

The prosecutions of Krasnoyarsk Muslims Andrei Dedkov and Andrei Rekst are politically motivated

Andrei Dedkov, a Muslim from Krasnoyarsk, was held in a pre-trial detention facility from April 2016 until March 2017 on charges of organizing a cell of *Nurdzhular*, a religious association ruled to be extremist in Russia. At present, he is awaiting trial and under travel restrictions. In the same case Andrei Rekst, who is now on bail, is also a defendant. According to investigators, Rekst was a participant in the cell organized by Dedkov.

Memorial considers the prosecutions of Dedkov and Rekst to be politically motivated. While Dedkov was in detention, he was a political prisoner. We shall also consider them to be political prisoners if they are sentenced to terms in prison and are detained.

Dedkov and Rekst have been charged under Section 1 and Section 2, respectively, of Article 282.2 of the Penal Code of the Russian Federation (organizing the activity [Section 1] or participating in the activity [Section 2] of an NGO or religious organization or other organization that has been closed, or had its activities banned, by court decision on grounds of extremism that has entered into force, with the exception of organizations that in accordance with Russian law have been designated as terrorist). Dedkov faces up to 10 years in prison, and Rekst up to four years.

It is not the first time that the Russian authorities have prosecuted Muslims who study and disseminate books from the *Risale-i-Nur* Collection (*The Epitomes of Light*) by the Turkish theologian Bediuzzaman Said Nursi (1877 — 1960). In 2008 the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation ruled that the international religious association *Nurdzhular*, of which allegedly the followers of Nursi are members, was an extremist organization. The law enforcement bodies consistently call *Nurdzhular* an organization ‘with an evident structure’ that disseminates Islamic and Turkish political influence in the world.

However, in reality, all that exists is an apolitical community of people who consider themselves followers of the teachings contained in *Risale-i-Nur*, communicate with each other and hold joint readings. As yet no evidence of the existence of a structured organization, directed from Turkey, has been presented, and we suggest that this notion is an invention of the Russian authorities. The fabricated cases that have followed one another have been filled with new details of unsubstantiated charges: collaboration with the CIA, efforts to violate the territorial integrity of Russia, and so on.

So far as the writings themselves are concerned, in 2007 14 translations of works by Nursi were banned by a decision of the Koptevsky district court in Moscow. We consider this ban, like the ban on *Nurdzhular* that followed, to be groundless. A number of the arguments put forward by the experts on which the court based its judgement are absurd. For example, in the religious literature the experts found passages containing condemnation of sinners (and even self-criticism by someone who had repented) and passages intended to frighten atheists with retribution after death, and on this basis drew the conclusion that the texts are extremist and incite religious discord.

Moreover, in Nursi’s books there are no calls to violence or terrorism, nor hate speech. The Council of Muftis of Russia, the Central Spiritual Directorate of Muslims of Russia and the *Sova Research Centre* have all stated that the writings of Nursi represent no danger to society and do not contain any propaganda of violence. The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom has urged that the ban on these writings be reviewed.

We find no grounds to prosecute people who read, whether individually or in a group, the books of Said Nursi. Such prosecutions are only motivated by the desire of law enforcement bodies to create the illusion that they are combating organized extremism.

We believe that the followers of Said Nursi are subject to prosecution solely for their religious convictions and their non-violent realisation of the right to freedom of thought and conscience.

We demand that all charges against Andrei Dedkov and Andrei Rekst be dropped, and also that bans on religious literature that does not incite violence be lifted.

Recognition of an individual as a political prisoner, or of a prosecution as politically motivated, does not mean that Memorial Human Rights Centre shares or approves of the individual's views, statements or actions.

PayPal – an e-wallet for giving help to all Russian political prisoners helppoliticalprisoners@gmail.com.

More information about the case of Andrei Dedkov and Andrei Rekst can be read [here](#).