two higher educations, was recently forced to work as a janitor at the Maardu Gymnasium because, due to being labeled by the Security Police (KaPo), he could not find a job in his specialty. S.N. Seredenko also provided free legal advice to human rights defenders and activists of the Russian communities of Latvia and Lithuania.<sup>679</sup>

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<sup>678</sup> <https://lv.sputniknews.ru/world/20210330/15422485/estonia-arestovan-russkoyazychnyy-pravozaschitnik.html>

<sup>679</sup> <https://regnum.ru/news/polit/3236502.html>

The arrest of S.N. Seredenko caused a wide resonance among the public in the Baltic states. Actions in his support were held by Estonian NGOs representing the Russian-speaking community, members of the Estonian United Left Party,<sup>680</sup> representatives of the Latvian Russian Union (LRU), and other activists. MEPs T.A. Zhdanok (from Latvia)<sup>681</sup> and J. Toom (from Estonia)<sup>682</sup> drew attention to the persecution of S.N. Seredenko. In particular, T.A. Zhdanok, who is now herself subjected to severe pressure from the Latvian political establishment and the local "security services," noted that S.N. Seredenko participated in hearings in the European Parliament on the persecution of dissenters in the Baltic countries. It discussed the fates of A. Paleckis, A.V. Gaponenko, V.I. Linderman, and other human rights defenders who allowed themselves to freely express their own opinions. According to the MEP, the arrest of the human rights defender two years after those hearings in the European Parliament is an indicator that the situation has only worsened.<sup>683</sup> J. Toom pointed out that the arrest of S.N. Seredenko is "a very bad signal for those who believe that Estonia is an open state governed by the rule of law. Many representatives of the Russian-speaking community see arrogance and disrespect here. And indeed, it is unthinkable that there would be such deafening silence during the arrest of an Estonian-speaking political activist."<sup>684</sup>

The NGO Russian School of Estonia in the context of the "case" of S.N. Seredenko called on PACE to pay attention to the persecution of citizens in the country for dissent and noted the practice of establishing groundless criminal cases against people who in any way disagree with the general "correct opinion".<sup>685</sup>

The LRU party reported about an appeal sent in 2021 by representatives of the Russian community of the Baltic States, the European Parliament, the

<sup>680</sup> [https://sputnik-meedia.ee/Estonian\\_news/20210421/334498/V-Talline-proshel-uzhe-vtoroy-piket-Svobodu-pravozaschitniku-Sergeyu-Seredenko.html](https://sputnik-meedia.ee/Estonian_news/20210421/334498/V-Talline-proshel-uzhe-vtoroy-piket-Svobodu-pravozaschitniku-Sergeyu-Seredenko.html)

<sup>681</sup> <https://lv.sputniknews.ru/Latvia/20210408/15467802/Latviya-ugrozhaet-a-Estoniya-uzhe-sazhaet-v-Rige-trebuyut-osvobodit-pravozaschitnika-Seredenko.html>

<sup>682</sup> [https://sputnik-meedia.ee/Estonian\\_news/20210409/278143/Evrodeputat-Yana-Toom-prizvala-vnesti-yasnost-po-delu-Sergeya-Seredenko.html](https://sputnik-meedia.ee/Estonian_news/20210409/278143/Evrodeputat-Yana-Toom-prizvala-vnesti-yasnost-po-delu-Sergeya-Seredenko.html)

<sup>683</sup> <https://lv.sputniknews.ru/Latvia/20210408/15467802/Latviya-ugrozhaet-a-Estoniya-uzhe-sazhaet-v-Rige-trebuyut-osvobodit-pravozaschitnika-Seredenko.html>

<sup>684</sup> [https://sputnik-meedia.ee/Estonian\\_news/20210409/278143/Evrodeputat-Yana-Toom-prizvala-vnesti-yasnost-po-delu-Sergeya-Seredenko.html](https://sputnik-meedia.ee/Estonian_news/20210409/278143/Evrodeputat-Yana-Toom-prizvala-vnesti-yasnost-po-delu-Sergeya-Seredenko.html)

<sup>685</sup> [https://m.sputnik-meedia.ee/Estonian\\_news/20210426/360171/Russkaya-shkola-Estonii-prizvala-PASE-dat-otsenku-arestu-Sergeyu-Seredenko.html?mobile\\_return=no](https://m.sputnik-meedia.ee/Estonian_news/20210426/360171/Russkaya-shkola-Estonii-prizvala-PASE-dat-otsenku-arestu-Sergeyu-Seredenko.html?mobile_return=no)

Riigikogu and the Riga City Council to the then Estonian President K. Kaljulaid with a call to stop the persecution on political grounds of human rights defender S.N. Seredenko. Among the signatories of the open letter were MEP T.A. Zhdanok, Riga City Council members M.B. Mitrofanov, J.G. Pliner, V.V. Buzaev and A.V. Kuzmin, as well as Estonian MP (at the time) M.A. Stalnukhin.<sup>686</sup>

On 22 September 2022, an Estonian court sentenced S.N. Seredenko to five and a half years in prison. The trial was held behind closed doors, so the details of the case remained unknown for a long time. A month after the verdict was handed down, S.N. Seredenko contacted journalists and explained what his "crime" was. According to him, five different versions of the charges were consistently put forward during the investigation. The Estonian prosecutor's office could not articulate what the human rights defender's criminal activity was. Therefore, the case was heard in closed session. As a result, S.N. Seredenko was charged under Part 1 of Article 235(1) of the Penal Code of Estonia – acting against the interests of Estonia in favour of a foreign state. Russia was designated as such. The article is worded extremely vaguely and thus allows for broad interpretations. S.N. Seredenko's lawyer filed an appeal against the decision of the court of first instance,<sup>687</sup> but it was rejected.

In January 2024, S.N. Seredenko was denied transfer to an "open prison" with non-escorted detention, although under current Estonian law, he already had formal grounds for this in January 2024. The non-escorted regime allows prisoners to be outside the prison territory from morning to evening, working somewhere in the area. S.N. Seredenko planned to get a job at any enterprise where labour is required. Thus, he would have the opportunity, among other things, to pay the fine imposed by the court – more than 5,000 euros (this is how the court estimated

<sup>686</sup> <http://russkiymir.ru/news/287171/>

<sup>687</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/article/politika-i-obshchestvo/20221024-zhertva-rusofobskogo-rezhima-pravozashchitnika-posadili-za-pravdu-ob-unizhenii-russkikh-v-estonii/>, <https://rus.err.ee/1608724240/sergej-seredenko-poluchil-5-5-let-tjurmy-po-obvineniju-v-antigosudarstvennoj-deyatelnosti>

S.N. Seredenko's fees for his publications over 12 years on Russian portals).<sup>688</sup> However, he was refused this, although it is known that such a regime is granted to those convicted of violent crimes. In addition, the European Court of Human Rights refused to consider his complaint against the court verdict.<sup>689</sup>

On 3 September 2022, M.A. Stalnukhin, a member of the Riigikogu and the Narva City Council, was dishonourably expelled from the Centre Party for calling members of the Estonian government "fascists" and "Nazis" for their decision to "purge" Narva of "red" monuments. The recording was posted on the Slavia portal's account on YouTube.<sup>690</sup>

D.K. Klenskiy was expelled on 16 January 2023, from the Union of Journalists of Estonia for harsh criticism of the liquidation of the Soviet military memorial heritage in Estonia and manifestations of neo-Nazi tendencies in Estonian society, as well as violations of the rights and interests of the Russian-speaking population of the country.<sup>691</sup>

Another favourite method of the Estonian special services to deal with objectionable people is to formulate claims of a financial nature. Thus, A.B. Krasnoglazov, director of the NGO Tallinn Pushkin Institute, was forced to leave Estonia after his office was searched in June 2021 by employees of the Tax and Customs Department (under the Ministry of Finance).

In recent years, Russian media outlets have been forced to work in Estonia under conditions of open opposition from the authorities, who consider them to be conduits of "hostile propaganda." Thus, since 1 January 2020, the Estonian bureau of the Russian news agency Sputnik has ceased operations under the threat of criminal prosecution of the staff by the Money Laundering Data Bureau. Employment relations with this media outlet were unlawfully declared a violation of EU sanctions against D.K. Kiselev, Director General of Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency. As a result of these restrictions, 35 employees

<sup>688</sup> <https://baltija.eu/2024/01/17/estonskomu-politicheskomu-uzniku-sergeyu-seredenko-otkazano-v-perevode-na-beksonvojnij-rezhim/>

<sup>689</sup> <https://pravfond.ru/press-tsentr/politicheskij-uznik-pravozashchitnik-i-antifashist-sergey-seredenko-tri-goda-v-estonskoy-tyurme/>

<sup>690</sup> <https://rus.delfi.ee/statja/120062948/foto-mihaila-stalnuhina-isklyuchili-iz-centristskoy-partii>

<sup>691</sup> <https://baltija.eu/2023/01/30/dimitrij-klenskij-kak-menya-isklyuchali-iz-soyuza-zhurnalistov-estonii/>

(including three Russian citizens) lost their jobs. These actions were taken despite the fact that H. Désir, the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media at the time, noted in December 2019 that no sanctions had been imposed on Sputnik in the European Union. At the same time, he appealed to the Estonian authorities with a call to "refrain from unnecessary restrictions on the work of foreign media, which could negatively affect the free flow of information."

Since 20 March 2020, under pressure from state and law enforcement agencies, the daily news program Novosti Estonia has ceased broadcasting on Perviy Baltiyskiy Kanal (operating under a franchise from Channel One Russia).

The few journalists from Russian media accredited in the country have been denied access to official events without explanation. State and municipal officials avoid contact with them under formal pretexts. The Estonian authorities defiantly ignore requests and appeals from representatives of Russian media accredited in the country – Interfax, RIA Novosti, TASS, and VGTRK. Journalists do not receive newsletters and press releases from Estonian government agencies and are not allowed into government institutions. Financial pressure measures are also applied to them. Under pressure from the special services, banking structures refuse to serve them (accounts are closed, contractual obligations are unilaterally terminated without explanation, etc.).

The special military operation of the Russian Federation to denazify and demilitarize Ukraine and protect the civilian population of Donbass has become a serious catalyst for clearing the information space of Estonia of "disinformation and Kremlin propaganda." The Estonian authorities a priori began to view Russian media as instruments of influence.

As a result, in 2022, all the methods of pressure on journalists practiced by the Estonian special services began to be used with renewed vigour. Aggressive propaganda against everything connected with Russia was unleashed in the country. The Estonian information space was completely closed to alternative points of view, any "dissent" is interpreted as war propaganda and disinformation, Russian media are censored/closed, criminal cases are fabricated against

objectionable journalists, social networks are closely monitored, including the accounts of Russian diplomatic and consular missions in the country. Thus, in early March 2022, the online news portal Sputnik Meedia<sup>692</sup> announced the cessation of work due to pressure and restrictions from Estonian banks and authorities, as well as threats against its employees. During the year, banks in Estonia froze salaries and closed Sputnik accounts based on absurd suspicions of "money laundering, financing terrorism, and illegal alcohol sales." In addition, recently, many newsmakers have been forced to refuse to cooperate with the portal in such a difficult atmosphere, and the editor-in-chief and staff have begun to receive "open threats" from unknown persons.

On 6 April 2022, E. Cherysheva, editor-in-chief of Sputnik Meedia, was detained in Tallinn at the instigation of the Estonian Money Laundering Data Bureau on suspicion of violating sanctions. She faced up to five years in prison, but her defence managed to have the evidence in the case declared illegal. On 10 May 2022, the Harju County Court ruled that the seizure of property without a warrant during the search of Cherysheva's house was illegal, and, accordingly, the evidence obtained in this way was inadmissible. On 7 July 2022, the Tallinn District Court dismissed the appeal of Chief State Prosecutor T. Perna.

As a result of the Estonian authorities' efforts, by May 2022, more than 40 Russian and Russian-language TV channels (including Perviy Baltiyskiy Kanal, which rebroadcasts programs from Russia's Channel One in the Baltic countries), STS, REN TV, Rossiya 24, NTV+, and others) and more than 50 websites (including TASS, RT, RBC, Sputnik) had been banned in the country, the publication and sale of print media (Komsomolskaya Pravda in Northern Europe<sup>693</sup>) have also become impossible.

Official Tallinn decided not to limit itself to banning Russian TV channels, since Russian TV channels are available on the Internet. In April 2023, as part of the work to "protect Estonia's information space," the Consumer Protection and

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<sup>692</sup> The portal Sputnik Meedia was created by former employees of the news agency Sputnik Estonia, which was closed down two years before that due to strong pressure from the Estonian police.

<sup>693</sup> <https://rodina.ee/item/1208-pochemu-komsomol-skuyu-pravdu-v-severnoj-evrope-obyavili-bankrotom>



Technical Regulatory Authority (TTJA) demanded that Internet service providers block access to 53 sites where you can watch Russian TV channels.<sup>694</sup> However, apparently, the Estonian media regulator sees Estonian nursing homes that broadcast Russian TV channels as one of the main enemies. In February 2024, it became known that a draft law is under consideration that would give the aforementioned agency the right to issue an order to stop providing media services to an accommodation facility or other public space operator that provides the opportunity to watch a Russian TV channel.<sup>695</sup>

In the context of the growing Russophobic frenzy in Estonia, it is not surprising that Russian journalists are currently prohibited from engaging in professional activities in the country. An attempt to prepare a report on the dismantling of the T-34 tank monument in Narva led to the detention and expulsion on 17 August 2022, of Izvestiya correspondents K. Soldatova and D. Timofeev.

The Estonian authorities continue the practice of canceling residence permits (with the wording "poses a threat to Estonia's security") and expelling Russian citizens permanently residing here from the country, as well as banning them from entering the Schengen area for five years.

M. Reve, one of the defenders of the monument to the Soldier-Liberator during its outrageous relocation during the Bronze Night in 2007, had his residence permit revoked and was banned from entering the Schengen area for 10 years on security grounds ("threat to the constitutional order, terrorist crime or other serious crime").

On 27 April 2022, S.I. Chaulin, a Russian citizen, one of the organizers of the Immortal Regiment events and a member of the board of the NGO Russian Compatriots of Europe, was detained on suspicion of organizing illegal public events. He came to Tõnismägi (where the Bronze Soldier stood before its relocation) with flowers and candles, and on 14 February 2023, he was deprived of

<sup>694</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/05042023-v-estonii-zablokirovali-sayty-s-dostupom-k-rossiyskim-telekanalam/>

<sup>695</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/12022024-v-estonii-sobralis-shtrafovat-doma-prestarelykh-za-translyatsiyu-rossiyskikh-kanalov/>

his permanent residence permit and expelled from the country. On 9 May 2022, Y. Kalinina, an activist of the Russian-speaking community, was detained.

On 6 December 2022, the Police and Border Guard Board (under the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Estonia) sent a notification of the cancellation of the residence permit to A.G. Kornilov, editor-in-chief of the *baltija.eu* portal and member of the Coordinating Council of Russian Compatriots of Estonia (he has been in Russia since July 2022).

A similar measure was applied to A. Yesakov, a member of the board of the NGO Russian Compatriots of Europe and one of the organizers of the Immortal Regiment in Tallinn (expelled on 4 May 2022), R.T. Usmanov, an activist from Narva and former head of the South Estonian Afghan War Veterans Union (expelled on 14 June 2022), A. Sushev, an activist from Narva who was declared a "Kremlin provocateur" (expelled on 21 September 2022), and S.S. Neprimerov, chairman of the board of the Narva Union of Chernobyl Liquidators (expelled on 30 September 2022).

According to publicly available data, in 2022, the Police and Border Guard Board expelled 184 and denied entry to Estonia to 1,187 Russian citizens.

In June 2023, KaPo carried out a punitive action against Z. Palyamar, a member of the board of the NGO Russian Compatriots of Europe, annulling her residence permit for many years of participation in organizing the Tallinn Immortal Regiment and collecting and sending humanitarian aid to Donbass.

On 4 April 2023, under undisguised pressure from KaPo, the Coordinating Council of Russian Compatriots of Estonia was forced to cease its activities.

In addition, expulsions are also used against Russian citizens with criminal records, under the formal grounds of their having a "country of belonging." At the same time, the lack of stable ties with Russia (housing, work, relatives, etc.) for such a category is not taken into account, and as a result, they find themselves in unfavourable economic conditions.

The Estonian authorities also use the denial of entry to the Schengen area to "undesirable" third-country nationals as a means of pressure, applying it, as a rule,

against objectionable Russian politicians, journalists, historians, publicists, and public figures. Their visas are annulled, and long-term entry bans are imposed. If the victims try to defend their violated rights, Estonian courts, which are formally independent, rule against them, citing "national security interests." This practice was tightened even before the development of relevant directives by the European Union in 2023 by adopting amendments to the law on exit and entry in the fall of 2017 in connection with "significant changes in the modern environment and security architecture." These restrictions affected a number of Russian politicians and journalists, including K.F. Zatulin, a member of the State Duma of Russia, journalists P. Kostrikov, E. Erofeeva, A.V. Zakharov, and St. Petersburg activists A.A. Koveza, S.V. Khristenko, M.A. Pirogov, and A.S. Malikov.

The Estonian authorities, like the authorities of neighbouring Lithuania and Latvia, persecute not only Russian residents, but also ethnic Estonians who cooperate with Russians or do not support the official course of the authorities. The accusation of "espionage" has also become very common.

A criminal case was opened against A.N. Andronov, an activist of the compatriot movement and a Russian citizen, and A. Peterson, an Estonian citizen and leader of the Koos (Together for Peace in Estonia) movement, who received almost 4,000 votes in the predominantly Russian-speaking Ida-Viru County in the Riigikogu elections, and his associate D. Rootsi, who were detained on the night of 10 March 2023, on suspicion of violating Article 235.1 of the Penal Code of Estonia ("establishing and maintaining ties with Russia against Estonia... with the aim of committing a crime"; punishable by imprisonment for up to six years). The charges were later changed to Article 232 of the Penal Code of Estonia – "treason" (punishable by life imprisonment).

In early August 2024, the Swiss human rights organization Justice pour Tous Internationale / International Justice for All filed a complaint with six special procedures of the UN Human Rights Council, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, and the Permanent Representative of the Republic of Estonia to the UN Office and other international organizations in Geneva, R. Salsa-Audiffren,

calling for an end to the political persecution and abuse of state security legislation against Aivo Peterson for his legitimate and peaceful activities.<sup>696</sup>

Other party members have also been persecuted. On March 27, 2024, it became known that Russian-speaking journalist Svetlana Burtseva was arrested on March 1 on suspicion of violating international sanctions. These charges were brought against her in connection with her work for the online publication Baltnews, which is part of the Rossiya Segodnya media group. In addition, KaPo brought an additional charge against the journalist under the article "Actions against the Republic of Estonia." S. Burtseva previously worked as a journalist for Sputnik Eesti, which ceased operations in Estonia in 2019.<sup>697</sup> Since March 1, 2024, she has been in custody, and the court has rejected all requests from the defence to change the measure of restraint.<sup>698</sup> In August, the journalist was charged with "treason by non-violent actions against the independence and sovereignty of the Republic of Estonia."<sup>699</sup> The trial of S. Burtseva began on 1 November 2024.<sup>700</sup>

Cases where the Estonian authorities have used repressive measures against those who visited the Kaliningrad region and other Russian regions have been documented. Thus, M. Vlasov, a member of the Estonian curling team who took part in a tournament held in Svetlogorsk, Kaliningrad region, from 24 to 27 August 2023, was disqualified by the Estonian Curling Association until the end of the 2023/2024 season.<sup>701</sup> On 16 September 2024, the Senate of Tallinn University decided to revoke the honorary status of Emeritus Professor Rein Müllerson for participating in the St. Petersburg International Legal Forum (SPILF) in the summer of 2024. It is significant that the Senate explained its

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<sup>696</sup> <https://pravfond.ru/press-tsentr/stati/shveytsarskaya-pravozashchitnaya-organizatsiya-podala-zhalobu-v-oon-po-povodu-narusheniy-prav-chelov/>

<sup>697</sup> <https://baltija.eu/2024/03/27/v-estonii-arestovana-russkoyazychnaya-zhurnalistka-svetlana-burceva/>

<sup>698</sup> <https://ria.ru/20240815/burtseva-1966361431.html>

<sup>699</sup> <https://iz.ru/1738868/2024-08-06/v-estonii-zhurnalistku-burtcevu-obvinili-v-gosizmene>

<sup>700</sup> <https://pravfond.ru/press-tsentr/v-estonii-nachalsya-sud-po-delu-zhurnalistki-svetlany-burtsevoy-obvinennoy-v-gosudarstvennoy-izmene/>

<sup>701</sup> <https://rus.err.ee/1609085963/igravshij-v-rossii-jestonskij-kerlingist-mihail-vlasov-diskvalificirovan-do-konca-sezona>

decision by referring to the inadmissibility of cooperation with institutions of a country that the university has considered an aggressor since February 2022.<sup>702</sup>

For participating in the XXIII International Pushkin Competition for Russian language teachers in Moscow, E. Rudakovskaya-Borisova, an honored teacher of Russian with a doctoral degree, was dismissed from the Tallinn French Lyceum in September 2023.<sup>703</sup>

On 7 December 2023, KaPo detained A. Hantsom, former editor of the local Sputnik Estonia bureau (before its closure by the authorities in March 2022) and head of the Estlyandskie Vesti portal, on suspicion of conducting "intelligence activities against Estonia."<sup>704</sup> A month earlier, the Estonian Consumer Protection and Technical Supervision Board ordered him to remove ten publications about the dismantling of monuments to Soviet soldiers, the country's Ukrainianization and growing Russophobia due to "information disseminated on the website inciting hatred and violence on the basis of nationality, inciting war and justifying war crimes".<sup>705</sup> On 10 May 2024, it became known that the court sentenced A. Hantsom to six and a half years in prison for actions related to "intelligence activities" and support for these activities. The case details, "naturally", were classified.<sup>706</sup>

On 3 January 2024, V.E. Morozov, a Russian citizen who until recently worked as a lecturer in the theory of international politics at the University of Tartu, was detained by KaPo on suspicion of espionage against Estonia (part 1 of Article 234.2 of the Penal Code of Estonia).<sup>707</sup> After suspicions were raised against V.E. Morozov, his employment relationship with the institute was terminated. According to State Prosecutor Triinu Olev, the Russian citizen allegedly acted in

<sup>702</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/17092024-tallinskiy-universitet-lishil-pochetnogo-statusa-emeritprofessora-za-uchastie-v-pmyuf/>

<sup>703</sup> <https://rus.postimees.ee/7870542/ne-ponyala-suti-problemy-uchitelnica-russkogo-yazyka-prinyavshaya-uchastie-v-konkurse-rusistov-v-moskve-lishilas-raboty>

<sup>704</sup> <https://rus.err.ee/1609189342/kapo-zaderzhala-chlena-partii-koos-allana-hantsoma>

<sup>705</sup> <https://rus.postimees.ee/7889140/vzvalis-za-propagandu-prorossiyskomu-portalu-prikazano-udalit-materialy-ugrozhayushchie-bezopasnosti-estonii>

<sup>706</sup> [https://narvanews.com/p/estonia/estonianews/zhurnalist\\_allan\\_khantsom\\_prigovoren\\_k\\_tjurme\\_na\\_6\\_5\\_let\\_v\\_ehstonii/6-1-0-1222](https://narvanews.com/p/estonia/estonianews/zhurnalist_allan_khantsom_prigovoren_k_tjurme_na_6_5_let_v_ehstonii/6-1-0-1222), <https://pravfond.ru/press-tsentr/zhurnalist-allan-khantsom-priznan-vinovnym-v-razvedyvatelnoy-devyatelnosti-protiv-estonii/>

<sup>707</sup> [https://rus.err.ee/1609223\\_588/professora-tu-vjacheslava-morozova-zaderzhali-po-podozreniju-v-rabote-na-rossijskie-specsluzhby](https://rus.err.ee/1609223_588/professora-tu-vjacheslava-morozova-zaderzhali-po-podozreniju-v-rabote-na-rossijskie-specsluzhby)

the interests of Russian intelligence and security services and "had been doing so for a long time." Security Police Director General M. Palloson said that V.E. Morozov "regularly passed information to Russian agents" on Russian territory and allegedly received monetary remuneration.<sup>708</sup> On 18 June 2024, the Harju County Court found him guilty of espionage against the Republic of Estonia. He was sentenced to six years and three months in prison, starting from the date of his arrest on 3 January 2024.<sup>709</sup>

According to KaPo, on 20 January 2024, entrepreneur and anti-fascist A. Josu (also known as Andrey Trederson and Andrey Torganov), who allegedly has dual citizenship (Russia and Romania), was stripped of his permanent residence permit in Estonia and deported to Russia, since "his activities pose a threat to the security of Estonia."<sup>710,711</sup> Police officers in Jõhvi presented A. Josu with a notice of deprivation of his residence permit in Estonia and a deportation order. The businessman was not even given the opportunity to collect his belongings and was taken to the border with Russia in handcuffs on the same day.<sup>712</sup> The security services stated that the detainee was a "Kremlin provocateur who spreads disinformation about the Soviet Union as a liberator." In addition, KaPo noted that "the glorification and active support of the aggressor and rewriting history do not fit into Estonia's legal and value space. At the time of Russia's aggression against Ukraine, A. Josu condemns support for Ukraine and EU sanctions against Russia and tirelessly disseminates messages from the Russian authorities." One of the main points of accusation against the activist for anti-Estonian activities was that he ended his speech at the anti-war rally of the Koos/Together party with the anti-fascist movement's slogan "No pasaran!"<sup>713</sup>

On 2 April 2024, the Harju County Court found Estonian poet and musician Jüri Kivit guilty of insulting the Estonian national anthem and fined him. In total,

<sup>708</sup> <https://rtvi.com/news/v-estonii-rossijskogo-politologa-morozova-prigovorili-k-shesti-godam-tyurmy/>

<sup>709</sup> <https://pravfond.ru/press-tsentr/byvshiy-professor-tartuskogo-universiteta-vyacheslav-morozov-prigovoren-k-6-3-godam-za-shpionazh/>

<sup>710</sup> <https://rus.postimees.ee/7944631/ugroza-gosbezopasnosti-zhitelya-estonii-lishili-vnzh-i-vyslali-v-rossiyu>

<sup>711</sup> According to A. Josu himself, he has only a Russian visa and was deported to Russia at his own request because his car was located there.

<sup>712</sup> <https://ruskiymir.ru/news/321968/>

<sup>713</sup> <https://pravfond.ru/press-tsentr/vlasti-estonii-deportirovali-v-rossiyu-antifashista-andreya-tredersona/>

he will have to pay several thousand euros. A criminal case against J. Kivit was opened in October 2022 when he posted the music video "My Country Has Gone Mad," based on the Estonian anthem, on social media. According to the Estonian prosecutor's office, in this composition, the musician mocked the Republic of Estonia and denigrated its official symbol. J. Kivit is known to many in Estonia for his poems and humorous songs on topical issues, which have long irritated the Estonian authorities.<sup>714</sup>

In October 2024, KaPo stated that persons with dual Russian and Estonian citizenship pose a threat to national security for the authorities in Tallinn because of the alleged possibility of recruitment by Russian special services. "These people themselves are not a problem. Russia creates this problem by finding among these people those who can be recruited. This has been happening more and more often in recent years," the Estonian Security Police said in a statement.<sup>715</sup>

The Estonian ruling regime readily responds to requests from third countries that launch trumped-up persecution of Russian citizens. On 30 January 2023, the Estonian side received an official request for the extradition of Russian citizen V.V. Konoschenok to the United States. After considering it, the Harju County Court made a positive decision on it. The Tallinn District Court dismissed the appeal against the extradition decision. On 13 July 2023, Russian citizen V.V. Konoschenok was extradited to the United States, where he was charged with criminal conspiracy to defraud US government agencies, violating the anti-Russian sanctions regime, the Export Control Reform Act, and smuggling dual-use goods, including those originating from the United States (paragraph 371, clause 18; paragraph 554, clause 18 of the US Code).<sup>716</sup>

To intimidate our compatriots, reports of punitive measures taken against those who disobeyed, i.e., those who allowed themselves to have their own

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<sup>714</sup> <https://baltija.eu/2023/07/21/poet-i-muzykant-yuri-kivit-schital-sebya-estonczem-poka-ne-uvidel-kak-gosudarstvo-oboshlos-s-russkimi/>, <https://pravfond.ru/press-tsentr/muzykant-yuri-kivit-zaplatit-krupnyy-shtraf-za-oskorblenie-gosudarstvennogo-gimna-estonii/>

<sup>715</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/14102024-v-estonii-lyudey-s-dvoynym-grazhdanstvom-obyavili-ugrozoy-bezopasnosti/>

<sup>716</sup> V.V. Konoschenok returned to his homeland as a result of a prisoner exchange between Russia and a number of Western countries.



opinion, are periodically published in the local pro-government media. In March 2023, the State Court ruled that a woman who posted a congratulatory message with the image of the Russian Airborne Forces symbols in a public Facebook group on 2 August 2022, was "guilty of supporting and justifying crimes committed by the Russian armed forces in Ukraine" and fined her 120 euros.<sup>717</sup> In April, after the State Court dismissed a cassation appeal by a resident of Narva, the decision of the Ida Prefecture to impose a fine of 444 euros on him for wearing a T-shirt with the inscription "USSR" on 9 May 2022, entered into force.<sup>718</sup> On 4 September 2023, in Kohtla-Järve, police officers threw an elderly man to the ground and handcuffed him. The reason was a St. George ribbon attached to the rearview mirror of his car.<sup>719</sup> Under the same pretext, on 12 September 2023, another driver in Narva was fined 400 euros.<sup>720</sup> A Polish citizen entering Estonia from Russia paid the same amount on 18 September.<sup>721</sup> At the end of September 2023, an Estonian resident was ordered to pay 500 euros for using the sticker "I am Russian."<sup>722</sup> On 5 October, the police opened a criminal investigation into two men who played the Russian anthem in the courtyard of one of the houses in the Mustamäe district of the capital.<sup>723</sup> In the middle of the same month, a Russian citizen entering the republic from Russia was fined 400 euros for a St. George ribbon attached to the rearview mirror of his car.<sup>724</sup> On 23 October 2023, an Estonian citizen crossing the Russian-Estonian border was fined 400 euros for wearing a hat with the USSR coat of arms.<sup>725</sup>

While watching a festive concert organized by Narva residents on 9 May 2023, in Ivangorod, on the Russian side of the Narva River, V.V. Sorokin

<sup>717</sup> <https://rus.err.ee/1608909434/gossud-shtraf-za-publikaciju-v-Facebook-fotografii-rossijskih-desantnikov-byl-obosnovan>

<sup>718</sup> <https://rus.err.ee/1608941975/noshenie-futbolki-s-nadpisju-sssr-oboshlos-narvitjaninu-v-444-evro>

<sup>719</sup> <https://rus.postimees.ee/7850034/zalomali-dedushku-za-lentochku-zhiteli-estonii-sporyat-s-policiey-iz-za-zaderzhaniya-voditelya-v-kohtla-yarve>

<sup>720</sup> <https://rus.err.ee/1609097381/v-narve-voditelju-avtomobilja-prishlos-zaplatit-za-georgievskuju-lentochku-400-evro>

<sup>721</sup> <https://rus.err.ee/1609103672/na-granice-v-narve-za-georgievskuju-lentochku-oshtrafovali-grazhdanina-polshi>

<sup>722</sup> <https://rus.err.ee/1609117379/policija-oshtrafovala-na-500-evro-iniciatora-ispolzovaniya-naklejki-ja-russkij>

<sup>723</sup> <https://rus.delfi.ee/statja/120237622/video-publichnoe-i-gromkoe-ispolnenie-gimna-rf-povleklo-dlya-dvuh-muzhchin-vozbuzhdenie-policiey-dela>

<sup>724</sup> <https://rus.postimees.ee/7876986/grazhdanina-rossii-nakazali-za-georgievskuju-lentochku-nemalym-shtrafom>

<sup>725</sup> <https://rus.postimees.ee/7881964/priezd-v-estoniyu-v-shapke-s-gerbom-sovetskogo-soyuza-oboshelsya-v-400-evro>



was detained as a result of a conflict with local blogger D. Kurakin.<sup>726</sup> On the embankment, D. Kurakin unfurled a Ukrainian flag towards Russia, by which he said he wanted to express his protest against the "revelry of victory worship" in Ivangorod and show Russians that "Estonia opposes russist ideology." The blogger's insulting behaviour caused outrage among the assembled compatriots. The provocateur responded rudely to requests to stop his action. As a result, V.V. Sorokin, unable to restrain himself, tried to snatch the flag from the blogger's hands. During the ensuing scuffle, D. Kurakin was pushed from the edge of the promenade onto the steps leading down to the river.

After this incident, V.V. Sorokin was sentenced by the court to one year and three months of suspended imprisonment on charges of "disturbing public order." A compatriot who had no previous convictions was given a probationary period of one year and nine months, and was also ordered to pay court costs in the amount of 687.75 euros. In addition, a case was opened against him for an offense for using the St. George ribbon. No action was taken against provocateur D. Kurakin.

Along with the above individual cases of persecution of Russians, the Estonian authorities, under the pretext of Russia's special military operation, intensified pressure on Russian-speaking residents of the country as a whole in 2022, starting by infringing on their rights in the labour sphere. On 18 March 2022, the Estonian Labour Inspectorate notified employers that if an employee is seen with a St. George ribbon, the symbol "Z," or using the Russian flag on social networks, it is necessary to proceed from the fact that "incitement to war and incitement to hatred, in accordance with the Penal Code of Estonia, are crimes and give the right to terminate employment relations due to loss of confidence on the basis of part 1, clause 5 of Article 88 of the Law on Employment Contracts."

This recommendation justifies managers on the ground who acted in this way on their own initiative. Thus, L. Betlem, head of Elron (commuter rail service), informed employees on 1 March 2022, that it was unacceptable to express "support for the Russian criminal regime" on social networks. It was announced

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<sup>726</sup> <https://rus.postimees.ee/7775283/mid-rossii-podderzhal-napadenie-na-aktivista-s-ukrainskim-flagom-v-narve>

that those who are seen doing this will have their employment contracts terminated for "loss of confidence and damage to the employer's reputation."

On 25 March 2022, President A. Karis stated that war propaganda could lead to criminal liability and called on the Riigikogu to define symbols that justify "Russia's aggression." The Fatherland faction in parliament introduced a bill to ban the use of symbols in Estonia's public space in support of "aggressive war." On 21 April 2022, the Riigikogu banned the display of "hostile symbols" in public spaces.<sup>727</sup>

Estonian law enforcement and security agencies are taking measures to identify pro-Russian citizens. On 8 March 2022, the Police and Border Guard Board urged social media users to promptly inform web police about "questionable posts" (i.e., pro-Russian publications) for their verification for the presence of "incitement to war and incitement to hatred." The next day, KaPo clarified that "egregious cases" of activity on social networks should be immediately reported to this special service.

On 22 March 2022, the faction of the Conservative People's Party of Estonia (EKRE) in the Riigikogu introduced openly discriminatory amendments to the Law on Weapons, which provide for the right to own weapons only for citizens of EU and NATO member states. The relevant bill was approved on 22 February 2023 (permits for Russian citizens are valid for one year, after which the weapons are forcibly confiscated).<sup>728</sup>

However, the Estonian authorities began revoking gun licenses even before the law came into force. Thus, the Police and Border Guard Board revoked the right to own weapons from three residents of the Russian-speaking Ida-Viru County for "actively opposing" the relocation of the T-34 tank memorial in Narva, since this allegedly "posed a threat to public order and state security." An attempt

<sup>727</sup> <https://rus.err.ee/1608571405/riigikogu-v-preddverii-9-maja-prinjal-zakon-o-zaprete-vrazhdebnoj-simvoliki>

<sup>728</sup> <https://www.riigikogu.ee/ru/press-relizy/pravovaya-komissiya-ru/riigikogu-prinyal-popravki-k-zakonu-ob-oruzhii/>

by one of the compatriots to challenge the decision in the Tartu Administrative Court in October 2023 was unsuccessful.<sup>729</sup>

Amidst a wave of Russophobia, a number of leading Estonian universities announced as if on cue that they oppose "aggression" and therefore decided not to accept applicants from Russia for education in the 2022/2023 academic year: the University of Tartu on 7 March 2022,<sup>730</sup> the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre on 24 March 2022,<sup>731</sup> and Tallinn University of Technology on 4 April 2022.<sup>732</sup> It is characteristic that these decisions were welcomed by M. Arpo, Deputy Director General of KaPo, who called them a "solidarity reaction of the democratic world to aggression and war crimes of Russia."<sup>733</sup>

On 3 March 2022, the Tallinn Alexela Concert Hall canceled the performance of the St. Petersburg Eifman Ballet scheduled for 11 March 2022.

Since 13 September 2023, after the European Union developed another set of restrictions aimed directly at Russian citizens, Estonia introduced a ban on entry into the country for cars registered in Russia.<sup>734</sup>

On 22 December 2023, Prime Minister K. Kallas announced that the country's authorities are looking for ways to deport Estonian residents who have decided to obtain Russian citizenship. She compared the desire to become a Russian citizen to supporting terrorism and a threat to the country. Estonian Interior Minister L. Läänemets also made a similar proposal, stating the possibility of deporting residents of the country who have become Russian citizens.<sup>735</sup>

On 20 December 2023, the prime ministers of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia reached an agreement on a unified approach within the framework of applying EU sanctions against Russia and Belarus. In January 2024, the heads of customs

<sup>729</sup> <https://rus.err.ee/1609147967/gosudarstvo-otobralo-razreshenie-na-oruzhie-u-zawitnikov-sovetskogo-tankapamjatnika-v-narve>

<sup>730</sup> <https://rus.err.ee/1608525092/tartuskij-universitet-s-oseni-ogranichit-priem-grazhdan-rossii-i-belarusi>

<sup>731</sup> <https://rus.err.ee/1608543355/jestonskaja-akademija-muzyki-i-teatra-priostanavlivaet-priem-grazhdan-rf-i-respubliki-belarusi>

<sup>732</sup> <https://rus.postimees.ee/7493048/tallinnskiy-universitet-bolee-ne-primet-na-obuchenie-rossijskih-i-belorusskih-studentov>

<sup>733</sup> <https://rus.err.ee/1608540403/kapo-ogranichenija-na-priem-rossijskih-studentov-ne-nakazanie-a-preventivnaja-mera>

<sup>734</sup> <https://www.gazeta.ru/auto/news/2023/09/13/21276224.shtml?updated>

<sup>735</sup> <https://www.gazeta.ru/auto/news/2023/09/13/21276224.shtml?updated>

services of the three Baltic states signed an agreement to develop the aforementioned agreements.<sup>736</sup> The declared attitude differs from what is implemented in practice, where even family members of Estonian leaders demonstrate a different attitude towards this regime.

At the end of August 2023, a scandal erupted in the country when it became known that the husband of the Estonian Prime Minister, A. Hallik, had earned over one and a half million euros since February 2022 on transporting goods between Estonia and Russia. Information also leaked to the media that K. Kallas twice accompanied A. Hallik at events related to his company, and also invested 370,000 euros in the family business – with a declared total income of 248,000 euros over the past three years. At the same time, the double standards of the head of the Estonian government, who actually put pressure on Estonian entrepreneurs, persuading them to "acquire a moral compass" and abandon "grey" supplies from Russia, while in fact eliminating competitors for a member of her family, were also noted.<sup>737</sup> There was no information in the public domain that specialized anti-corruption agencies in Estonia were interested in this story.

In early 2024, a discussion resumed in the Estonian leadership regarding the need to "temporarily suspend" the right of citizens of "aggressor states" (Russia and Belarus) residing in the republic to vote in municipal elections "until the end of the war." According to Prime Minister K. Kallas, if earlier the parliament wanted to adopt a special law to implement this plan ("following the example of depriving prisoners of voting rights"), now, taking into account the opinion expressed by President A. Karis and Chancellor of Justice Ü. Madise about its unconstitutionality, the Reform Party will seek to amend the country's basic law.<sup>738</sup>

In early November 2024, Prime Minister K. Michal announced that the ruling parties of Estonia had agreed to introduce these amendments to the Constitution in order to deprive Russian and Belarusian citizens of the right to vote

<sup>736</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/26012024-tamozhni-pribaltiki-dogovorilis-edinoobrazno-primenyat-sanktsii-protiv-rf/>

<sup>737</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/article/politika-i-obshchestvo/20231123-patalogicheskaya-rusofobka-bez-printsipov-kto-vozzhelal-stat-gensekom-nato/>

<sup>738</sup> <https://rus.err.ee/1609224843/kaja-kallas-lishenie-vseh-grazhdan-rossii-izbiratel'nogo-prava-trebuetsya-vremeni>

in municipal elections. The draft law was submitted to the Riigikogu on 7 November 2024. The proposed amendments will grant the right to vote in local elections in Estonia only to citizens of NATO countries, the EU, the European Economic Area, Switzerland, and states that have concluded special agreements with Estonia, including possibly Ukraine, as well as non-citizens. Of the 980,000 voters registered today, this innovation will affect about 69,000 Russian and Belarusian citizens living in Estonia.<sup>739</sup>

In mid-January 2024, the Border Guard Service announced that Estonia could close checkpoints on the border with Russia. Estonian officials cited the fact that in recent weeks Russia "deliberately sent groups of foreigners who do not have the legal right to enter the European Union to the Estonian border".<sup>740</sup>

On 19 January 2024, the Estonian government approved a bill to denounce the treaty with Russia on legal assistance and legal relations in civil, family, and criminal matters. Commenting on this step, Estonian agencies noted that Estonia "will maintain bilateral relations with Russia only at the absolute minimum level" and such a line will be pursued "until the end of hostilities in Ukraine".<sup>741</sup>

In February 2024, the Estonian authorities launched a campaign to intimidate Russian citizens living in the country in order to reduce turnout in the 17 March Russian presidential election. Attempts are being made in the Estonian media to exert psychological pressure on Russians. Russian voters are unequivocally "warned" about the consequences of participating in the vote, which is equated with "supporting mass falsification" and "aggression against Ukraine." Along with this, as of February 2024, the Estonian authorities have not responded to Russia's request, in accordance with the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, to ensure security at the polling station during the presidential elections.

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<sup>739</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/04112024-estoniya-izmenit-konstitutsiyu-chtoby-lishit-rossiyan-i-belorusov-prava-golosa/>

<sup>740</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/14022024-pogranyluzhba-estonii-zayavila-o-vozmozhnom-zakrytii-granitsy-s-rossiey/>

<sup>741</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/18012024-pravitelstvo-estonii-odobrilo-denonsatsiyu-dogovora-s-rf-o-pravovoy-pomoshchi/>

Following their ideological inspirers, the German Nazis, the Estonian authorities began to suppress any manifestations of belonging to Russian nationality and culture.

In the fall of 2023, ten employees of the local police department were dismissed in Russian-speaking Narva, since their level of Estonian proficiency did not meet the C1 level.<sup>742</sup>

The Estonian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (EOC MP) and its primate, Metropolitan Eugene of Tallinn and All Estonia, are also persecuted by the Estonian state. After the start of the special military operation, nationalist forces called the EOC MP a "conduit for Moscow's interests." On 27 September 2022, Interior Minister L. Läänemets said he expected Metropolitan Eugene to condemn Patriarch Kirill's statements, since "a church that calls on Russians to kill Ukrainians cannot operate in the country." The Estonian official also threatened to revoke the clergyman's residence permit if he did not hear about his public position by 12 October. On that day, Metropolitan Eugene published his letter to the ministers of internal affairs and justice, noting that he "does not share" the words spoken by Patriarch Kirill in a sermon on 25 September 2022. He also assured that no "actions are being taken in the parishes of the EOC MP to promote war and incite hatred."

At the end of 2022, the Estonian parliament deprived the Estonian Orthodox Church of financial assistance, removing it from the list of organizations receiving regional investments.

All this was not enough for the Estonian authorities. On 18 January 2024, the Police and Border Guard Board announced that it would not renew the residence permit of Metropolitan Eugene, primate of the Estonian Orthodox Church, and that he must leave Estonia by 6 February.<sup>743</sup> According to I. Aru, head of the border guard bureau of the Police and Border Guard Board, the "Estonian state's" decision to refuse to extend the residence permit to the head of the EOC is

<sup>742</sup> <https://severnojepoberezhje.postimees.ee/7887032/v-narve-uvolili-desyatelyh-policeyskih-iz-za-yazykovogo-nesootvetstviya>

<sup>743</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/06022024-glava-estonskoy-pravoslavnoy-tserkvi-pokidaet-estoniyu/>

due to the fact that he "supports the aggressor and, despite repeated warnings, has not changed his behaviour, which does not correspond to the values and legal framework of Estonia."<sup>744</sup> However, even these measures by the Estonian authorities cannot influence who will head the diocese of the canonical Orthodox Church. In an address to the flock published on the church's website, the primate of the EOC noted that he would continue to administer the church remotely.

On 14 April 2024, a new coalition agreement was signed in Tallinn between the Reform Party, the Social Democratic Party, and the Eesti 200 and Isamaa parties, which includes a provision stating that "the city will terminate contracts and no longer support individuals, organizations and projects that increase the influence of the Russian Federation."<sup>745</sup>

Nationalist circles in Estonia continue to increase pressure on the EOC. The media reports that Estonian Interior Ministry officials are meeting with clergy and parishioners, urging them to break all ties with Moscow. Estonian law enforcement officials recommend considering the Latvian option, where the church is completely autocephalous. Another option voiced is the transfer of the Estonian church to the jurisdiction of the Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

On 23 April 2024, Interior Minister L. Läänemets visited the Pühtitsa Convent in Kuremäe, which has stavropegial status, to persuade its leadership not to cooperate with the Moscow Patriarchate. L. Läänemets noted that the state intends to give churches and parishes the opportunity to make their own decisions. However, he made it clear that if the church parishes do not make the "right" decisions, they will face forced termination of their activities by decision of the state. The minister bluntly stated that parishes "that are subordinate to Patriarch Kirill, that is, Moscow, may face problems. If they do not make their own

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<sup>744</sup> <https://rus.err.ee/1609225491/jestonija-ne-stala-prodlevat-vnzh-mitropolita-evgenija-6-fevralja-on-dolzhen-pokinut-stranu>.

<sup>745</sup> <https://baltija.eu/2024/04/23/igumeniya-filareta-predlozhila-pravitelstvu-estonii-obratitsya-k-patriarhu-kirillu-s-predlozheniem-smeny-statusa-pyuhticzkoj-obiteli/>



decisions, the state will ultimately be forced to seek the termination of their activities through the courts. However, the issues can certainly be resolved."<sup>746</sup>

In a statement published by the monastery, it was noted that the stavropegial status of the monastery is enshrined in its charter, which states that a change of jurisdiction is impossible, and therefore the monastery itself cannot initiate a renunciation of stavropegial status. Therefore, the monastery proposed that the Estonian government, represented by the Minister of Internal Affairs, who insists on changing the monastery's jurisdiction, as the initiator of the process, should appeal to Patriarch Kirill with a proposal to abolish the monastery's stavropegial status.<sup>747</sup> In the monastery's official response sent in October 2024, the abbess of the monastery, Abbess Philareta, explained that the monastery does not have the authority to do so. "We were forced to thoroughly study this issue in the context of inter-church relations. As a result, we can say that such an initiative on the part of the monastery would literally mean spiritual death for our nuns, because then unity with the Universal Church would be lost, and, worst of all, the presence of the Holy Spirit," the monastery's message says. Abbess Philareta also emphasized the apolitical nature of the monastery and noted that the Pühtitsa Convent does not interfere in political or secular affairs, and its activities are exclusively for spiritual purposes.<sup>748</sup>

On 25 April 2024, a delegation of the Estonian Ministry of Internal Affairs visited the Narva Resurrection Cathedral. Representatives of the ministry proposed that the parish either break off canonical ties with Moscow or come under the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. In this case, the security forces also resorted to threats, indicating that if it is not possible to reach a consensus during

<sup>746</sup> <https://baltija.eu/2024/04/23/igumeniya-filareta-predlozhila-pravitelstvu-estonii-obratitsya-k-patriarhu-kirillu-s-predlozheniem-smeny-statusa-pyuhticzkoj-obiteli/>

<sup>747</sup> [https://www.puhtitsa.ee/index.php?view=article&id=378&catid=18&fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTAAAR3ytrgNJZB0sSfWYAOgi2vdAB-aKbyGT6Dm9MOxImdLkdnbjO-V6-flr0g\\_aem\\_AXxs-3n0mveXI-2RVzsXdgaCE04qqZibQkGW7aGyGs974iax7Hpr6EBVFOWcg4xCrzlrPfG2fFoZFCT\\_XTFJzfqr](https://www.puhtitsa.ee/index.php?view=article&id=378&catid=18&fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTAAAR3ytrgNJZB0sSfWYAOgi2vdAB-aKbyGT6Dm9MOxImdLkdnbjO-V6-flr0g_aem_AXxs-3n0mveXI-2RVzsXdgaCE04qqZibQkGW7aGyGs974iax7Hpr6EBVFOWcg4xCrzlrPfG2fFoZFCT_XTFJzfqr)

<sup>748</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/01112024-zhenskiy-monastyr-v-estonii-otkazalsya-vykhodit-iz-podchineniya-rpts/>



the negotiations, "the use of the legally stipulated mechanism of forced liquidation cannot be ruled out."<sup>749</sup>

Another step in the undisguised pressure on the Estonian Orthodox Church was the adoption by the Estonian parliament on 6 May 2024, of a statement condemning the Moscow Patriarchate for supporting Russia's special military operation and calling on the EOC MP to break ties with it. Among other things, the statement says that it is necessary to recognize the Moscow Patriarchate as an "institution supporting the military aggression of the Russian Federation." It also notes that "Orthodox associations and parishes must also independently assess the threat to public order and their members posed by hostile influence activities and take the necessary steps to end ties with the Moscow Patriarchate."<sup>750</sup> In mid-April 2024, Estonian Interior Minister L. Läänemets proposed to the Riigikogu that the Moscow Patriarchate be declared a terrorist organization that supports terrorism in its activities. This recognition would give the Ministry of Internal Affairs the opportunity to apply to the court with an initiative to terminate the activities of the EOC.<sup>751</sup>

Due to the ongoing pressure, in August 2024, by decision of the Church Council (the highest governing body), the EOC removed the mention of the Moscow Patriarchate from its name. At the same time, a new version of the Church Charter was approved, which enshrined the EOC's independence in church-administrative, economic, educational, and civil affairs.<sup>752</sup>

Efforts to suppress the activities of Russian activists who advocate for preserving the memory of the exploits of the Red Army in the fight against fascism, and large-scale discrimination against the Russian-speaking population convincingly confirm that Estonia has fully joined in supporting neo-Nazism and is putting these hateful ideas into practice.

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<sup>749</sup> <https://baltnews.com/v-ehstonii/20240426/1026278607/Raskol-pravoslavnoy-semi-Kak-vlast-vmeshivaetsya-v-dela-tserkvi.html>

<sup>750</sup> <https://www.interfax.ru/world/959219>

<sup>751</sup> <https://t.me/baltnews/45218>

<sup>752</sup> <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/20082024-v-estonii-i-na-ukraine-idut-na-raskol-pravoslavnykh/>



## **Japan**

Following the beginning of the special military operation to denazify and demilitarize Ukraine and protect the civilians of Donbass (SMO) by the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, a campaign against Russia and its citizens unprecedented in its Russophobic nature has been launched in the country.

The hostile rhetoric combined with the anti-Russian policy pursued by the Japanese government is projected on the daily lives of Russian citizens in Japan and leads to the violation of their social and economic rights.

Since the start of the SMO, consular offices of the Russian Federation have been documenting facts of domestic violence in mixed families and ethnic harassment at work in Japanese companies. A number of institutions artificially created a work environment in which their Russian employees, for fear of being fired, did not openly express their patriotic positions.

On 3 March 2022, there was an illustrative case when a Russian goods shop named "Red Square" in Tokyo was vandalized: an intruder (a US citizen of Ukrainian descent) smashed the sign at the entrance.

Other disturbing examples include attempts by a number of hotels to refuse to accommodate Russians (February-March 2022; the incidents were promptly resolved after direct intervention by city authorities). The intention to hide Russian-language signs at Tokyo's Ebisu station in April 2022, allegedly due to complaints from passengers who found them inappropriate in the context of the situation in Ukraine, was quite illustrative (the signs were returned a week later after a wave of criticism against the management of the JR East Transportation Company).

There are still discriminatory measures introduced at customs inspection points of Japanese airports for persons travelling to Russia in 2022. It is prohibited to export "luxury goods" (clothes, shoes, hats, laptops, ceramics, furs, jewelry, watches, perfumes, etc.), that cost more than 40,000 yen (about USD 270). Restrictions apply to cash up to 100,000 yen (about USD 680).

Special rooms have been organized at border crossing points (airports, seaports), where passengers, prior to check-in, travelling for Russia, regardless of their nationality, are subjected to additional checks for compliance with the illegal restrictive measures imposed by the Japanese government.

It should be noted that official Tokyo has made certain efforts to curb discrimination against Russians in the Japanese society, the manifestations of which were described as "unacceptable and inappropriate"<sup>753</sup> by Chief Cabinet Secretary Minister Hirokazu Matsuno and Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi in 2022.

Attempts to put pressure on Russian foreign institutions are common: there are regular unfriendly and offensive actions, pickets and demonstrations in front of the diplomatic mission and consular buildings, and threatening phone calls and mails. There are certain difficulties associated with the fact that a number of management companies refuse to fulfill their contractual obligations or conclude new contracts, referring to "international turmoil."

In May 2024, prior to the opening of the Festival of Russian Culture in Japan, posters with "Down with the Festival of Russian Culture" slogan were put up on buildings close to the concert hall in Tokyo, and threats were made against the Japanese employees of its organizing committee. There have been periodic calls from some Japanese politicians to ban the event.

In the course of the Russophobic campaign of 2022-2024, contacts of political, business and public circles of Japan with the Ambassador of the Russian Federation in Tokyo were completely suspended with obvious prompting of the official authorities.

An outrageous act of protocol discrimination was the refusal (for the first time in almost 50 years) of the Japanese side to invite the head of the Russian diplomatic mission to the memorial ceremonies in August on the occasion of the another anniversaries of the US atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 2022, 2023 and 2024. In addition, the Hiroshima authorities, effectively

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<sup>753</sup> <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2022/04/20/national/yoshimasa-hayashi-russian-discrimination-concerns/>

desecrating the memory of the victims of the nuclear catastrophe caused by the United States, threw away a wreath laid at the city's memorial by the Russian ambassador, who himself visited the city in 2022.

The Russian visa centre (Tokyo) received anonymous threats and demands that our compatriots "get out of Japan."

Similar "appeals" have been sent to the Moscow Patriarchate in Tokyo, as well as to the clergy of the Autonomous Orthodox Church of Japan.

In July 2024, Andrey Sova, a Russian citizen, who lives in Japan, was detained on suspicion of supplying goods under sanctions to Russia via third countries. In response to an official appeal by the Russian Embassy in Tokyo demanding the immediate release of Andrey Sova, the Japanese Foreign Ministry, trying to justify the actions of the Japanese law enforcement agencies, referred to "restrictive measures imposed in the context of the situation in Ukraine."

In October 2023, an attempt was made to replace the flag of the Russian Federation with a "protest" flag (white with a blue stripe), which is prohibited in our country, on the signboard of the Far Eastern Federal University (FEFU) branch in Hakodate.

On 12 June 2024, information about the termination of enrolment of applicants for 2025-2026 by the educational institution was posted on the official website of the Branch of FEFU in Hakodate. Against the background of the Russophobic campaign launched in the country after the start of the special military operation, the Branch management does not exclude the possibility of a complete closure of the university's unit in Japan.

In 2023-2024, the Russian Embassy managed to carry out a number of planned war memorial activities. Solemn actions were held at the monument to Richard Sorge, Hero of the Soviet Union (laying wreaths on 23 February, 9 May and 7 November), attended by representatives of embassies of friendly countries, as well as compatriots and participants of the Russia's Immortal Regiment action.

It should be noted that there were significantly fewer attempts to "bully" Russians in 2023-2024. However, numerous cases of refusal by Japanese consular

authorities to issue visas to Russian citizens living in the Southern Kuril Islands, the Republic of Crimea and the new constituent entities of the Russian Federation (the Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republics, the Kherson and Zaporozhye Oblasts) constitute the main element of the manifestation of Russophobia today.

In recent years, Russophobia has spread in the territory of the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija (Republic of Serbia) along with established Serbophobia. However, the provisional self-governing bodies in Pristina have long pursued an anti-Russian policy, regarding Moscow as the key opponent of Kosovo's pseudo-statehood.

In September 2022, the "government" of Kosovo tightened visa requirements for Russian citizens, canceling the earlier visa-free regime for holders of diplomatic and service passports, residence permits in Schengen countries, and multiple-entry Schengen visas.

In February 2022, under the pretext of "preventing propaganda and ensuring public safety," Kosovo's so-called "Independent Media Commission" banned the broadcasting of all Russian television channels whose main audience was the province's Serb community.

On 24 September 2021, in violation of media freedom principles, Kosovo's "law enforcement authorities" denied two journalists from Russia's Channel Five to enter the province.

The Kosovo's "police" involved in the detention and beating of Mikhail Krasnoshchekov, a Russian citizen and a staff member of the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), in May 2019 have not yet been brought to justice. The solution to his case is still pending. Nevertheless, the issue at the initiative of the Russian side is regularly raised at thematic meetings of the United Nations Security Council and in contacts with United Nations representatives.

In December 2021, Andrey Antonov, a Russian citizen who worked in UNMIK, was declared persona non grata in violation of international legal norms.

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<sup>754</sup> Since NATO's aggression against Yugoslavia in 1999, the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija has been de facto not controlled by Belgrade. However, UN Security Council resolution 1244 reaffirms Serbia's sovereignty and territorial integrity with regards to Kosovo.