



Briefing Notes Summary

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

Russian Federation – January to June 2025

30 June 2025

13 January 2025

Prison sentence for donations to Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation

On 24.12.24, a Moscow district court found Ivan Tishchenko guilty of financing extremist activities under Article 282.3 of the Russian Criminal Code and sentenced him to four years' imprisonment. The cardiac surgeon regularly donated an undisclosed amount to the Anti-Corruption Foundation (FBK) established by Alexei Navalny. According to the defence, the standing order was set up before the FBK was classified as an extremist organisation in June 2021. According to the human rights organisation Memorial, at least 27 criminal proceedings have been instituted as of December 2024 for financial contributions (often small donations) made to the FBK. It reports that so far fines have been imposed in 11 cases and prison sentences in two cases (including this one). Two further donors have reportedly been sentenced to suspended sentences.¹

20 January 2025

Prison sentences for Navalny lawyers

Three lawyers who once represented opposition activist Alexei Navalny, who died in a penal colony (cf. BN of 19.02.24), have been sentenced to several years in prison by a court in Petushki (Vladimir Oblast). According to agency reports published on 17.01.25, they were found guilty of belonging to an extremist organisation, namely Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation (FBK), which is classified as such.

The information on sentences is inconsistent. It is predominantly reported that Vadim Kobsev was sentenced to five and a half years, Alexei Liptser to five years and Igor Sergunin to three and a half years in a penal colony. It is reported that the three men had already been arrested in October 2023 and placed on an official list of "terrorists and extremists" the following month. The reports state that prior to this, they had been the only ones, with a few exceptions, who had been able to visit Navalny in prison. It was reportedly through them that Navalny's messages had reached his team, which had then published them. According to the court, the defendants had thus abused their status as lawyers by using their position to pass information from him to his team, who are deemed members of an extremist organisation.

Various other criminal proceedings are taking place in connection with the accusation of supporting the FBK. Several fines, suspended sentences and also prison sentences have already been imposed for donations made to the FBK (cf. BN of 13.01.25). Four journalists are also on trial for posts on YouTube that were allegedly linked to the FBK (cf. BN of 08.04.24 and 07.10.24). Following Navalny's death, hundreds of participants who attended memorial events were arrested for disturbing public order following unauthorised gatherings and were sentenced to fines and detention (cf. BN of 26.02.24).

The civil rights organisation OVD-Info and western states see the ruling that has now been handed down as a deliberate crackdown on defence lawyers who take on cases of political prisoners and critics of the authorities and government, according to further reports. Two other Navalny lawyers who are on a wanted list are said to be abroad.²

10 February 2025

Prison sentences imposed after protests in Bashkortostan in 2024

On 07.02.25, a district court in the western region of Udmurtia found six people guilty of participating in mass riots and using violence against state officials under Articles 212 and 318 of the Russian Criminal Code and sentenced them to prison terms of four and a half to five years. The men had taken part in the anti-government protests in support of the Bashkir activist Fail Alsynov in the city of Baymak in January 2024 or, in some cases, were merely passers-by in the vicinity of the venue. The protest rally, one of the largest in Russia since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, was violently dispersed by the security forces, with the crowd defending themselves with snowballs against the authorities' crackdown (cf. BN of 22.01.24).

With around 80 defendants, the Baymak case is considered to be the largest politically motivated criminal trial in recent Russian history. According to media reports, since July 2024, the defendants have received lengthy prison sentences of between four and eight and a half years in at least 16 cases to date (including this one); further guilty verdicts are expected. Meanwhile, hundreds of other demonstration participants have been fined and even given administrative detention for several days for, among other things, violations of the severely restricted right of assembly in Russia. In addition to criminal and administrative sanctions, at least one defendant was subjected to severe physical violence by the security forces during his arrest and had to be hospitalised. A second suspect died in police custody under unexplained circumstances, and a third person committed suicide after police interrogation.³

03 March 2025

Arrests at memorial events for deceased Navalny

According to the independent civil rights portal OVD-Info, at least 42 people were arrested in 18 cities across Russia on 16.02.25, half of them in the cities of Volgograd, Yaroslavl, Ufa and Novosibirsk, during commemorative events held to mark the first anniversary of Alexei Navalny's death. Those attending the gatherings had individually held peaceful vigils for the deceased opposition leader on the street or had visited well-known memorials for the victims of political repression, such as the Solovetsky Stone memorial, laying flowers or holding posters showing pictures of the deceased or inscriptions such as "Russia will be free" and "in eternal memory". While some of those arrested were released without charge a short time later, others were sentenced to penalties of between one and 14 days' administrative detention on charges of allegedly committing administrative offences, including, with reference to posters of Navalny shown, the "use of extremist symbols" (Article 20.3 of the Administrative Offences Act).⁴

07 April 2025

Prison sentences for media workers

On 04.04.25, Petropawlowsk-Kamtschatski city court sentenced the journalist and head of the Yabloko party in the Kamchatka Region, Vladimir Yefimov, to two years' detention in a penal colony for discrediting the armed forces and displaying extremist symbols in accordance with Art. 280.3 and Art. 282.4 of the Criminal Code. Yefimov was accused of criticising the singer Shaman, who is known for his support for the Russian invasion of Ukraine, in an internet post, and of publishing an antifascist film in which Nazi symbols could be seen.

On 31.03.25, the Fifth Court of Appeal in Novosibirsk confirmed a sentence that had already been handed down on 27.11.24 on the journalist Nika Novak according to which a journalist was sentenced to four years' imprisonment in accordance with Art. 275.1 of the Criminal Code for confidential collaboration with foreign organisations, this being the first such conviction since the introduction of the law. The court now ordered the additional seizure of 500,000 RUB (roughly 5,377 EUR, as of 07.04.25) which she had allegedly earned by criminal means as a freelance

journalist for Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. Human rights organisations considered the sentence to be clearly politically motivated.

On 27.03.25, the journalist Maria Ponomarenko, who had been detained since April 2022 (cf. BN of 20.02.23), was sentenced to one year and ten months' imprisonment by Shipunovsky District Court in the Altai territory for non-grievous bodily harm in accordance with Art. 321. 2 of the Criminal Code. The journalist was accused of having physically attacked two prison guards, which the convict denied. Ponomarenko was said to have repeatedly complained of harassment by the prison administration, and had been sentenced to solitary detention 13 times as a punishment. Human rights activists stated that solitary detention had become more common among female prisoners since the start of the Russian war of aggression on Ukraine as a result of declining consideration vis-à-vis women. The conditions in solitary detention were furthermore more severe for women, since unlike men they were not allowed to wear prison clothing in most cases, but only underwear and a nightgown.

The work of independent media workers has been hindered by more and more repressive means since the start of the war of aggression on 24.02.22. According to Reporters sans Frontières (RSF), almost all independent media in Russia have been banned, blocked and/or declared "foreign agents" or "undesirable organisations" since the fully-fledged invasion. The country fell in the press freedom ranking published by RSF from 150th place in the pre-war year 2021 to 162th place in 2024, out of 180 countries that were ranked.⁵

14 April 2025

Prison sentences for Jehovah's witnesses

According to media reports, Jehovah's witness Maxim Khamachin was sentenced to six years' imprisonment on 03.04.25 by Chelyabinsk District Court in accordance with Art. 282.2(1) of the Criminal Code for organising activities of an extremist association. Khamachin was accused of having held meetings of the Jehovah's witnesses from 2017 to 2022, as well as of preaching, distributing religious information materials and encouraging other persons to participate in the organisation's activities.

According to reports, on 31.03.25 the four Jehovah's witnesses Alexander Starikov, Alexei Kuznetsov, Oleg Katamova and Alexander Shchetinin were also sentenced to six years' imprisonment by Konakovo City Court in accordance with Art. 282.2(1) of the Criminal Code. They are said to have been accused of holding religious services and Bible readings by videoconference. The court proceedings of another defendant in this case, namely of Sergei Naumenko, are said to have been divided out into separate proceedings. The state prosecution office is said to be calling for a seven-year prison sentence for Naumenko.

After the Jehovah's witnesses were classified on 20.04.17 as an extremist organisation, the subsequent dissolution of their administrative centre and roughly 400 regional communities, according to the human rights portal OVD-Info, a total of 593 convictions were handed down against members of the religion, in particular in accordance with Art. 282.2(1) and/or (2) of the Criminal Code (cf. BN of 06.03.23, 31.10.22, 13.06.22 and 24.01.22).⁶

28 April 2025

Prison sentences imposed on media workers connected with Navalny

On 15.04.25, a Moscow district court found three male and one female journalists guilty of participation in an extremist association in the shape of the Anti-Corruption Foundation (FBK) of the late opposition figure Alexei Navalny, and sentenced them to five-and-a-half years in prison each, and to a subsequent working ban of three years, in accordance with Art. 282.1 of the Criminal Code. According to press reports, Antonina Favorskaja and Artjom Krieger, who work for the independent Russian news medium Sotavision, reported on Navalny's trial and detention conditions purely as journalists and observers, but did not work with his organisations. Also the connections between the co-accused freelance media workers Konstantin Gabov and Sergei Karelin and Navalny were hence rudimentary. For instance, the video of a street survey carried out by Gabov is said to have been posted in social media, including on Navalny's YouTube channel "Navalny LIVE".

In January 2025, several-year prison sentences had also been imposed on three former lawyers of Navalny for allegedly belonging to the FBK (cf. BN of 20.01.25).⁷

05 May 2025

Prison sentences for Crimean Tatars

On 29.04.25, the military court of the southern district in Rostov on the Don sentenced six Crimean Tatars to imprisonment of between eleven and 14 years for participation in activities of a terrorist organisation in accordance with Art. 205.5 of the Criminal Code and for preparation of a violent coup in accordance with Art. 30.1 in conjunction with Art. 278 of the Criminal Code. Five of the men are said to have been sentenced to 14 years' imprisonment, the first four years having to be spent in prison, and the remainder of the sentence in a high-security colony. The sixth accused is said to have been sentenced to eleven years' imprisonment, the first three years of which in prison and the remainder of the sentence in a punishment colony. The court claims that the men, who were arrested on 24.01.23 in Crimea's Dzhankoi raion, were involved in activities of the banned Islamist organisation Hizb ut-Tahrir, which has been regarded as a terrorist association in Russia since 2003. Human rights organisations consider the convictions to be politically motivated. According to OVD-Info, 127 Crimean Tatars have been the target of state persecution since the Russian annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in March 2014, accused of membership of a terrorist organisation (cf. BN of 23.01.23, 21.03.22 and 14.02.22).⁸

26 May 2025

Raids on naturalised migrants against the background of the war in Ukraine

According to media reports, the head of the state investigation committee, Alexander Bastrykin, stated in the sidelines of the annual conference of the St. Petersburg International Legal Forum on 20.05.25 that the prosecution authorities had now apprehended more than 80,000 newly-naturalised migrants who had not met their obligation to have themselves entered in the Russian military register. One-quarter of them were already taking part in the "special operation", as the war of aggression against Ukraine is officially designated in Russia. According to media reports, regular raids have been taking place for a prolonged time on mosques, markets and construction sites, as well as in other places where migrants are presumed to be. Immigrants with Russian nationality who had failed to register were generally either summoned to the military commissariat for registration, or taken there directly, by force in some cases, in violation of the applicable law. There were also said to be reports in this context according to which migrants had been threatened with having their naturalisation reversed and subsequently being deported to their countries of origin, and thus illegally forced to sign up as contract soldiers for the war in Ukraine.

A legal amendment that was passed in August 2024 requires new Russian nationals to register with the military commissariat of the place where they live within 14 days, otherwise their naturalisation may be reversed. The purpose of the registration is amongst other things to be able to call them up later for basic military service, and for war service in the event of a fresh mobilisation. According to information from OVD-Info, Russian courts had divested at least 63 individuals of Russian nationality for failure to comply with the registration obligation up to January 2025. This affects individuals of Central Asian origin particularly frequently.⁹

02 June 2025

Prison sentence for activity in "undesirable" organisation

On 14.05.25, Basmany district court in Moscow sentenced Grigory Melkonyants, the co-chair of the Movement for Defence of Voters' Rights "Golos", to a prison term of five years for organising activities of an "undesirable organisation" in accordance with Art. 284(1) and (3) of the Criminal Code.

The well-known election monitor was arrested on 17.08.23, the day of the national and local elections, and in the run-up to the 2024 presidential election campaign. Human rights organisations have labelled this a politically-motivated conviction. Melkonyants is accused of collaborating with the European Network of Election Monitoring Organizations (ENEMO), of which the NGO Golos was a founding member. ENEMO was labelled "undesirable" on 27.09.21.

The broad discretion which according to human rights organisations was already associated with the designation as an "undesirable organisation" was said to reach the level of politically-motivated arbitrary detention in this case in that it equated the civil movement Golos with the NGO Golos, which had been liquidated in 2020. His defence

lawyer stated that the allegation of Melkonyants having worked for ENEMO was questionable, since ENEMO had not been designated as an “undesirable organisation” until one year after the closure of the NGO Golos in 2021. According to court observers, the court’s judgment therefore referred retroactively to a period prior to ENEMO’s listing as an “undesirable organisation”.

As the Novaya Gazeta Europe reports, on 23.05.25 warrants had been issued for the arrest of the four former local parliamentarians Ilya Asar, Sergei Vlassov, Igor Glek and Yelena Russakova, who live in Germany, on the basis of Art. 284(1) and (3) of the Criminal Code. They face up to six years’ imprisonment. Their criminal proceedings are said to have been initiated on the basis of their activity for the movement by the name of “Deputies of peaceful Russia”, which was formed in Germany in 2023. The movement was designated as an “undesirable organisation” by the office of the public prosecutor general on 16.08.24. After a rally held by the movement in Berlin on 01.03.25, at which demands are said to have been expressed to topple the Russian government, family members of the politicians who live in Russia are said to have been questioned and their homes searched.

The Duma introduced the term “undesirable organisation” into legislation in 2015. The category of “undesirable” includes foreign or international NGOs allegedly constituting “a threat to the foundations of the constitutional order”, or “the defence and security of the country”. Undesirable organisations are banned from operating in Russia in any manner. Moreover, all Russian nationals who collaborate with an organisation in Russia or abroad that is designated as undesirable, or who organise their activities, are deemed to have committed a regulatory offence in accordance with Russian law. Criminal law applies to repeat offences, which are liable to up to six years’ imprisonment. According to observers, the measures have been used to cut Russian civil society off from international funding. According to OVD-Info, criminal proceedings in accordance with Art. 284(1) are currently pending against at least 23 individuals, with at least 13 currently in detention because of their activity for “undesirable organisations”. On 29.05.25, the list of “undesirable organisations” kept by the justice ministry comprised 227 educational, social, research and religious organisations and associations, 34 of which are headquartered in Germany.¹⁰

23 June 2025

Prison sentences for donations related to Ukraine

According to press reports, on 20.06.25 a military court in Russia’s southwestern Belgorod region found the anti-war activist Nadezhda Rossinskaya guilty of treason (Art. 275 of the Criminal Code), financing terrorism (Art. 205.1 of the Criminal Code) and public calls for action against state security (Art. 280.4 of the Criminal Code), and sentenced her to 22 years’ imprisonment and a fine of 320,000 roubles (roughly 3,500 EUR, as of: 23.06.25). Rossinskaya, who also goes by the name of Nadine Geisler, was reportedly accused of having published an appeal on social media in August 2023 for donations to the Ukrainian “Azov” regiment, which Russia has declared to be a “terrorist organisation”, an accusation which both she and her defence lawyer have rejected. According to media reports, shortly after the start of the full-scale war of aggression against Ukraine, Rossinskaya began collecting donations for displaced Ukrainian civilians, and founded a volunteer movement (“Army of Beauties”) which is said to have organised food and medicine deliveries to Russian-controlled parts of Ukraine between 2022 and 2023 and supported the local population in evacuating.

As recently as on 29.05.25, according to press reports a student was sentenced to twelve years in prison in the Volgograd region, also accused of treason. The man, who suffers from a neurological movement impairment, is reported to have transferred a total of a maximum of 3,000 RUB (approx. 35 EUR, as of: 23.06.25) to a Ukrainian bank account, intending to support a petition for peace talks between Russia and Ukraine, and to have submitted a confession.

According to data from OVD-Info, the number of convictions for treason has increased significantly in Russia since the war began, most recently from 39 cases in 2023 to 156 in 2024. An unspecified proportion of these is said to be accounted for by cases in which the individuals concerned had claimed to have donated money to charities for humanitarian support of the Ukrainian population, whilst the investigation authorities claim that it had been transferred to the Ukrainian armed forces.¹¹

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