

RUSSIA : THE RISE OF GOG? PUTIN POSITIONS HIMSELF TO INFLUENCE RUSSIA FOR LIFE



https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vladimir_Putin_2019-04-12.jpg
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JAN 16. 2020. President Vladimir Putin has fast-tracked work on constitutional changes that could keep him in power well past the end of his term in 2024 while lawmakers quickly sealed his choice for new prime minister.

The entire Russian government led by former Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev resigned after Russian President Vladimir Putin gave a speech on constitutional reform. Medvedev said, this was "to give President Vladimir Putin room to carry out the changes he wants to make to the constitution."

In his annual state of the nation address in Moscow, Putin announced his wish to reform the Russian constitution. 'I truly believe that it is time to introduce certain changes to our country's main law,' Putin said. Shortly afterward the government resigned en masse, not in protest but seemingly to pave the way for these reforms.

**In view of this new Putin move, in case you never read this before,
the following articles from May and July 2019, becomes more alarming.**

RUSSIAN EVANGELICALS PENALIZED MOST UNDER ANTI-EVANGELISM LAW

7,000 Churches Fasting, Praying Over New Terrifying Persecution Law

www.christianitytoday.com/news & www.charisma news.com/world

Following Russia's ban on Jehovah Witnesses, evangelical Protestants have become the most-punished group under the country's controversial "anti-missionary laws."

More than half of all cases of alleged violations last year were against evangelicals. Of the 159 individuals and organizations prosecuted for demonstrating their faith in public, 50 were Pentecostals and 39 were Baptists,

according to analysis by “Forum 18,” a news service covering religious freedom issues in Russia and surrounding countries.

So far this year, Russian authorities interrupted a Baptist worship service in April and charged its 71-year-old pastor with illegal missionary activity.

In January, two Baptists were punished for discussing their faith at a bus stop.

The 2016 *Yarovaya* laws ban Russians from inviting outsiders to join their faith, even online or in their own homes, unless they have a government permit through a registered religious organization, and even then they can only evangelize in designated churches and religious sites.

Evangelicals in the former Soviet country say that even as many Christians outside the state-affiliated Russian Orthodox Church heed the restrictions, violators are more likely to face punishment when charged by authorities. The fines start at 5,000 rubles for individuals (\$75) and at least 50,000 rubles (\$750) for organizations.

“Believers are afraid to carry the Word of God to the masses, because they fear fines,” Pentecostal Union lawyer Vladimir Ozolin told Forum 18. “As ever, law enforcement agencies assume that any church activity is missionary activity, which is certainly not true.”

For some Protestant Christians, the rules have turned into a no-win situation: Even displaying the full name of their organization to comply with one provision of the law has been interpreted as a violation of another. Last year, a Baptist pastor in the Perm region was found guilty for hanging a sign reading, “House of Prayer of the International Council of Churches of Evangelical Christian-Baptists, worship service every Sunday from 10am,” Forum 18 wrote.

“The placement ... suggests that [the defendant] carries out missionary activity aimed at disseminating information about the beliefs of [the church] among other persons who are not members,” the verdict concluded.

(The vast majority of Protestant congregations worship on property designated for residential use since laws restrict churches’ ability to lease or buy land for themselves.)

Russia ended up issuing a clarifying ruling last March after churches were being penalized for distributing basic information to their own flocks. The Constitutional Court decided that notices about services, ceremonies, or events only violate the anti-missionary laws if they indicate missionary activity will be a “defining feature” of the gathering.

But evangelicals still haven’t been able to avoid the penalties. Last month, (July) authorities appeared in the middle of a Sunday worship service near Novorossiisk, along the coast of the Black Sea. According to reports, the choir stopped singing “Jesus Is My Lighthouse” as the pastor, Yury Korniyenko, disputed with officials.

Two days later, he received a summons alleging illegal missionary activity.

Yevgeny Kokora, an elder in the 50-person congregation, told *Radio Free Europe* that they had started receiving weekly calls from investigators demanding

summaries of Korniyenko's sermons and reports of attendance. Meanwhile, their neighbours in Novorossiisk also suffered under the recent crackdown.

In March, authorities tore down an "unauthorized" Pentecostal meeting house, banned the Seventh-day Adventists gathering, and deported two Mormon missionaries back to the US.

The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) annual report, released last week, also called out Russia's continued violations, writing, "Religious and other communities can be financially blacklisted or liquidated, and individuals can be subjected to criminal prosecution for social media posts that are arbitrarily determined to offend the religious sensibilities of others."

Russia made its way onto the USCIRF list for the first time in 2017, largely due to the evangelism restrictions enacted the year before.

US ambassador to Russia John Huntsman referred to the state of religious freedom in Russia as "very difficult and very troubling."

"We're not only seeing religious organizations shut down, we're seeing individual members punished for their religious beliefs, which goes against everything we in the United States and a whole lot of other countries in this world stand for," he said in a recent interview.

Earlier in the year in Ryazan, southeast of Moscow, a pair of Baptists were punished for sharing Christian materials at a bus stop.

Sergei Roshchin and Valery Turkin were charged in January for not having authorization from a religious group to conduct missionary activity, but they insisted that they were merely sharing their personal beliefs. Their case failed in court and on appeal, with the judge ruling that they had invited others to a service.

According to Forum 18, Russia is increasingly prosecuting individuals for not having religious authorization, even if they do belong to an official religious group to begin with. "This is a particular problem for both independent Baptists and Council of Churches Baptists. The latter refuse on principle to seek any kind of state registration," the site reported.

Overall, more than 56 organizations and 103 individuals were prosecuted for violations of Russia's anti-missionary laws last year, fewer than the year before only because Jehovah's Witnesses had been **banned** as an "extremist group" and are no longer publicly active in the country.

<http://www.charismanews.com/world/58295-7-000-churches-fasting-praying-over-terrifying-new-persecution-law>

**7,000 CHURCHES FASTING, PRAYING OVER TERRIFYING NEW
PERSECUTION LAW**

Russian President Vladimir Putin signed an anti-terrorism law, but for the country's many churches, the signature sparked a demand for prayer and fasting.

The bill toughens punishment for acts deemed to be terrorism and for the organization of "mass unrest," according to the *Los Angeles Times*. It would also introduce prison sentences of up to a year for those who fail to report such crimes.

Furthermore, Great Commission Ministries Chairman Hanny Haukka tells *Charisma News* the law entails: Foreign guests are not permitted to speak in churches unless they have a "work permit" from Russian authorities

If a friend or relative from outside Russia wishes to share his/her faith in your home the guest will be fined and expelled from Russia.

Any discussion of God with non-believers is considered missionary activity and will be punishable.

Missionary activity will be permitted by special government permission. Example: If one

traveling on a train shares his faith without written permission the offender will be taken into

police custody for the duration of the journey and will be fined 50,000 rubbles (\$1,000).

Offenders from the age of 14-years-old will be subject to prosecution

Religious activity is no longer permitted in private homes. Most churches in Russia meet in homes.

Every citizen is obligated to report religious activity of neighbours to the authorities. Failure to be an informant is punishable by law.

One may pray and read the Bible at home but not in the presence of a non-believing person. You will be breaking the law and be punished.

If the church has purchased property it cannot be converted into a place of worship.

In church buildings, it is not permitted to invite people to turn to God. Worship services are permitted but making a non-believer a follower of Christ is against the law.

In response, thousands of churches across the country have come together to cry out to God.

"The church is appalled at the news of the new law. About 7,000 evangelical/protestant churches are in fasting and prayer at the moment over the news," Haukka tells *Charisma*

News.

Churches aren't the only residents enraged by the law. American refugee Edward Snowden tweeted: Putin has signed a repressive new law that violates not only human rights, but common sense. Dark Day for Russia."

What's more, critics are now declaring the *Yarovaya* laws, aka the "**Big Brother**," laws, as a sign of the end times:

If these amendments come into force, prison sentences for certain non-violent "extremist" crimes will potentially be twice as long as, for example, murder committed in the heat of passion, which carries a maximum sentence of three years.

Despite receiving nearly unanimous support in parliament, the *Yarovaya* laws have triggered a flood of apocalyptic commentary. Many wonder why Russia's already excessively harsh criminal laws are being made harsher.

The only official criticism of the legislation, however, has come from the Presidential Human Rights Council, which has highlighted ways in which the proposed amendments directly contradict the Constitution and existing laws. This criticism has been almost entirely ignored.

The Duma has already passed a number of laws that have harshened Russian law in the name of fighting terrorism and extremism. It criminalized "public calls for the violation of territorial integrity" and "rehabilitation of Nazism," a direct affront to the freedom of speech. In 2013, it passed a law that allowed the state to confiscate property from individuals affiliated with terrorists, including their relatives.

The government has long used the "fight against terrorism and extremism" to justify repressive laws, no matter how obviously senseless they may be. As a result, Russia's statutory framework can now be effectively used to target not only credible extremist threats, but also political opponents of the state. A large group of prominent Russian lawyers decried this problem in an open letter in 2013, saying that the "parliament's legislative work has acquired a distinctly prohibitive and repressive character."

In response, Haukka pleads with believers around the world to join with Russian churches in prayer and fasting.

"Russia is closing down in an awful way. The new law is in total conflict with the purpose and the task given to the church by the Lord. The law will send the church back into Soviet era Communist persecution," he says.

**PRAY FOR BELIEVERS IN RUSSIA.
AND CHINA IS IN THE SAME CONDITION.**