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## **XENOPHOBIA AND RADICALISM IN RUSSIA, 2017-18. WHAT CHANGED?**

In 2017 – first half of 2018, there were significant changes in Russia both in the sphere of countering xenophobia and radicalism and in the trends related to the spread of xenophobic attitudes and the dynamics of hate crimes.

### **Legislation.**

In terms of the legislation, Russia followed the overall European trend. First, anti-extremist legislation was tightened. On August 1, 2017, Vladimir Putin signed a law that prohibits individuals who have previously been convicted of incitement to hatred and discriminatory practices on the Internet and in social networks or for crimes of an extremist nature to become the founders or chief editors of the media.<sup>1</sup>

Amendments to the law on citizenship were adopted, which, analogous to the Dutch amendments, make it possible to deprive of citizenship those individuals who acquired it in order to carry out activities that pose a threat to the constitutional order of the Russian Federation. However, its wording allows for an extremely broad and arbitrary interpretation.

In general, the transfer of responsibility from the legislator to the law enforcer is characteristic for Russian legislation, especially anti-extremist legislation. This state of affairs creates fertile ground for abuse.

In 2017, the *Federal List of Extremist Materials* was updated 33 times, with 329 items added, increasing the number of items on the list from 4,016 to 4,345 points. The List was supplemented with materials produced by today's Russian nationalists, other nationalists, appeals of radical Islamists for violence, materials criticizing the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) and religion, materials of Orthodox fundamentalists, materials of Jehovah's Witnesses, opposition materials and materials as a result of an error.<sup>2</sup>

The *Federal List of Extremist Organizations of Russia* was also replenished in 2017, with six new organizations added to the list (10 organizations were added in 2016). Thus, at the end of 2017, there were 65 organizations on the list. A continuation of activity by these organizations is

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.mskagency.ru/materials/2691059>.

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.sova-center.ru/racism-xenophobia/publications/2017/07/d37459/#\\_ftn8](https://www.sova-center.ru/racism-xenophobia/publications/2017/07/d37459/#_ftn8).

punishable under Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation (Organization of Activities of an Extremist Organization).

Among the organizations included in the List, special attention should be paid to the Administrative Center of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia, a religious organization. Its activities and activities of all of its 395 regional offices were suspended in accordance with part 4 of Article 9 of Federal Act No. 114 of July 25, 2002, on countering extremist activities.<sup>3</sup> This decision led to criticism by human rights activists. While members of this organization refuse to work in the civil service or serve in the army, and prohibit certain medical procedures, in particular blood transfusions for young children, they do not carry out terrorist activities.

As for the suspension of the activity of the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar People, a public association that is the single highest executive-representative body of the Crimean Tatars by the ruling of the Supreme Court of the Republic of Crimea of April 26, 2016 and the decision on the appeal to the prohibition by the Judicial Panel on Administrative Cases of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation of September 29, 2016 (and published on January 25, 2017) – this ruling was characterized by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination as a discriminatory practice.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, it is known that the Mejlis actively participated in the economic blockade of Crimea by Ukraine, and also supported (and, according to some information, organized) the explosions that damaged electricity lines leading to a massive Crimean power outage.

In addition, the Federal List of Extremist Organizations included the ultra-right organization *Rubezh Severa* (Frontier of the North), which was recognized as extremist by the decision of the Syktyvkar City Court of the Komi Republic on November 23, 2016; the TOYS Soccer Fan Organization; the Naberezhnye Chelny branch of the Tatarstan Regional All-Tatar Political Public Movement (REVTATPOD) - All-Tatar Public Center (VTOTs).<sup>5</sup>

With regard to migration policy, in 2017, the parliament received two bills aimed at facilitating the expulsion from the country of those labor migrants who did not indicate work as a reason for entry, as well as of those who did not have an employment contract. In 2018, 90,360 permits will be issued to foreigners and stateless persons in Russia, which is 19.8 thousand less than in 2017 (110,160 permits).

On October 17, the Deputy Chairman of the State Duma of the Russian Federation, Irina Yarovaya, introduced a bill to combat illegal migration. She proposed to introduce criminal liability for fictitious registration of foreigners in non-residential premises. The measures aimed at strengthening control over migrants arriving in the country that were introduced in 2017 mainly concerned the introduction of a mandatory fingerprinting procedure for all foreigners visiting Russia for more than one month.

In 2017, the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs proposed the introduction of mandatory DNA collection of migrants.

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<sup>3</sup> [http://minjust.ru/ru/nko/perechen\\_zapret](http://minjust.ru/ru/nko/perechen_zapret).

<sup>4</sup> [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CERD/Shared%20Documents/RUS/CERD\\_C\\_RUS\\_CO\\_23-24\\_28705\\_E.pdf](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CERD/Shared%20Documents/RUS/CERD_C_RUS_CO_23-24_28705_E.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> [http://minjust.ru/ru/nko/perechen\\_zapret](http://minjust.ru/ru/nko/perechen_zapret).

The number of convictions for violent hate crimes has continued to decline. Only one person was convicted and received a suspended sentence for a violent crime committed on the basis of racial hatred.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, the number of criminal convictions for public “extremist statements” (incitement of hatred, calls for extremist or terrorist actions, etc.) and of administrative sentences under the anti-extremist articles of the Administrative Code continued to rise.<sup>7</sup>

In total, 671 people were convicted in 2017 under the anti-extremist articles for organizing mass riots, encroachment on the life of a statesman, insulting the feelings of believers, etc. Under Article 282 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation on the incitement of hatred or enmity, 17% more people were convicted than in 2016; in five years, the number of sentences under this article increased 2.5 times (461 people). Over the past five years, the number of convicts under extremist articles has increased 2.2 times.<sup>8</sup> Russian Law enforcement agencies pursued cases related to Muslim organizations banned in Russia, for example, Tablighi Jamaat, and to radical protest movements such as Artpodgotovka.

Thus, Russia is one of the few countries that demonstrates a contradictory trend - an increase in the total number of hate crimes (a total of 1521 were recorded in 2017, which is 4.9% more than in 2016 (1450 crimes)), while the number of violent crimes is sharply reduced - 52 crimes instead of 77 that were committed in 2016 (the decline of 32.47%).

Russian law enforcement officials believe that curbing the spread of hatred, primarily on the Internet, is directly related to the reduction of violent hate crimes. Such a conclusion is made on the belief that a potential criminal, before deciding to commit a violent crime, usually tries to find like-minded people on the Internet or offline, share his views on minorities, etc. If stopped at this stage, there is a 99 per cent probability that he will not go on to kill or perform a violent act. However, there is an urgent need for preventive measures. In 2016-17, there were frequent instances of initiating criminal cases for “likes” and reposts on the Internet, which very often ended in actual imprisonment, and whereby punishment clearly did not correspond to the severity of the act. As a result, in 2018, anti-extremist legislation was decriminalized: now a criminal case for the indicated actions on the Internet can be initiated only after a decision on administrative proceedings has already been made.

However, a fundamentally tough approach to punishing for the spread of hatred will surely remain in place: Russian law enforcement officers understand the above-mentioned relationship between hate speech and violent hate crimes and often justify their position with Art. 4 of the *International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination*, which requires the suppression of any activities of radical organizations.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://riavrn.ru/news/voronezhets-izbil-urozhentsa-tadzhikistana-i-vylozhil-video-v-sotsset/>.

<sup>7</sup> [https://tvrain.ru/up/docs/tvrain\\_report.pdf](https://tvrain.ru/up/docs/tvrain_report.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.rbc.ru/society/28/04/2018/5ae1a24c9a7947031454275f>.

## **Discriminatory practices.**

The issue of violence and discrimination against members of the LGBT community is acute in Russia. In June 2017, the European Court of Human Rights found the Russian law on “gay propaganda” to be discriminatory, violating freedom of expression, and promoting homophobia.<sup>9</sup>

In 2016-2017, the Russian LGBT network monitored discriminatory practices and violence against LGBT people in Russia; in total, 366 testimonies were collected during this period.

In 2017, the journalists of *Novaya Gazeta* published information about the campaign launched by the authorities of the Chechen Republic against LGBT people. According to this information, law enforcement agencies of the republic organized informal prisons for men suspected of homosexual contacts, where the detainees were severely beaten and tortured.<sup>10</sup>

For a long time, the federal authorities did not pay attention to reports about LGBT persecution in the Chechen Republic, and it was only after the increase in information in the media that an investigation was launched. In September 2017, Maxim Lapunov, one of the victims of Chechen security officials, filed a complaint with the investigative authorities. At present, the conclusions of the official investigation and the status of the case are not known.

Sources of *Novaya Gazeta* in law enforcement agencies linked mass repressions against the Chechen LGBT community with the announcement, in March 2017, by GayRussia.ru (an LGBT rights organization) about holding gay parades in four cities in the North Caucasus, including Grozny. The organization’s activists notified local authorities about the parades. These statements, which caused a huge negative resonance in the Caucasus, provoked a wave of repression. However, according to the publication, the first wave of repressions took place before March 2017. It is known that the Chechen tradition is such that as soon as the fact of a person’s particular sexual orientation becomes public – the society itself strips this person of the right to life. At the same time, the residents of the Chechen Republic remain silent on what happened. The lack of their testimony prevents us from drawing unequivocal conclusions about whether the facts cited by *Novaya Gazeta* really did take place.

As mentioned, on April 20, 2017, the Supreme Court of Russia decided to liquidate as extremist the Administrative Center and all 395 regional organizations of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia.<sup>11</sup> Although formally the activity of the Jehovah's Witnesses Church was not prohibited, in fact, almost all of its work in Russia was banned and its property was transferred to the state. Concerns about the ban on activities of the Administrative Center of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia were expressed by UN human rights experts, representatives of the OSCE, the UK government, the US Department of State and the European Union.

In December 2018, President V. Putin condemned the ban of the Administrative Center, which

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/20/06/2017/5948d7bc9a794773f6350adc>.

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.novayagazeta.ru/articles/2017/04/04/72027-raspravy-nad-chechenskimi-gejami-publikuem-svidetelstva>.

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.sova-center.ru/misuse/news/persecution/2017/04/d36871/>.

caused bewilderment among Russian human rights activists, since the Russian leader had been silent about this for almost a year.

Discriminatory law enforcement practices aimed at restricting missionary activities of new religious movements and Protestant churches, based on amendments from the package of laws of Yarovo-Ozerova adopted in 2016, have become widespread.

## **Xenophobia.**

The situation concerning xenophobia in Russia has significantly improved in recent years. The level of migrant phobia in Russia decreased in 2017 by 10% and amounted to 58%. However, despite progress, these figures are close to the highest figures among European countries. Only Italy, France, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia have 2-5% higher levels of migrant phobia than Russia. In all fairness, it should be added that in the three countries mentioned above there is practically no significant presence of immigrants. At the same time, it should be recognized that in 2017, the Russian government pursued a policy of sharply reducing labor quotas and the number of visas that were issued to migrants who come to Russia.

The level of anti-Roma sentiment in Russia was 17% in 2017, which is 4% less than in 2016. Compared to other European countries, Russia has the lowest level of hatred for Roma.<sup>12</sup> The most acutely anti-Roma sentiments are manifested, as was the case in the previous years, in Italy.<sup>13</sup> The level of Romaphobia in this country in 2017 was 83%; it was 79% in Slovakia; 72% in Hungary, etc.

Anti-Semitic sentiments in Russia are also minimal - 4%, which is 2% lower than in 2016. In other countries, this level varies from 33% in Poland (practically in the absence of a Jewish population in the country)<sup>14</sup> to 5% in Britain.<sup>15</sup>

Anti-Islamic sentiment also amounted to 4%, which is already 9% less than a year before. The situation is better only in Holland.

## **Radicals.**

In Russia, there are almost no active right-wing organizations and neo-Nazi parties. By 2016, almost all notable organizations of right-wing radical nationalists were banned, and their leaders forced into emigration or arrested. Thus, in 2016, A. Belov (Potkin), the leader of the largest nationalist organization of the 2000s, The Movement Against Illegal Immigration, and of the Russian Movement that replaced it, was sentenced, and Dmitry Demushkin, the second Co-Chairman of the movement *Russkie*, was arrested at the end of the year.

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.levada.ru/2017/08/23/16486/>.

<sup>13</sup> <https://ilfattoquotidiano.it/2018/02/23-siamo-zingari-brutti-sporchi-e-cattivi-e-vittime-orgogliose-del-vostro-razzismo/4181136/>.

<sup>14</sup> [https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2018/K\\_037\\_18.PDF](https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2018/K_037_18.PDF).

<sup>15</sup> [http://www.jpr.org.uk/documents/JPR.2017.Antisemitism\\_in\\_contemporary\\_Great\\_Britain.pdf](http://www.jpr.org.uk/documents/JPR.2017.Antisemitism_in_contemporary_Great_Britain.pdf).

A number of Islamist groups in Moscow and the surrounding region, St. Petersburg and Samara were liquidated. The activities of certain Wahhabi communities, ideologically and organizationally connected with the Islamic State and Hizb ut-Tahrir (both of which are banned in Russia), were suspended. Many activists of banned Islamist organizations were forced to go into exile. For example, in Novy Urengoy, all the assets of the local Wahhabi mosque had to be moved abroad, and so on. The recent arrests of Islamic terrorists, information about which leaked to the media, show that those arrested come mostly from Central Asia. This suggests that the recruitment of local residents for terrorist organizations is becoming increasingly problematic.

As already mentioned, many activists of radical organizations left Russia to participate in the hostilities in Syria and Iraq on the side of the terrorists (more than 5,000 people), as well as to participate in the civil war in Ukraine (where they joined both sides of the conflict). Finally, we should also mention the split of Russian right-wing organizations after the conflict in Ukraine, when a certain part of the so-called “true nationalists” supported Kyiv authorities, and the other - the separatists. For the same reason, there was a split of the unnatural, but long-term union between Russian nationalists and liberals, which emerged in 2011 on the wave of the formation of the anti-Putin opposition. As a result of this union, the process of demarginalization of right-wing radicals was initiated by the liberals, who provided these radicals a platform in the form of the so-called Opposition Coordination Council, etc.

However, there are a number of “systemic parties” of a nationalistic orientation. These are the LDPR, the Patriots of Russia and the Motherland (*Rodina*). It should be mentioned that these parties are already acting in a more careful manner. The LDPR program, unlike the program of V. Zhirinovskiy himself, which was published in 2018, and the program of the Patriots of Russia did not contain any discriminatory requirements in 2017.<sup>16</sup>

The program of the *Rodina* party has not changed since 2016. It continues to include the following discriminatory proposals:

- “to legally recognize the state-forming and civilizational role of the Russian people as a guarantee of stability and successful development of Russia;
- temporarily introduce a visa regime with source countries of migration to Russia (this would benefit the integration processes within the Eurasian Economic Union, but will close the entry into Russia for idlers, criminals, and extremists);
- gradually reduce the number of foreign citizens employed in unskilled jobs in Russia, which will reduce unemployment among our fellow citizens;
- introduce ‘immigration notes’ for foreigners entering Russia, obliging them to pay as a pledge the amount ‘for expulsion’ if it is needed later.”<sup>17</sup>

Shortly before the Parliament election day in the fall of 2017, representatives of the political organization “Nation and Freedom Committee” became more active. At the beginning of

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<sup>16</sup> [https://ldpr.ru/party/Program\\_LDPR/](https://ldpr.ru/party/Program_LDPR/).

<sup>17</sup> <http://rodina.ru/partiya/votes/programma-partii-RODINA-Alternativa-dlya-naroda-Rossii?congress=votes>.

September, appeals and slogans, including “Vote for the nationalists on September 10, 2017” appeared on the organization’s website and its VKontakte, Facebook, and LiveJournal pages.

2017 was probably one of the most unsuccessful years of the recent past for Russian nationalists. They completely failed in the Moscow municipal elections. However, V. Zhirinovskiy, whose program contained openly xenophobic, nationalist and anti-migrant slogans, managed to get a 5% of votes in the 2018 presidential election.

Vyacheslav Maltsev’s “revolution” failed to justify hopes. “Russian March” was a fiasco in 2017. In general, nationalist acts have become more diverse, but significantly less popular than in previous years.

Overall, it can be said that the radical right movement is currently in a deep crisis. Various reasons have led to the weakening of the Russian far right. These include a change in the current agenda; an increase in international tensions; and an increased vigilance of law enforcement agencies (such as was the case on the eve of the World Cup), which rendered right-wing initiatives unsafe. Additionally, the departure of a large number of activists abroad and, finally, the termination of the unnatural alliance of right-wing radicals with the liberals against the background of events in Ukraine, also contributed to the demise of the right-wing movement in Russia. In addition, there was a withdrawal of some ordinary supporters of right-wing radicals from active participation in politics (which, in its turn, was associated with the loss of credibility of the leaders of nationalist organizations).

The process of crushing the radical right continues, which exacerbates the already difficult situation that has developed since the split within the movement on the “Ukrainian issue” and the arrests or emigration of many leaders. In general, the activities of most nationalist political groups occur by inertia, while autonomous right-wing groups have taken a wait.

The demise of the “Russian Marches,” which once gathered thousands of people, best demonstrates the decline in popularity and influence of radical right-wing organizations. For the first time in the past five years, the nationalists of Yekaterinburg have abandoned the traditional May Day Russian March. Its organizer, Maxim Vakhromov, explained this by a decline of the support of the march among the population, due to the fact that people do not see positive changes in the national policy of the country.

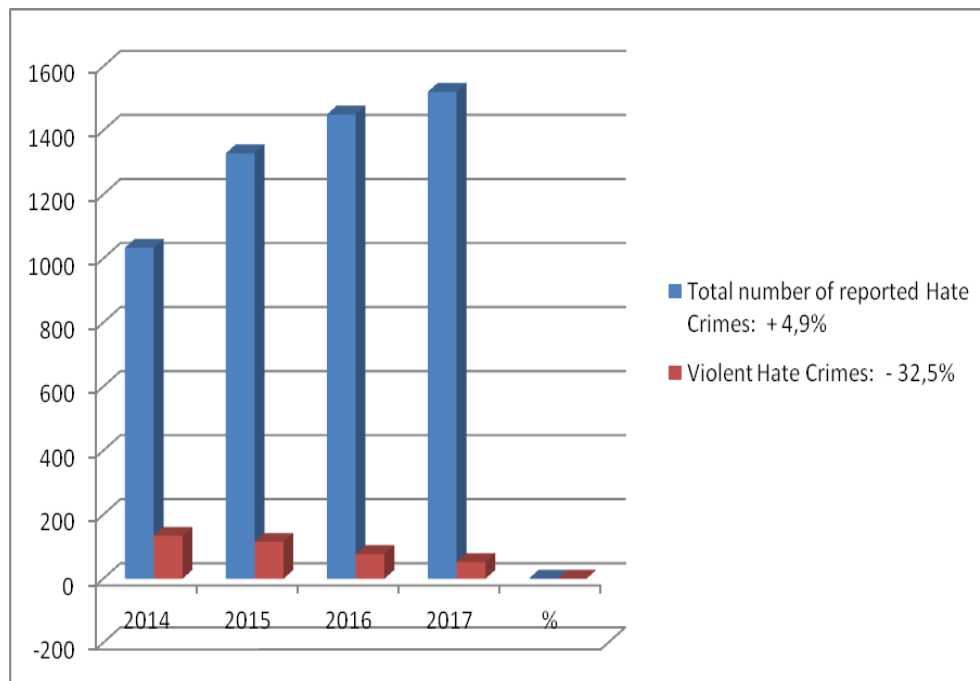
On August 10, the Tverskoy District Court of Moscow sentenced Aleksandr Sokolov, a special correspondent with the RBK newspaper, to three and a half years in prison in connection with his participation in the organization People’s Will Army, recognized as extremist and prohibited by the court (article 282.2 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation). Publicist Yuri Mukhin was sentenced to four years suspended term and an additional four years of probation. Activists Valery Parfionov and Kirill Barabash were sentenced to four years in a penal colony. Barabash was deprived of the rank of lieutenant colonel of the Armed Forces. On July 17, the prosecutor demanded a four-year term in a penal colony for Sokolov, a four and a half-year term for Mukhin, and a four-year term for Barabash and Parfionov. The prosecutor also demanded to strip Barabash of his lieutenant colonel rank. The investigation found that Sokolov and his comrades, under the guise of the initiative group on conducting a referendum (under the name “For Responsible

Authorities,” or ZOV) continued the activities of the banned People’s Will Army. The defense insists these are two different organizations.<sup>18</sup>

### Hate Crime.

In *Russia*, according to the General Prosecutor’s Office of the Russian Federation, the total number of hate crimes increased by 4.9% compared with 2016 and amounted to 1521 episodes compared to 1450 incidents in 2016. At the same time, there were significantly less recorded *violent* crimes (52 incidents).<sup>19</sup> This is 32.5% less than the figure for 2016, when the authorities recorded 77 cases of violence.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, 45 violent crimes were committed against a person. The proportion of all violent crimes in the total number of hate crimes was 3.41%, which is 1.62% less than a year ago. In general, this is confirmed by analytical data of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation.<sup>21</sup>

**Fig. 1. Hate Crimes in Russia (2014-2017)<sup>22</sup>**



According to the SOVA Center for Information and Analysis, “the number of racist and neo-Nazi motivated attacks” in Russia has also decreased.<sup>23</sup> The NGO recorded 28 ethnic attacks (44 in

<sup>18</sup> <https://zona.media/news/2017/08/10/sokolov>.

<sup>19</sup> General Prosecutor's Office of the Russian Federation “Structure of registered extremist crimes in 2017 as compared to 2016”; “The structure of crimes registered in 2017 compared to 2016, committed on the basis of political, ideological, racial, national or religious hatred or hostility, or on the basis of hatred or enmity against any social group.”

<sup>20</sup> <https://civic-nation.org/pan-european-report/Pan-European%20Report-2017-ed!.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> <https://media.mvd.ru/files/application/1241295>.

<sup>22</sup> <https://media.mvd.ru/files/application/1241295>.

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.sova-center.ru/racism-xenophobia/publications/2018/01/d38732/>.



2016), 11 people were injured according to this data as a result of attacks on LGBT people (5 in 2016), and 3 attacks on homeless people were recorded (2 in 2016).<sup>24</sup>

The number of convictions for perpetrators of violent crimes motivated by hatred, according to this organization, also decreased (10 sentences and 24 perpetrators in 2017 against 15 sentences against 43 people in 2016).<sup>25</sup>

This suggests that the authorities continue the old line - to tighten control over those who commit non-violent crimes. This has the effect of reducing violence, because, as already indicated, potential offenders, before committing a violent crime, have been trying to find a way out for themselves in the form of hate speech online or offline for quite a long time.

As for non-violent crimes, most of them in 2017 were crimes committed under Article 282 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation (incitement of hatred or hostility, as well as humiliation of human dignity). There were 985 such crimes committed, which is 32 more cases than in 2016 (953). Also, 310 crimes were committed under Art. 280 (calls for extremist activity), which is five cases more than a year ago. Finally, 65 crimes were committed under Art. 282 (organization of activities of an extremist organization or participation in it), which is 26 cases more than in 2016.

In addition, five hate killings were committed in the Russian Federation in 2017 (three in 2016); three intentional causes of serious harm to health with extremist motives - Section "e" of Part 2 of Art. 111 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation (1 in 2016); and two intentional bodily harm of moderate severity (3 in 2016) - Section "e" of Part 2 of Art. 112.

According to the data of the Prosecutor General's Office of the Russian Federation for the first half of 2018, in general, there was a decrease in extremist crimes - 616 episodes (which is 12.3% less as compared with the first half of 2017).<sup>26</sup>

Unfortunately, in official reports there is no specification of information about xenophobic vandalism regarding religious buildings and institutions. According to the Sova Center, in 2017, there were 14 instances of attacks by vandals of the buildings of Jehovah's Witnesses, including three arson attacks (in 2016, there were nine episodes).<sup>27</sup> On April 30, 2017, the houses occupied by a family of Jehovah's Witnesses caught fire. The incident took place in a small town in the Moscow region of Lutsino, where one of the local residents, who previously expressed negative attitudes against the religion, threw a Molotov cocktail while drunk. The fire destroyed two houses and the cars of the believers.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.sova-center.ru/racism-xenophobia/publications/2018/01/d38732/>.

<sup>26</sup> The Prosecutor General's Office of the Russian Federation "The structure of the registered crimes of an extremist nature in January - May 2018"

<sup>27</sup> <http://jw-ru.blogspot.com/search/label/%D0%9D%D0%B0%D0%BF%D0%B0%D0%B4%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%B5%20%D0%BD%D0%B0%20%D0%A1%D0%B2%D0%B8%D0%B4%D0%B5%D1%82%D0%B5%D0%BB%D0%B5%D0%B9%20%D0%98%D0%B5%D0%B3%D0%BE%D0%B2%D1%8B>

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

Experts attribute the escalation of violence against the religious organization to the fact that in 2017 it was almost banned (its activities were suspended) as an extremist group, which was widely and negatively covered in the media.

According to the Sova Center, 11 acts of vandalism were recorded against Orthodox objects, of which two were arson attacks (10 acts took place in 2016).<sup>29</sup>

In two cases, according to the same NGO, attacks were made on Protestant churches. This included an incident that took place in the Lutheran Church in Voronezh on June 23, 2017, when unknown persons left a model of an explosive device at the site. The Bishop of the South Russian District of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Augsburg Confession (the center of the district is in Voronezh), Anatoly Malakhov, linked the incident to a legal battle between the church and the city authorities, which revolves around the buildings that were used by the Lutherans of Voronezh before the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917.<sup>30</sup>

In 2017, Russia reported two acts of vandalism against synagogues: the first incident was recorded on the night of July 11, when unknown persons threw a stone at the synagogue in Kostroma; the second, on the night of September 11, when three bottles of incendiary mixture were thrown at the office of the Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia (FEOR) in the area of Maryina Roshcha in Moscow. In both cases, the buildings suffered minor damage.<sup>31</sup> In 2017, there were five such cases.

In 2017, one attack was carried out on a neo-pagan site and one on a Buddhist site. There is no information available about attacks on Muslim sites.

Yet at the same time, the SOVA Center notes that "the number of attacks on religious sites remains unchanged: 30 in 2017 and 2016 (and 29 in 2015). But the share of the most dangerous acts - arson and explosions - has increased compared to last year: 29 per cent, or 14 cases out of 48 (13 per cent or six out of 44 cases a year ago).<sup>32</sup> Most of these crimes were committed against the property of "Jehovah's Witnesses," which, as indicated, is associated with a broad xenophobic campaign in the media.

But in general, in Russia, for the fourth year in a row, there has been a decrease in the number of hate crimes of a *violent* nature.

This decrease has happened for various reasons. First, the reform of anti-extremist legislation, which was introduced in 2014- 2016, can be credited. As was already mentioned, the revised legislation has allowed the suppression of these crimes at the initial stage of the activity by instigators in social networks. Thus, the main emphasis was placed on the suppression of non-violent crimes, which ultimately led to a decrease in violent acts.

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<sup>29</sup> <https://www.sova-center.ru/racism-xenophobia/publications/2018/01/d38732/>.

<sup>30</sup> <http://www.portal-credo.ru/site/?act=news&id=126549>.

<sup>31</sup> <http://moshekantor.com/docs/127/>.

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.sova-center.ru/racism-xenophobia/publications/2018/01/d38732/>.

One of the reasons for this decrease stems from the split and the weakening of radical groups in Russia.

Another reason was the general political situation in the aftermath of the conflict in Ukraine and the imposition of international sanctions against Russia. These events largely united the Russians. The effect of an external threat was triggered when citizens put aside their internal contradictions and felt internal unity instead.

## CONCLUSION

Radical nationalism, xenophobia and migrant phobia remain an actual problem for Russian society. There is no doubt that one can see the tendency in recent years to reduce the number of violent hate crimes, but without a deep understanding of the causes of this process and a change in the methods of combating intolerance, this trend towards reduction can be short-lived. The main group of victims is still composed of people whom the attackers perceived as “ethnic outsiders,” and the number of attacks against ideological opponents increased.

There has been a drastic demise of right-wing movements and groups. There are several reasons for the weakening of extreme right movements and the reduction of inter-ethnic tensions. The first reason was the tightening of anti-extremist legislation and the intensification of the work of law enforcement agencies, especially on the eve of the World Cup. The second important factor is the increase in international tension, which led to the consolidation of society against a common enemy (Ukraine, the West, etc.) and was a step towards strengthening the political nation, when the population gives up internal contradictions and acquires a common goal, which, in this case, is to counter the anti-Russian policy of a hostile environment. True, it must be admitted that this factor plays a smaller role every year. In addition, a significant part of the most active nationalists were involved in conflicts outside of Russia (in Syria and Ukraine), which weakened these movements within the country.

The lack of administrative responsibility for inciting hatred among government officials also raises big questions. Some of the xenophobic and particularly anti-Semitic statements by well-known politicians (for example, the one made by the Russian State Duma’s Deputy Speaker, Peter Tolstoy,<sup>33</sup> who claimed that Jews were responsible for the events of 1917), were suppressed, but were left without administrative or criminal consequences.

Discrimination at the local level of some indigenous peoples of Siberia, such as the Shors, who have been fighting for their historical lands, where they lived and buried their ancestors, with large regional coal companies, should be among the priority problems for Russian authorities.

At the same time, there is a decline in xenophobia at all levels of society. The liberalization of anti-extremist legislation is not likely to have an impact on this process in the future.

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<sup>33</sup> <https://newizv.ru/news/society/25-01-2017/251342-petr-tolstoj-novym-izvestijam-imel-v-vidu-tak-nazyvaemuju-intelligenciju>.