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Country Report on Terrorism 2020 - Chapter 1 - Russia

Overview: The Russian Federation continued to prioritize counterterrorism efforts in 2020 and remained a target of both domestic and international terrorist groups, particularly those tied to longstanding separatist groups in the North Caucasus region. Russia, however, also used counterterrorism and “extremism” as pretexts to suppress the exercise of human rights, or for other objectives in both domestic and foreign policy. Violent extremist Islamic groups, including those with ideological ties to ISIS and those consisting of fighters returning from Syria, remain a top government concern. Though the United States and Russia continued to share information on terrorist threats at the working level, the formal counterterrorism dialogue framework remained on hold because of public, unfounded statements by Russian security officials alleging U.S. support for ISIS.

2020 Terrorist Incidents: Militants targeted government buildings and law enforcement officers during the year. While the vast majority of these attacks were prevented, several terrorist incidents occurred.

- On December 11 a suicide bomber detonated himself while law enforcement officers attempted to detain him in the village of Ucheken, Karachay-Cherkess Republic, in the North Caucasus region. The detonation injured six officers, none seriously. The incident occurred outside the regional Federal Security Service (FSB) headquarters.
- On December 28, two assailants armed with knives killed one policeman and wounded another in Grozny, Chechnya. Police officers killed both assailants while trying to apprehend them.

Legislation, Law Enforcement, and Border Security: Under the coordination of the National Antiterrorism Committee, the FSB, with aid from the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) and Rosgvardiya when appropriate, perform counterterrorism functions. Russia properly applied its antiterrorism legislation in numerous terrorism cases during the year. In other cases, however, Russia continued to use its antiterrorism legislation against the political opposition, independent media, and certain religious organizations to criminalize the legitimate exercise of freedom of expression or association. For further information, see the Department of State’s *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices.*

The U.S. Department of State designated the Russian Imperial Movement (RIM) and members of its leadership as Specially Designated Global Terrorists on April 6. RIM has provided paramilitary-style training to white supremacists and neo-Nazis in Europe from facilities in St. Petersburg. Russia’s communications regulator, Roskomnadzor, blocked access to RIM’s website; however, the Russian government has not reported any additional restrictions on RIM or its leaders.

Russia’s FSB Director General Alexander Bortnikov reported in a December meeting of the National Antiterrorism Committee that in 2020 law enforcement agencies and special services prevented 41 terrorist attacks, killed 49 militants, detained 753 suspects, and dismantled 55 terrorist cells. These numbers represented a slight increase, compared with 2019. Bortnikov also reported that, in coordination with Roskomnadzor, law enforcement agencies restricted access to 66,500 materials containing content relating to or promoting terrorism and blocked the activities of 110 foreigners disseminating such materials on the internet.

Countering the Financing of Terrorism: Russia is a member of FATF and two FATF-style regional bodies: MONEYVAL and the Eurasian Group on Combating Money Laundering and Financing of Terrorism (EAG). Its FIU, the Federal Financial Monitoring Service (Rosfinmonitoring), is a member of the Egmont Group. In addition, according to the federal law “On the Central Bank of Russia (CBR),” the CBR has the authority to monitor activities of Russian financial organizations to assess their compliance with provision of the federal law “On the Prevention of Criminal Proceeds Legalization and Terrorist Financing.” The CBR monitors the implementation of AML/CFT laws and imposes liability for the violations committed by the banking institutions. Criminal cases involving money laundering are investigated by the MVD, the Russian Investigative Committee, and/or the FSB.

Several significant laws were passed in 2020. On July 13, President Putin signed into law an amendment to Article 6 of the federal law “On the Prevention of Criminal Proceeds Legalization and Terrorist Financing.” The amendment was designed to improve the mandatory measures taken by legal entities in specific circumstances to prevent the laundering of criminal proceeds and to cooperate with law enforcement agencies on issues related to combating the financing of terrorism and money laundering.

On July 20, he signed the federal law “On Financial Platforms.” This law amended Articles 5 and 7 of the federal law “On the Prevention of Criminal Proceeds Legalization and Terrorist Financing,” by subjecting online financial platforms subject to national AML/CFT policies and regulations.

On December 8, Putin signed into law an amendment to Article 10.2 of the federal law “On the Prevention of Criminal Proceeds Legalization and Terrorist Financing,” to stipulate that “decisions of intergovernmental bodies based on international agreements with Russia as a party that contradict the Russian Constitution shall not be enforced in Russia.”

In October the CBR reported that the total amount of funds moved offshore through Russian commercial banks from suspicious transactions had declined 72.2 percent year-on-year in the first half of 2020 to $259.5 million (18 billion rubles), down from $474.4 million (31 billion rubles) in the same period of 2019. The CBR noted that Russian banks had apparently continued meeting their AML/CFT obligations, despite operational challenges caused by COVID-19.

In December, Rosfinmonitoring reported that in 2020 it had blocked the financial assets of more than 1,200 persons suspected of involvement in terrorist activities, totaling more than $755,750 (57 million rubles). It also detected and prevented 184 terrorist financing cases. For additional information on money laundering and financial crimes, see the *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, Volume II, Money Laundering and Financial Crimes.*

Countering Violent Extremism: The government amended the federal law “On Countering Extremist Activities.” The amendment, which entered into force on August 11, expanded what qualifies as “extremism” to include the forcible “violation of the territorial integrity of Russia.” Under the updated law, demonstrations or rhetoric in support of a territory’s separation from the Russian Federation (which, according to the Russian Constitution, includes Crimea), could be considered extremist. Incidents of large-scale persecution of certain religious minorities, such as Jehovah’s Witnesses and certain Muslim groups, for purported extremism increased during the year.

International and Regional Cooperation: Russia is a member of the Global Counterterrorism Forum and an active participant in several multilateral organizations, including the OSCE, the Eurasian Economic Community, the East Asia Summit, and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation.

ecoi.net summary:
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