

## SOVA Center for Information and Analysis

Since last Spring, SOVA Center continued its monitoring work, focusing on hate crimes, ultraright activities, including online, and anti-extremist law enforcement.

Generally speaking, there is no increase in racist, ethnic and religious hatred in Russian Internet. It's difficult to estimate, if there is a decline, but surely there is no rise. Pure neo-Nazi propaganda is more rear than in previous years. There are two major reasons for that:

- active criminal (for felonies) and administrative (for misdemeanors) law enforcement;
- general decline of ultra-right movement.

But we still witness serious online threats. In December 2019 an article on a Chechen man abducted by Chechen authorities was published. The article cited his ethnic Russian wife living in Siberia. After that, she got hundreds of hate messages in one night including death threats, both from Russian nationalists for 'racial betrayal' and Chechen patriots for criticizing Chechen authorities<sup>1</sup>.

We have new types of hate rising (new – for Russia). One of them – systematic misogynist hatred, related to growing activity of feminists. For example, we have a small hate group called Men's State (by association with Islamic State), which regularly threaten women, who from their point of view act indecently, and threaten them offline too. Then threats were extended to those who tried to oppose the initial threats. Men's State is known for statements against 'interethnic' marriages and affairs too. Interestingly their leader, Vladislav Pozdnyakov, is seeking political refuge in Poland now<sup>2</sup>.

As it happens everywhere, COVID-19 pandemic became a pretext for xenophobic statements, initially against Chinese (in March), later – against working migrants (mostly there are from Central Asian countries; from April). The latter were accused mostly of not being dangerous from an epidemiological point of view, but as a criminal threat (because of their poor economic situation). Nationalist organizations urge the government to deport migrants to respective countries, but that campaign is weak.

Turning to law enforcement issues, we may say that the number of criminal prosecutions for incitement to hatred has dramatically decreased due to partial decriminalization of that offence since the beginning of 2019. We support that reform as reasonable one.

At the same time, we witness a quick increase in prosecution for misdemeanors in hate speech related sphere, based mostly on two offences. First is a dissemination of banned texts, videos, pictures, songs, etc. The problem is that banning of some of these items was controversial or clearly against basic human rights norms. Second is a public displaying of banned symbols (starting from swastika). Here the problem is that in many cases the purpose of using such symbols was very far from propagating related ideologies, or even the opposite.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.sova-center.ru/racism-xenophobia/news/racism-nationalism/2020/02/d42056/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.sova-center.ru/racism-xenophobia/news/racism-nationalism/2020/02/d42121/>