

3.5.1. Lawyers

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Due to the current political environment, lawyers involved in politically sensitive or opposition-related cases[434] increasingly face the risk of criminal prosecution,[435] including on extremism charges, and harassment, which reflects the application of ‘selective, punitive justice’ by the authorities.[436] As noted by Ivan Pavlov, the profession of a lawyer has become dangerous; lawyers are increasingly prosecuted, and custodial pre-trial measures for lawyers are chosen more frequently than before.[437]

In November 2024, a lawyer and a former president of the Udmurtia bar association was sentenced to seven years in prison on charges of spreading ‘false’ information and ‘inciting hatred’ for 2022 Facebook posts condemning Russian military actions in Bucha, Mariupol, and Irpin.[438] As reported by OVD-Info, colleagues of the lawyer believed that his prosecution was linked to his defence work for journalist Ivan Safronov, sentenced to 22 years in prison on treason charges.[439]

In January 2025, three of Alexei Navalny’s lawyers were sentenced in a closed trial[440] to prison terms ranging from three and a half to five and a half years.[441] A month after their arrest in October 2023, they were placed on the list of ‘terrorists and extremists’.[442] The prosecution accused them of helping Alexei Navalny lead an extremist group by communicating his messages to the public, including by social media posts, and helping him to file ‘frequent lawsuits over his treatment in prison’ to use legal hearings to keep speaking out against the state and the war in Ukraine.[443] The case was widely viewed as an attempt to increase pressure on the opposition and discourage defence lawyers from taking on politically sensitive cases. Two other members of Navalny’s defence team are in exile and were added to a wanted list, with one reportedly charged in absentia with extremism.[444]

In May 2025, a human rights lawyer from Kaliningrad, known for defending ‘activists, opposition figures, and individuals prosecuted under the laws restricting freedom of expression and assembly’, was charged for ‘confidential cooperation with a foreign state’ (Article 275.1 of the Criminal Code) and placed in pre-trial detention.[445] At the prosecutor’s request, the detention hearing was held behind closed doors ‘on grounds of State secrecy.’[446]

In January 2025, OVD-Info reported that lawyers also faced violations of their professional rights and obstruction of public defenders’ legal practice. Half of the lawyers surveyed by OVD-Info

through a closed survey reported having faced various violations. These included, but were not limited to, denial of access to clients in police departments and other state facilities, especially during detentions and investigative procedures, searches carried out without a court order, inspections of lawyers entering court buildings, and the use of so-called ‘dual defence’, where a court-appointed lawyer, often aligned with the prosecution, was assigned ‘in addition to the contracted lawyer.’447

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