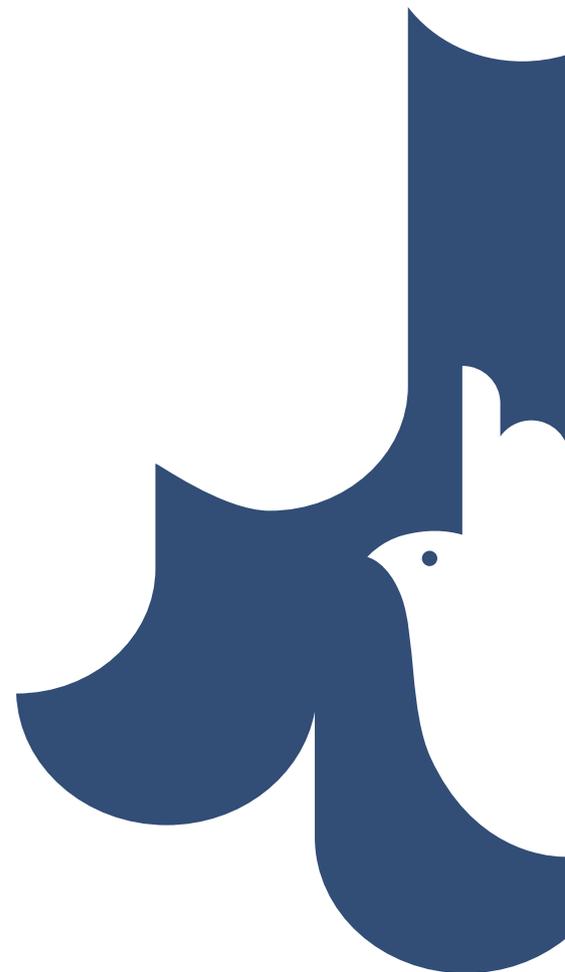


REPORT

ON ANTISEMITISM IN RUSSIA

2020



MANIFESTATIONS OF ANTISEMITISM IN 2020

There was a further slight decline in the level of antisemitic violence in 2020. The downward trend in manifestations of antisemitism in the public sphere has continued: in the official media, manifestations of antisemitism have become rather an exception, and the few notable antisemitic publications posted on the social media sites, as a rule, now cause a negative reaction of the public and the journalistic community. However, the political pressure on Jewish organizations and believers has been continuing.

THE MOST EXTREME MANIFESTATIONS OF ANTISEMITISM

To our knowledge, during this year, there have not been any antisemitically motivated attacks (in 2019 there was one case). The only case, which at first seemed to be antisemitically motivated, happened in March: the tragedy involved Izgiyagu Pashayev, a chairman and local rabbi of the Jewish community of Buynaksk (Dagestan), who had been attacked and murdered. However, the investigation found the version of the domestic crime most persuasive, and the attacker, previously convicted Artur Abdulayev, was charged according to Part 4. Article 111 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation ('intended infliction of grievous bodily harm resulting in involuntary manslaughter'). Abdullaev's case was referred to court back in the summer, but at the time of this writing, no verdict has been rendered yet.

We also note that in September, law enforcement agencies uncovered the impending assassination attempt against the leader of the Jewish community of Krasnodar, rabbi Yuri Tkach. On suspicion of the crime preparation, two participants in the movement "The USSR Citizens" were detained, who are now accused under paragraphs "g", "z" and "l" of Part 2 of Article 105 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation (RF), applying also Part 1 of Article 30 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation and Part 3 of Article 33 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation ('Organizing preparations for a murder by a group of hired persons or persons motivated by religious hatred').

In addition, in June, internet user Anton Garkysh sent antisemitic threatening letters to the email addresses of the representative of the World Jewish Congress in Russia and the Russian Jewish Congress.

We know of three cases of antisemitic vandalism in 2020 (vs. 5 in 2019). In April, vandals set fire to the Jewish Cultural Center building and the Star of the North synagogue in Arkhangelsk. As a result of arson, the glass at the entrance was broken and the entranceway was blacken with smoke. In July, more than 30 gravestones were damaged at the Jewish part of the St. Petersburg Memorial Cemetery in Memory of Victims of January 9. In September, a drunken person shouting antisemitic

slogans, tried to enter the premises of the Shamir community in eastern Moscow. Unable to get into the building, he threw the chanukiah from the front doorsteps, tore off the nameplate, broke the mailbox and knocked the license plate off the rabbi's business car.

ANTISEMITISM IN PUBLIC LIFE

The trend towards a decrease in the number of antisemitic statements in the media observed during previous years further continued in 2020.

Regarding federal TV channels, there was only one known to us case during 2020, when such statement was made on television. In June, Igor Korotchenko, the editor-in-chief of National Defense ("Natsionalnaya Oborona") magazine, during the Russia-1 TV show titled 60 Minutes on a Hot Scent, while opposing critics of the Victory Parade, said that a number of opposition figures of Jewish origin, including musician Andrei Makarevich, in the times of Hitler "...could be turned either into ashes in the crematorium or into a lampshade".

Commenting on the incident, President of the Russian Jewish Congress Yuri Kanner noted that Korotchenko's position should be understood as a general position of the TV channel, since neither the presenters nor other participants in the program objected to the expert or stopped him. Moreover, there was a video added to his statement, which included portraits and quotes of those who, in Korotchenko's opinion, could become ashes or lampshades. *"The expert did not misspoke himself or breathed the word. He performed an agreed upon, previously planned and well-prepared re-prise. Therefore, this is what should be of concern to all of us. Because this is the position of the channel that exists at our expense, at the expense of the public treasury and under the control of the state,"*¹ Yu. Kanner said.

The leader of the antisemitic anti-rating can be considered the North-West Political News Agency, in which publications such passages appeared at least three times. In February, there was an editorial about a ruffian armed with a knife who attacked people in the Moscow church of St. Nicholas. The authors of the publication were outraged that this incident did not cause the same public outcry as the attack by Alexander Koptsev on the synagogue on Bolshaya Bronnaya in 2006, and law enforcement agencies qualified the attack on an Orthodox church as a less serious act: the case was initiated under Article 116 ('beating') and Article 213 ('hooliganism'), which involves a sentence of up to 5 years in prison, while Koptsev was sentenced to 16 years in a super-maximum security prison Article 282 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation ('incitement of hatred'). According to the authors of the editorial, this suggests that for the Russian justice *"the victims in the synagogue are more valuable"*. However, they did not mention the fact that Koptsev's sentence was based not

¹ Kanner, Yu. Lampshades made from the skin of Jews as a meme // Yu. Kanner's blog on «Echo of Moscow». 2020, June 29. [https://echo.msk.ru/blog/y_kanner/2668361-echo/]

on one, but on several articles, and the substantive charge was not incitement of hatred, but attempted murder.

In May, the same media source published Yuri Nersesov's response to how the host of the Dilettant show on Echo of Moscow, Vitaly Dymarsky, annotated the memoirs of a former officer of the Russian Liberation Army Leonid Samutin, *"I used to be a Vlasovite"*, and Tsargrad TV channel edited an interview with the parodist Elena Sparrow. Nersesov compared the tactics of hiding some facts while purposefully changing the focus of the information, with the activities of mohalims (skilled circumcisers), thus emphasizing the Jewish origin of many authors of Echo of Moscow and the leadership of Tsargrad TV. Along the way, he recalled the "real" last name of Elena Vorobey — Lehenbaum.

In July, the editorial staff of the North-West Political News Agency commented on the interview with Dmitry Bykov, a writer, to another publisher, in which he explained that the reason, for which his new novel about the 'Beilis affaire' did not come out, was "a huge growth of antisemitism in Russia". The authors of the Political News Agency denied the antisemitic component of the murder of Andrei Yushchinsky and again used the method of *"disclosing pseudonyms"*, mentioning the "real" last name of Bykov and stating that *"a huge growth of antisemitism exists only in Zilbertrud's mind, who actually fights a number of his inner demons"*.

In at least two regions, the media provoked a public debate about the Holocaust. In both cases, the reason for it was the monuments to the victims of the Holocaust, the installation or reconstruction of which was carried out with the support of the Russian Jewish Congress. There, although in general the discussion ran in a civilized way, some of its participants insisted that there the term 'Holocaust' should not be mentioned separately; instead it would be enough to honor the memory of the perished Soviet citizens who *"did not have any division into nations"*.

Hence, in Volgograd, where the regional authorities initiated the decision to erect such a monument in The Eighth of March Park, while there is already the Memorial to Fallen Soldiers and Civilians of Stalingrad, some public figures demonstrated uncertainty about whether such a decision would be right. For example, the February issue of Volgograd Online quotes a local activist Anatoliy Boltykhov, who is confident that a monument to the victims of the Holocaust could be erected only if next to it there is a *"a monument to Russians, which is exactly as many times larger, as many times greater is the number of dead Russians buried in the park. To clearly see how great was the loss of each ethnic group at that time"*.

At the same time, Bryansk.news in November, outraged by a changed text written on the memorial plate in Lithium Park, which instead of simply "civilians" now says *"mostly Jews and Gypsies."* Bryansk.news is sure that due to such reconstruction of the monument *"thousands of Soviet citizens who were tortured and killed — civilians, war prisoners, refugees — all turn into thousands of dead Jews, and the monuments themselves become the memorials to the victims of the Holocaust"*, while the killed *"Russians, Ukrainians and others just do not matter"*.

In Russian social networks (if setting aside the marginal segment), there is virtually no slant towards accusing Jews of the spread of coronavirus infection, in contrast to other countries where such idea is widespread. The author of one of the few such publications, journalist Andrey Tyunyaev was

fined 400,000 rubles in November for publishing a video on his YouTube channel, saying *“the coronavirus is actually ‘Feigelson-Jakobson’s disease’ that is only dangerous for Jews and Armenians”*. The court found him guilty under Article 207.1 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation (‘dissemination of intentionally false information about circumstances posing a threat to the life and safety of citizens, and/or on measures taken to ensure the safety of the population, distributed under the guise of truthful messages’).

Nevertheless, sometimes antisemitic publications appeared on social networks, but most of them resulted in either administrative punishment or public condemnation.

First of all, the scandal around the confessor of the Sredneursky nunnery in honor of the icon of the Mother of God “The Grower of Crops”, schema-hegumen Sergius (Romanov) should be mentioned, which began with one of his April sermons that included antisemitic statements.

In this sermon, he urged believers to disobey the orders of the secular authorities and the hierarchy to close churches for parishioners due to the pandemic. At the same time, the priest emphasized the need to fight against *“Yoke of the Jews,”* he mentioned *“the oppression of Jewish masonry,” “the Jewish regime”* and *“Jewish capital”*, and also proposed to evict those who put barriers to going to churches, *“to the Republic of Birobidzhan or to the island of Martinique or to the island of Spinelonga, at their choice”*.

Since Father Sergiy is one of the most prominent figures in Tsarebozhiye movement opposing the patriarchate, his speech had not been left unnoticed and entailed a reaction from both the leadership of the Russian Orthodox Church and law enforcement agencies. At first, the diocese first barred him from preaching, then to perform divine services, and after that, since the priest ignored the orders of the hierarchy, the church court defrocked, and later completely excommunicated him.

In July, the secular court first imposed a fine of 90,000 rubles on the preacher *“for distributing fake information about coronavirus”*, according to Part 9 Article 13.15 of the Code of Administrative Offences of the Russian Federation (‘dissemination of intentionally false socially significant information in the media, as well as in information and telecommunication networks under the guise of truthful messages’), and then a fine of 18,000, according to Article 20.3.1 of the Code of Administrative Offences (‘incitement of hatred’).

Later, at the request of Roskomnadzor, the Youtube channel that contained videos of Fr. Sergius’s sermons, was removed, but his supporters created a new channel, where they continued to post his speeches, most of which contained xenophobic statements. In January 2021, one of the ex-schema-hegumen’s assistants, his press secretary Vsevolod Moguchev, a former extreme ultra-right activist, was arrested for 15 days under Article 20.3.1 of the Code of Administrative Offences for publishing the April sermon, and immediately after his release, another case was initiated against him under the same article.

Following imposition of administrative sanctions, three criminal cases were initiated against the former priest himself, but they had nothing to do with his sermons. It must be noted that such a harsh reaction against the well-known fundamentalist preacher was actually caused not by his xenophobic position, but by his insubordination to secular and church authorities. However, along the way, the authorities had to respond to his xenophobic speeches.

Other antisemitic statements on social networks did not lead to administrative punishment of their authors, however, as a rule, they caused a public uproar. For example, in August, users were outraged by the announcement of Elizaveta Bondar's performance "The Philistines" based on Maxim Gorky's famous play, that had been published by the St. Petersburg Young Spectator's Theatre named after A. Bryantsev, which said about the play: *"There are liberals and Jews, and people of the system, and the Russian Orthodox Church, and rallies, and everything else that we are in today, living in Russia."* After readers drew attention to the openly antisemitic nature of this text, a theater critic Elena Volgust reached out to the theater administration for explanation. The deputy director of the Young Spectator's Theatre Tatiana Tsvetkova apologized to the director and everyone who considered themselves offended, and the text of the announcement was removed from social networks.

In November, Krasnodar journalists were outraged by a Facebook post of Yuri Kornienko, an operator at Svoe TV Stavropol TV channel, who commented on the death of Mikhail Zhvanetsky: *"The old Jew has died! His time has come"*. Most commentators pointed out the inadmissibility of such statements. The Union of Journalists of Krasnodar Krai also responded to the publication: Kornienko was given a reprimand, the director of the TV channel Aleksandr Papchenya was called on to deal with the issue, and the curator of the TV channel in the regional government was advised to pay attention to this incident. Kornienko was forced to delete his post.

Many social media users also condemned the antisemitic commentary of Zakhar Prilepin, a writer, to the December publication in the literary critic Konstantin Milchin's blog about the winners of the Big Book Prize. According to the critic, the main prize should have been awarded not to Alexander Ilichevsky, but to Mikhail Yelizarov, and he explained the choice of the jury by their *"taste blindness and deafness"*, and their personal sympathies. Prilepin believes that the choice of the jury was determined exclusively by the ethnic origin of Ilichevsky who lives in Israel: *"There are about 50 Jews on the Big Book Prize jury. That's all you should have written, Kostya [Konstantin Milchin]"*. Milchin, in turn, reminded him that the same "Jews" six years earlier awarded the prize to Prilepin himself, and that time he did not look for any ethnic implications in their decision.

Article 18.8 of Russia's Administrative Code (violation by a foreign citizen of the rules of entry into the Russian Federation).

In March, Russia's Ministry of Justice included the Saratov Regional Jewish Charity Center "Khasdey Yerushalaim" (Miloserdie) into the register of non-profit organizations acting as a foreign agent.

OTHER MANIFESTATIONS OF ANTISEMITISM

There were very few cases of antisemitism outside the media, but almost all of them were related to different state structures. For the first time in several years, there have been complaints from Jewish prisoners that they can not meet their religious needs in prisons. In October, the defendant in the “Moscow case” (about rallies in the summer of 2019) Danil Beglets complained about the actions of the administration of the Oryol penal settlement No. 7, forcing Jewish prisoners to work on Shabbat. Seven people were injured, and, according to Beglets, the administration of the prison set other prisoners against them.

Beglets himself was released on parole shortly after the incident was made public. For six remaining imprisoned Jews, the Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia discussed with the administration of the colony the possibility to avoid work on Saturday.

Dmitry Pchelintsev, a defendant in “The Network” case, reported about the impossibility of reading the Torah in the Kirov pre-trial detention center No. 1. However, he did not file a formal complaint, hoping that the problem would be resolved when he was transferred to the colony.

As in the previous year, there were cases of political pressure on Jewish organizations. In particular, in August in Simferopol, the Magistrate’s Court penalized Hava Nagila Synagogue of messianic Jews located in Yevpatoriya with a fine of 30,000 rubles, convicting it under Part 3 of Article of the 5.26 Code of Administrative Offenses of the Russian Federation (‘carrying out activities by a religious organization without specifying its official full name’). The offense constituted the fact that the full name of the religious organization was not indicated on the synagogue page in VKontakte social network.

We know of only one case of discrimination by private parties: in January, an operator of the Tver taxi service “Poekhali” refused to take an order from Olga Kozlova, a resident of Tver, after learning that she had attended a photo exhibition dedicated to the Holocaust. After receiving an answer to his question whether this exhibition was “about Jews,” he said: “*What they did to them [to Jews] was all right,*” and hung up. The client complained to the taxi management, and the operator was fired in February. Legal assistance to Kozlova was provided by the Russian Jewish Congress.

LAW ENFORCEMENT

The number of known to us criminal sentences for the statements falling within a category of extremist ones, slightly increased in 2020 compared to the previous year: at least 132 against at least 123.

Of these, no less than ten were directly or indirectly related to the propaganda of antisemitism, of which only three sentences were rendered for propaganda through means other than the Internet. Vyacheslav Kotenko, a resident of the Oktyabrsky District of the Volgograd Region, was sentenced to 280 hours of penal labor in February for desecrating a memorial to the victims of the Holocaust in Aksai village in 2019. However, the court considered that his actions were not motivated by hatred and found him guilty under Part 1 of Article 214 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation ('vandalism'), and not under Part 2 of the same article ('vandalism motivated by ethnic hatred') unlike another resident of Volgograd, Denis Neustroev, who in October was found guilty under two articles at a time — Part 2 of Article 214 and Part 1 of Article 280 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation ('public appeals to extremism'). For desecration of the memorial "The Front Line of the Defense of Stalingrad in November 1942, the 62nd and 64th Armies" in 2018, he was given one and a half years suspended sentence, with deprivation of the right to engage in activities related to the administration of sites on the Internet for two years.

In addition, in December in Moscow Oleg Platonov and Valeriy Yerchak were convicted under Part 2 of Article 282 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation ('incitement of hatred committed as part of an organized group'). For the publication of Yerchak's antisemitic book "Words and deeds of Ivan the Terrible", included in the Federal List of Extremist Materials, Platonov was given a four-year suspended sentence with a probationary period of three years, and Yerchak himself received a three-year suspended sentence with a similar probation period.

The rest of the verdicts were for propaganda of antisemitism on the Internet. The harshest sentence was passed in September upon a resident of Tula under Part 1 of Article 282 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation ('incitement of ethnic hatred as a repeated violation of law within one year after bringing a person to administrative responsibility for a similar act'). For publishing antisemitic materials on the social network, since this was not the first such violation of law within a year, he was sentenced to two years in a penal colony.

In three cases, a suspended sentence was imposed. In June, the 52-year-old resident of Karelia Lyudmila Petrova received one and a half years suspended sentence with a probation period of two years and a prohibition of using the Internet for two years under Part 2 of Article 280 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation, for calls for the expulsion of Jews. The resident of Kirov, Dmitriy Gordin, for the publication of antisemitic videos in January received one year suspended sentence under Article 280 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation. In October, a juvenile resident of Sevastopol was sentenced under the same article and under Part 3 of Article 354.1 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation ('dissemination of information expressing obvious disrespect to society about the days of military glory and memorable dates in Russia') to one year in prison and

the same probation period, as well as the a one-year prohibition to engage in activities related to the administration of the Internet sites.

In two cases, fines were to be paid as punishment. In April, a resident of Tula was fined 300,000 rubles under Part 1 of Article 282 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation for antisemitic publications on VKontakte, and a resident of Palekh village, Ivanovo Region, for a similar publication was fined 100,000 rubles under Part 1 of Article 354.1 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation.

In addition, a resident of Perm was sentenced to one year of custodial restraint in August for publishing a commentary against Jews and immigrants from the Caucasus and Central Asia under Part 2 of Article 280 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation.

More commonly, Article 20.3.1 of the Code of Administrative Offences was used to punish hate speech. According to the data of the Judicial Department of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation, in the first half of 2020 (the data for the second half of 2020 have not yet published at the time of this writing), 347 people were prosecuted under this article — almost the same number as for the entire year of 2019, when this article was first enforced (383 people). How many of these sentences were passed for propaganda of antisemitism is unfortunately unknown. We know of at least 13 such cases, and almost all of them involved propaganda on the Internet.

Usually, fines were imposed as punishment under this article. The largest fine, 18,000 rubles, was assigned to the aforementioned schema-hegumen Sergiy (Romanov). In other cases, the amounts of the fine ranged from one to 15,000 rubles.

The only verdict related to propaganda of hatred that took place not only on the Internet, was passed in August to Anna Vortelo, a resident of Kemerovo, who was fined 10,000 rubles for sticking a leaflet “Citizens of the USSR” on a bus stop, which equated service in the Russian police with betrayal of Motherland and collaboration. It is noteworthy that her antisemitic posts on VKontakte did not attract any attention of law enforcement agencies and went unpunished.

One of those prosecuted under this article, the resident of Kazan K. Mikhailov in June was sentenced to a five days of administrative arrest for publishing a xenophobic statement about some ethnic groups, including Jews.

In addition, in November, a resident of Novomoskovsk, Tula Region, was fined 1,000 rubles for publishing antisemitic material under Article 20.29 of the Code of Administrative Offences (‘production and distribution of prohibited materials’).

As before, actually there could have been more sentences for propaganda of antisemitism, since law enforcement agencies are still extremely reluctant to publish information about such cases.

Finally, it is worth noting that in October, the Perm activist Roman Yushkov, known for his antisemitic statements, announced that the case initiated against him under Article 282 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation (‘incitement to ethnic hatred’) had been closed. This was already the fifth criminal case initiated against him, this time the reason was Yushkov’s antisemitic speech at a public hearing on the construction of a Jewish center in Perm in 2019. However, the expert examination failed to reveal any signs of incitement of hatred in his speech.