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[The Russian State's New Surprising Crusade ... Against "Orthodox Extremists"](#)



It seems that the Russian state is preparing to get tough on various hardline, fringe followers of the Orthodox Church. Columnists in the opposition media and panic-stricken citizens on social media have already dubbed these Russian citizens "Orthodox extremists" or "new fundamentalists" Alexander Kalinin, for instance, the leader of the "Christian State - Holy Rus" group, has been detained. He faces charges of "compulsion to complete a transaction or to refuse to complete it under threat (...)". If we translate the charges from this legalese into layman's terms, what we find is that threatening letters are being sent to cinemas. Investigators are trying to identify others involved in the dissemination of these letters. Two of Kalinin's associates have also been detained.

The first threatening [letters](#) were delivered as early as in January 2017: "Should *Matilda* premiere tomorrow, cinemas will be set on fire and people may get hurt. And these acts will be initiated out of hopelessness by those who love God and their people. Their love is so great that they are prepared to sacrifice both their freedom and their lives". At the time, the media were quick to rummage through Kalinin's biography, discovering that he is a fringe figure with several hundred followers who authors a video blog about his visions - enough to calm most down. The authorities, however, ordinarily alert and more than willing to jail a person for an innocent comment made on social media, have turned a blind eye to the letter sent to a thousand cinemas.

The state reacted only when, as suspected by investigators, members of "Holy Rus" [set ablaze](#) a car parked close the office of Konstantin Dobrynin, director Alexei Uchitel's lawyer. Another reason for the subsequent reaction of the state, other than actions speaking louder than words, was that the crime was carried out in Moscow: authoritarian Russia, it is worth stressing, is a centripetal state. After all, earlier, a resident of the town of Irbit who has a history of having undergone psychiatric treatment, [set fire](#) to a cinema in Yekaterinburg, his way of protesting the release of *Matilda*. He had loaded his car with gas bottles and cans of gasoline before ramming it into the building. The arsonist was swiftly detained, but Kalinin was never mentioned in this regard. It took the fire in the capital to instigate an investigation against this radical fundamentalist.

From "God's Will" to "Holy Rus"

The expression "it seems" at the start of this piece is key here. Truth be told, the problem with "new radicals" is a very serious one from the state's perspective. By no means can it be resolved by detaining an online preacher in question (the VKontakte social media platform has been the main channel for Kalinin's activities over recent years). Kalinin, who was convicted of murder, fraud, and forgery in 2002, is, undoubtedly, a product of official Russian propaganda. To be more precise, he is, in fact, a "by-product". Still, the emergence of what is now known as "Orthodox radicalism" is the state's doing. Since propaganda and especially TV propaganda is all-encompassing and targets the rank and file, it's impossible to say how many Kalinins have appeared in Russia over the past four to five years.

By pursuing its own ideology, rejecting humanistic values in stark contrast to a European route, the state has given tacit support to “activists” of all persuasions eager to “express the righteous wrath of the people”. A vicious cycle of repressive laws justified by “the will of the majority” has been developed. The state apparently thought playing with activists was safe. Not all were corrupt per se, but they were all under control.

One can recall a number of telling examples. The star of Maxim Martsinkevich, a nationalist known as Tesak, ascended in 2013, in the days of heated discussions about the law “for the Purpose of Protecting Children from Information Advocating for a Denial of Traditional Family Values” (one of the first and hence, one of the less oppressive discriminatory laws adopted by the State Duma of the previous convocation – mere fines were to be imposed for “propagandizing homosexuality”). Tesak organized a movement known as “Occupy Pedophilia”. His followers posed as minors online, established contact with potential child molesters and arranged dates with them. Muscleheads would appear at these rendezvous instead of young boys and videos documenting humiliation and even violent attacks against the hapless suitors seeking forbidden love would later emerge. Tesak was *en vogue*. Arkady Mamontov, one of the most notable figures to appear on Russian propaganda TV, shot several stories, taking great care to mention the fact that “ordinary, sincere and passionate Russian guys” were taking a stand against “the bearers of the Western Sodomite plague”. Tesak became accustomed to his impunity but the controversy surrounding the scandalous gay propaganda law eventually subsided and his violent struggle lost momentum. A case was initiated against Tesak. He ended up behind bars.

When the heroic deeds of anti-*Matilda* activists are described, the term “Orthodox ISIS” appears frequently. Another beautiful expression – the “Orthodox Taliban” was also used recently. Dmitry “Enteo” Tsorionov and his associates from the “God’s Will” (*he was expelled only recently*) movement were regarded as members of the “Orthodox Taliban”. Enteo was in demand during the upsurge of the fight against arts “alien to traditional Russian values”. Members of “God’s Will” vandalized exhibitions, arranged noisy protest actions and generally horrified liberal-minded citizens via social media – while the group enjoyed support from high-ranking ROC patron Vsevolod Chaplin. Enteo proved to be more cautious than Tesak; as soon as Chaplin lost his post, “God’s Will” stopped carrying out public actions.

However, Kalinin along with many others who protest against the release of the movie *Matilda* is a different breed. They are neither politicians nor actors looking for high-ranking patrons; nor are they heeding state officials’ instructions. They have simply taken the veracity of state TV broadcasts for granted. They have come to believe that the time is nigh, and they are and simply showing readiness to fight for their ideals.

Sincerity these days

Several noteworthy quotes appear in Kalinin’s letter. Kalinin emphasizes several times that he admires Vladimir Putin immensely: “He is perhaps the only person in power who truly and sincerely loves Russia and his people”. Kalinin has learned the ins and outs of propaganda and threatens those who want to “stage a Maidan in Russia” with abhorrent reprisals. This is also an effect of propaganda: the state teaches its citizens that they have to join in fighting the enemy, that foreign puppeteers pull the strings of every dissenter in the country and that these puppeteers plan to destroy Russia. This is what Kalinin thinks. Uchitel is seen as one of the enemies, not least because of his movie. Kalinin juxtaposes the idea of a malignant Europe, whose image is created through official propaganda, with his own vision of the role of the state. His “Christian State – Holy Rus” is not only the name of this fringe organization; these terms also idealistically describe a glorious Russia, the last country to actively safeguard sacred, traditional values.

Kalinin is an ally of the state. He moves in step with the state. He listened intently and heard what the state was telling him. Now the state has detained him. How come? His state has betrayed him as has he who “truly and sincerely loves Russia”. This conflict is unlikely to be resolved peacefully.

It seems that State Duma deputy Natalia Poklonskaya – the official face of the campaign against *Matilda* – if one may put it this way – is experiencing a similar tragedy. Poklonskaya is a high-ranking statesperson who is new to Russia. She was formerly a prosecutor in Crimea when it remained part of Ukraine. Incidentally, she waged a somewhat successful fight against manifestations of “pro-Russian separatism”. She is less than *au fait* with the meanders of Russian politics. She apparently takes propaganda seriously and sometimes oversteps the mark. In one of his statements, even Putin stood up for Uchitel in a cloaked manner, but Poklonskaya would not give in. In Russia, a hint made by Putin carries more weight than a law carved in stone. But

Poklonskaya is seemingly oblivious to this. At the meeting of the inter-factional group for the protection of Christian values, she asked whether a demand should be issued for the resignation of the Minister of Culture Vladimir Medinsky. Indeed, liberals believe that Medinsky is an embodiment of the state policy of new barbarianism. However, from the point of view of true conservatives, he himself is a liberal if not a foreign spy.

It would be difficult to get rid of Poklonskaya – she is a living symbol, one of the key figures of propaganda of the days of the Crimean annexation. But they say that her more experienced colleagues are already seeking an alternative, less prominent post for her. One which allows no time for excessive public activity. This, too, will mean that her state has betrayed her. She senses this, it seems. Somewhat admirably, she perseveres with her fight against ballerina Matilda Kshesinskaya.

The emergence of a hero

The state's game of the "ideology of traditional values" gave rise to a number of Kalinins. It is important to understand that the state is playing a hypocritical game; zealots of traditional values who are part of the political system wear expensive suits, spend their vacations in supposedly decaying, decadent Europe, own real estate there and send their children to study there and yet do not take this game seriously. For them, propaganda is just a tool, a means of diverting attention away from their – predominantly fraudulent – activity.

For Kalinin and his ilk, this is not a game, it's rather a matter of life and death. They are prepared to go to prison should it be necessary in order to defend traditional values. Most importantly, they are not averse to torching cinemas and cars should it become necessary. In a bid to brush them off, the state has taken to telling blatant lies, since Kalinin is not seen as an enemy per se. He is the man who brought the ideas instilled by the state to a logical conclusion.

Similar to Poklonskaya, Kalinin is more consistent than either Medinsky or Putin. Through the most overt means – with the use of the Molotov cocktail – he demands that the state also shows consistency. He urges the state to stand by its words; that the state joins in efforts aimed at crushing all those who have been declared enemies in recent years. He demands genuine, real intolerance from the state which has turned intolerance into state ideology.

How is the state going to explain to Kalinin, the very state that gifted him life, that he is wrong? It is not going to; this is impossible. Should the state continue its ideological penetration of the population in the same vein, new Kalinins will certainly emerge. This new breed of Kalinins, however, will be even tougher and will demand that the state listens. Carried away by the fight against political dissent which is absolutely harmless in 99 out of 100 cases, the state has given birth to a real and dangerous enemy who will stop at nothing.

It is bewildering that the reason for the explosion of all this hatred fraught with the most unpredictable consequences is *Matilda* – a movie that tells well-known stories, directed by a figure who is loyal to the authorities, and who can hardly be described as a radical experimentalist.

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