

2.5. Treason

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Following the full-scale invasion in Ukraine in February 2022, legislation punishing crimes of treason has significantly expanded.272 In July 2022, the Criminal Code was amended to criminalise ‘confidential cooperation with a foreign state, international or foreign organisation’ (Article 275.1 of the Criminal Code). In April 2023, the maximum punishment for state treason (Article 275 of the Criminal Code) was raised from 20 years in prison to life imprisonment. In addition, the scope of treason was expanded to include siding with an enemy, defined as participation as part of foreign forces or an international or foreign organisation in an armed conflict or hostilities.273

While espionage committed by a Russian citizen is one of the definitions of treason under Article 275 of the Criminal Code,274 the Article 276 ‘Espionage’ covers actions by a foreign national or a person without nationality.275According to Alexander Verkhovsky, the ‘unusually high number of espionage cases’ is related to the prosecution of ‘Ukrainian citizens who lived in territories that fell under Russian jurisdiction.’276

The number of prosecutions for treason, confidential cooperation, and espionage has increased, reflecting a trend similar to that related to anti-terrorism and anti-extremism legislation.277 Based on open sources such as court websites,278 there were around 360 convictions on charges of treason, confidential cooperation, and espionage in 2024279 and 224 convictions on these charges in the first half of 2025. As further noted by Ivan Pavlov, this constitutes a drastic increase from 15 convictions on treason in 2021 and two or three such convictions a year before 2014, attributing this rise to the war in Ukraine and the authorities’ search for an ‘internal enemy’.280

According to a lawyer from Department One, cited by Novaya Gazeta Europe in July 2025, the majority of people prosecuted on charges of treason, confidential cooperation and espionage, are ‘completely ordinary people’ who had ended up under the FSB’s scrutiny. The reasons for this scrutiny varied, with attempting to obtain permission to travel to Ukraine having become a ‘trigger for the FSB’.281

According to Department One, ‘siding with an enemy’ constituted the most common charge in treason cases, accounting for 59 % of cases between February 2022 and December 2024. This

charge typically involved activities like cooperating with Ukraine, attempting to join the Ukrainian army, or engaging in sabotage, such as trying to set fire to military recruitment offices or railway infrastructure.282 During the same period, at least 18 people were charged with 'providing assistance' to the enemy, primarily through money transfers, and 15 of them were already convicted.283

As noted by Mediazona in August 2025, the expanded definition of treason, which includes 'siding with an enemy' as one of the forms of treason, enables the authorities to prosecute people 'not only for alleged contact with Ukrainian intelligence but for simply sending money' to Ukrainian and international organisations.284 In November 2024, as reported by the human rights group Memorial, a Moscow court sentenced a man to 13 years in colony for donating 50 euros to the Ukrainian military.285 In August 2025, a man who returned to Russia from abroad was sentenced to 15 years in a maximum security penal colony for donating 500 US dollars to the Ukrainian foundation 'Come Back Alive' at the end of February 2022.286

According to Mediazona, security services can easily identify donors, especially those who made bank transfers before Visa and Mastercard closed their services in Russia287 in early March 2022.288 Moreover, banks are required to report suspicious activity to the Federal Service for Financial Monitoring (*Rosfinmonitoring*289), Russia's financial intelligence unit, which shares the data with the security services. Mediazona also noted that the security services are mainly interested in foundations directly supporting the Ukrainian military but 'donations to purely humanitarian groups' are also 'not safe from the FSB's interpretation.'290

Ivan Pavlov noted that while some criminal proceedings on treason cases have been discontinued, acquittals do not occur; the last known acquittal in a treason case was in 1999.291 According to Department One, since the beginning of the full-scale war in Ukraine, treason and espionage trials last on average less than two months, down from over six months before 2022. Out of 536 convictions handed down between February 2022 and December 2024, 230 were issued by military courts, which generally do not disclose personal information of defendants, including their names.292

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