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By the reshuffle of his administration Putin repeats the recent reshuffle in the government



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raised the Russian benchmark index to historical highs. The shares of oil company and of the state-owned savings giant Sberbank were affected most



Leader of Russia's Jehovah's Witnesses Vasily Kalin in front of Golovinsky Intermunicipal District Court / MosNews.com collage

Jehovah's Witnesses Contest Moscow Ban

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Anna Arutunyan

MosNews

The current legal status of the Moscow Community of Jehovah's Witnesses remains unaltered and the judge's decision to ban the religious group has not yet come into force, representatives of the community said in an official statement. Artur Leontyev, the group's lawyer, told MosNews that the community filed an appeal on Monday against the ruling.

Judge Vera K. Dubinskaya of the Golovinsky Intermunicipal District Court in northern Moscow ruled on Friday to liquidate the legal entity of the Moscow Community of Jehovah's Witnesses and to impose a ban on their activities. Within the next two months, the Moscow City Appeals Court will decide either to uphold the ruling, in which case the ban will come into force, or revoke it, and the case will be heard again.

"We have also filed a complaint to the European Court on

FEATURE

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The Moscow News Weekly

War Vet Turns Billionaire



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Tsvetkov has risen from Air Force lieutenant colonel to billionaire. This year the Afghan war veteran has landed on the Forbes list

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MONEY

DJ RusIndex	2,020.87	+1.09%
MT RusIndex	664.02	+1.90%
RUR/USD	28.49	0.00%
RUR/EURO	34.44	-0.04%
Oil Brent	32.36	-1.58%
Oil Urals	29.40	-1.93%

human rights and religious freedom violations,” Leontyev said.

The Jehovah’s Witnesses in Moscow are federally registered. They have 11,000 adherents in Moscow and 133,000 throughout Russia. Charles Russell founded the community in Russia in 1891.

The first lawsuit against the community was filed in 1998 by a regional prosecutor, accusing Jehovah’s Witnesses of inciting religious discord, breaking up families, violating individual Russian citizens’ rights, inclining people to commit suicide and luring teenagers and minors. In 2001, prosecutors of the capital’s northern district dismissed the complaints. Although the community is registered on the federal level, the City of Moscow Department of Justice has refused to register or re-register any community of Jehovah’s Witnesses under a 1997 law allowing a religion to be deemed “anti-state”.

The latest ruling to ban the organization in Moscow revived fears of growing intolerance towards ethnic and religious minorities in Russia, both inside the country and abroad.

The United States spoke out against the ruling Friday. “We deplore the recent decision... to ban the religious activities of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Moscow and to liquidate their legal entity,” State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said Friday in Washington.

Christian Presber, a spokesman for the religious group in Moscow, told MosNews that the ruling increased the danger of violent attacks directed at Jehovah’s Witnesses in Russia and other former Soviet areas.

While Presber did not mention cases of outright violence, he said that Jehovah’s Witnesses have encountered repeated pressure from the police – such as unnecessary detainment and unwarranted refusal to allow conventions. “Members have been approached by the police when talking about the Bible,” he recalls.

Presber said that given the general situation of distrust for minorities, “attacks on individuals who are members of religious minorities have a lot of potential. I’ve seen evidence in Moscow and St. Petersburg.”

Moreover, Presber believes that the ruling, which has not gone into effect yet, will increase such incidents. Sanctioned by the ruling, he said, people will feel they “have a moral right to attack Jehovah’s Witnesses” as a group that has been banned.

The European Court has ruled in several cases in Greece, France and Austria, establishing a precedent that Jehovah’s Witnesses belong to a recognized religion. Under the ruling,

INTERVIEW

IGOR KOROLKO
The Moscow News Weekly

Non-Fundamental Justice



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made to the Euro Court of Human R lawyer Karina Moskalenko expla how the court wo what kind of opti available to petiti

COLUMN

GEORGY BOVT, S COLUMNIST
Gazeta.Ru

The Double Standards of Russia’s War Terror



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warlord, has been in the Chechen highlands. This re has just arrived. I killed during a successful securit carried out jointly the GRU, the Main Intelligence Department, and FSB, the Federal Security Service.

the state cannot investigate the beliefs of a recognized religion.

And, since Russia has ratified the European Convention on Human Rights, persecuting a religion based only on its beliefs is unlawful, Presber said. "It's an ideological case."

Meanwhile, Leontyev said that this is a significant case internationally. "The position of international organizations in this case is clear," he told MosNews. "Everyone is watching how Russia is going to rule on this issue. People all over the world see Jehovah's Witnesses as a litmus test to determine how human rights and religious tolerance are observed in Russia."

"It will show where Russia is headed," he said.

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