

3.4.1. Use of legal instruments against journalists

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According to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), as of 21 October 2025, 327 journalists and media outlets were designated as ‘foreign agents’.385 As noted by the UN Special Rapporteur, Mariana Katzarova, 59 journalists were added to the register in 2024 and 40 journalists in the first four months of 2025.386 The UN Special Rapporteur also noted that around 40 % of administrative charges for non-compliance with ‘foreign agent’ legislation (Article 19.34 of the Code of Administrative Offences) were initiated against journalists and bloggers.387 Furthermore, in 2024, at least 16 journalists faced criminal prosecution for violations of ‘foreign agent’ obligations (Article 330.1 of the Criminal Code).388

As of 21 October 2025, 23 media organisations were listed as ‘undesirable’389 – the label that brings criminal charges for someone who works with them or quotes their materials.390 In 2024, as reported by Mediazona, Russian district courts issued 81 fines against journalists and readers for participation in the activities of ‘undesirable organisations’ (Article 20.33 of the Code of Administrative Offences). Of these, most cases concerned involvement with Meduza (45 administrative protocols), RFE/RL (12 administrative protocols), and TV Rain (9 administrative protocols). Nearly half of them (34) were initiated by the Yakutian branch of the Centre for Combating Extremism, known as Centre E, which reportedly monitored social media for links to banned outlets.391

Since February 2022, journalists have faced criminal charges under the ‘war censorship’ legislation. In September 2025, the UN Special Rapporteur noted that at least 18 criminal cases had been initiated on these charges, with at least 23 journalists being sentenced.392

Between July 2024 and July 2025, at least nine criminal cases were initiated against journalists under terrorism-related charges (Article 205.2 of the Criminal Code), with seven journalists convicted. In February 2025, the editor-in-chief of an independent media outlet was sentenced in absentia to 10 years in prison on charges of ‘fake news’ and ‘justification of terrorism’. Under the same combination of charges, a former news presenter was sentenced in absentia to eight years in prison for publishing an interview with a fighter from the Free Russia Legion, which was designated as a ‘terrorist organization’ in Russia in July 2025.393 In March 2025, the FSB reportedly arrested a Yakutian anti-war journalist394 in Yakutsk, the capital of the Sakha Republic,395 who had left Russia in 2022 and returned in 2024,396 on charges of ‘public calls to commit acts of terrorism, public justification of terrorism or terrorism propaganda.’397

In addition, between July 2024 and July 2025, at least 8 new criminal cases were initiated against journalists on extremism charges, with 12 journalists convicted in the same period.398 In April 2025, four journalists were sentenced to five and a half years in prison (each) in a closed-door trial on extremism charges, related to their alleged collaboration with the ACF.399 In July 2025, a journalist from Ufa, the capital of Bashkortostan, who had covered regional protests and volunteered with the local ACF branch before it was banned in 2021, was sentenced to 12 years in prison in a closed-door trial for involvement in an extremist organisation and 'spreading false information' about the Russian army,400 including through cooperation with the ACF.401

There have also been instances when journalists faced prosecution on national security charges.402 In November 2024, an RFE/RL journalist in Chita in the Russian Far East was sentenced to four years in prison under charges of 'confidential cooperation with a foreign organisation' (Article 275.1 of the Criminal Code), after a regional FBS branch accused her of being paid by a foreign media outlet 'to prepare inaccurate materials discrediting the Russian army and state authorities.'403 This was the first case in which a journalist was convicted under these charges,404 which carry a maximum sentence of eight years in prison.405 In July 2025, the FSB initiated a criminal case against two journalists for illegal border crossing while reporting from Sudzha in August 2024 when it was under Ukrainian occupation.406 As reported by the UN Special Rapporteur, an RFE/RL journalist, released in June 2024 after serving over four years in prison on charges of 'espionage' and 'possession of explosives', stated in court that he had been subjected to torture 'to extract a confession.'407

The UN Special Rapporteur noted that at least 65 journalists have faced criminal charges in absentia.408 According to CPJ, many journalists and media professionals in exile faced criminal prosecution for non-compliance with the 'foreign agent' legislation.409 Other charges include charges for spreading 'false' information,410 discreditation of the Russian army and government,411 organisation of activities of an 'undesirable organisation',412 justification of terrorism,413 and involvement in an extremist organisation.414

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