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Anti-cultism in Russia

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The Definition of the Anti-cult Movement and Anti-cultism. The anti-cult movement is a general name for associations, groups, or individual enthusiasts who oppose new religious movements and derogatorily refer to them as cults or sects. They require that “sects” be banned or at least that their rights be limited.

The term “anti-cultism” has two similar meanings. First, it is used as a synonym for the anti-cult movement. Second, anti-cultism refers to the totality of concepts regarding the particular harm and danger posed by new religious movements and religious minorities. It is the totality of these concepts that in fact inspires participants of the anti-cult movement.

In the Russian Federation, the anti-cult movement is represented by two main components: religiously-based and secular.

Religiously-based Anti-cultism. According to experts’ estimates, there are approximately 600 religiously-based anti-cultists in Russia, among whom there are approximately 300 persons who often deal with “cults” in their work and 50 persons who specialize only in cults and sects.²

Anti-cultists who are part of the Russian Association of Centers of Study of Religions and Sects (RACSRS) and who represent the Russian Orthodox Church are the most active and influential.

The leading center of RACSRS is the Informational Consulting Center of Priest-Martyr St. Irenaeus of Lyon, formed in 1993 in Moscow with the blessing of Alexy II, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia.³

1 Paris. Published by “Editions les 3 genies” 2013, 103 pages.

2 See S. I. Ivanenko, *Obyknovenniy antikultizm* [Ordinary Anti-cultism]. Saint Petersburg, 2012, page 27.

3 Patriarch Alexy II (secular name—Aleksy Ridiger, 1929–2008), head of the Russian Orthodox Church from 1990 to 2008.

RACSRS was created in 2006. The association is composed of directors of 21 regional centers for studying sectarianism in Russia,⁴ as well as 8 other centers—3 centers in Ukraine, 3 centers in the Republic of Belarus, one center in Uzbekistan, and one center in Kazakhstan.

The president of RACSRS⁵ and the Center of Priest-Martyr St. Irenaeus of Lyon is Alexander Dvorkin.⁶

The goal of RACSRS in Russia is to oppose the activity of new religious movements, prepare materials on the destructive nature of religious minorities for government agencies and the media, and conduct religious expert studies based on anti-cultist ideas.

A. Dvorkin and RACSRS actively apply the term “totalitarian sect” to religious minorities so as to discredit them. The term “totalitarian sect” and the closely related term “totalitarian cult” have been actively used since the 1930’s to criticize Communism and Fascism. The concepts “totalitarian sect” and “totalitarian cult” have been used in English and French literature since the 1970’s in connection with

⁴ The centers that are a part of RACSRS are active in Moscow, Podolsk (Moscow Region), Novosibirsk, Saratov, Tomsk, Tula, Saint Petersburg, Petropavlovsk-Kamchatka, Yaroslavl, Ryazan, Stavropol, Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk, Novgorod Velik, Vladikavkaz, Cheboksary, Murmansk, Taganrog, Voronezh, Perm, and Arkhangelsk. There are 13 religious ministers of the Russian Orthodox Church among the directors of the regional centers of RACSRS.

⁵ The vice presidents of RACSRS are Archpriest Alexander Novopashin (Novosibirsk), Archpriest Georgiy Ioffe (Saint Petersburg), Archpriest Arseniy Vilkov (Ryazan), Archpriest Viktor Gorbach (Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk), and the senior secretary of RACSRS, Alexander Kuzmin (Saratov).

⁶ Alexander Dvorkin (born in 1955 in Moscow) is one of the most known figures of the anti-cult movement in Russia. In 1977, he emigrated from the U.S.S.R. to live in the United States. He was baptized in 1980 in the New York Temple of Christ the Savior (Orthodox Church in America); he finished the St. Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary (Crestwood, New York) where in 1983 he received his Masters in Theology. In 1988, pursuing his doctorate at the Fordham University, a private Jesuit university of New York, he defended his dissertation on the theme “Ivan the Terrible as a Religious Type,” and received his Doctorate of Philosophy in history. From 1988 to 1991, he worked as an author and announcer at the radio station “Voice of America” in Washington and then as an editor in the news department at the radio station “Freedom” in Munich. On 31 December 1991 he returned to Russia and in March of 1992 began working in the Synodal Department of Religious Education and Catechization of the Moscow Patriarch. He has the title of Professor of the Orthodox Holy Tikhonov Humanitarian University awarded by the decree of Aleksy II, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia. In 1993, he formed and was the head of the Information and Consultation Center (since 2003—Center of Religious Studies) of Priest-Martyr St. Irenaeus of Lyon, episcopal of Lyon. He was a reader (lowest level of a religious minister) at the temple of Holy Trinity in Khokhly (Moscow).

new religious organizations that anti-cultists accused of “brainwashing.”⁷

If we summarize all the elements that are attributed to a “totalitarian sect” by Russian anti-cultists, then the following picture emerges.

1. A “totalitarian sect” is a group whose leadership controls the consciousness, behavior, and emotions of the members of the group and exploits them. A “totalitarian sect” can harm its members psychologically, physically, and financially. “Totalitarian sects” hide their true nature and objectives from potential or new adherents, using deceitful methods to recruit and draw in new members.

2. Members of a “totalitarian sect” unselfishly serve the leader of the group and do not question any of his statements or actions. Questions, doubts, and dissatisfaction are eradicated or even punishable. Mind-numbing methods are used to suppress doubts regarding the group and its leader.

3. The group’s leadership determines how the members of the “totalitarian sect” should think, act, and feel. The members have to receive permission to go on dates, change their work, or marry. The group has strict rules on how to dress, raise children, where to live, and so forth.

4. Members of a “totalitarian sect” usually sever ties with their family and close friends and reject life goals and personal interests that they had before they were recruited into the group. The leadership of the group not only encourages but also requires that the members of the “totalitarian sect” live with other members and associate only with them.

5. The group devotes excessive attention to obtaining more money. They are not above using even illegal means.

Representatives of secular religious studies, as a rule, do not recognize the

⁷ The first person in Russia to use the term “totalitarian sect” in regard to new religious organizations, thoroughly explaining its meaning, was the famous journalist Alexander Vladimirovich Shchipkov. On 21 October 1993 he published the article “Uchitelya i raby” [“Teachers and Slaves”] in the *Nezavisimaya gazeta* [Independent Newspaper]. Ten years later, in a collection of his journalistic articles, A. Shchipkov included this article under the title “Totalitarnaya sekta” [“Totalitarian Sect”] with an interesting commentary: “I introduced to Russia the term ‘totalitarian sects,’ which, strictly speaking, is not at all scientific.” (A. V. Shchipkov, *Soborny dvor*. Moscow, Mediasoyuz, 2003, page 146).

scientific nature of the term and do not use it.⁸ Having studied religion for more than 35 years, I am convinced that such “totalitarian sects” are a product of anti-cultists’ imagination.

A. Dvorkin and RACSRS do not give serious attention to missionary activity because they consider that their main task is to gain the support of government agencies and law enforcement structures so as to suppress a wide range of religious organizations categorized as “totalitarian sects.”

Even within the Russian Orthodox Church there are opponents to Alexander Dvorkin and his methods of combating new religious movements, which opponents call the “theory of totalitarian sectarianism.” The main critics of this theory are certain Orthodox missionaries as well as teachers at religious teaching institutes specializing in the field of Orthodox “sectarian studies.”⁹

In addition to Orthodox centers, Protestant anti-cult centers are also active. It should be mentioned that the Center for Apologetics Research (Saint Petersburg, website <http://www.apolresearch.org/>)¹⁰, as well as the publisher “Protestant,” was the first in modern Russia to begin publishing translations of works of Western anti-cultists.¹¹

Secular Anti-cultism. According to expert estimates, there are approximately 100 secular specialists in the field of anti-cultism, among whom 30 often deal with cults in their work, and 7 specialize in only cults and sects.¹²

⁸ According to the famous Russian religious expert Igor Kanterov, the vast majority of representatives of domestic scientific religious study and sociology of religions do not use the terms “totalitarian sect” and “destructive cult” in their research or teaching (see I. Ya. Kanterov. *Totalitarian Sects and Cults—Entsiklopediya religiy* [Encyclopedia of Religions] edited by A. P. Zabiako, A. N. Krasnikova, and E. S. Elbakyan. Moscow, Akademicheskyy proekt, 2008, page 1270).

⁹ Famous Orthodox missionary Archpriest Oleg Stenyayev—priest of the Church of the Nativity of John the Baptist in Sokolniki (Moscow), Roman Kon—associate professor of the Moscow Spiritual Academy and author of the book *Vvedeniye v sektovedeniye* [Introduction to the Study of Sects] (Nizhniy Novgorod: Nizhegorodskaya Spiritual Seminary, 2008, 496 pages), which is a textbook for students of Orthodox spiritual seminaries and academies, and others severely criticized A. Dvorkin and the theory of totalitarian sectarianism.

¹⁰ One of the main authors is Dmitry Rozet, deacon of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ingria and scientific researcher for the Center for Apologetics Research.

¹¹ For example, the book *The Deceivers: What Cults Believe, How They Lure Followers* by J. McDowell and D. Stewart was published for the first time in Russian. Moscow, “Protestant,” 1993, 224 pages.

¹² See S. I. Ivanenko, *Obyknovenniy antikultizm* [Ordinary Anti-cultism]. Saint Petersburg, 2012, page 27

Among representatives of secular anti-cultism, there are psychologists and psychiatrists, as well as other specialists. On a number of occasions, their scientific competence has for good reason been questioned.

For example, Yevgeniy Volkov, a well-known anti-cultist and candidate of philosophical sciences (Nizhniy Novgorod), is the author of many articles on psychological manipulation used by destructive cults. He was the editor and translator of the book *Exit Counseling: A Family Intervention* by Carol Giambalvo (translation from English, Nizhniy Novgorod, 1995, 118 pages). Ye. Volkov frequently participated in judicial proceedings against Protestants, followers of Eastern religions, and Scientologists. Ye. Volkov's name appears on the Incompetent Authors of Expert Studies website (<http://falseexperts.info/?show=experts&id=4>) because he calls himself a psychologist and participates in performing expert studies although he does not have the higher education and necessary scientific qualification in this field.

However, the influence of anti-cultism in modern Russia is determined, not by the scientific or professional competence of its followers, but by the importance of the governmental positions that they hold. For example, the mass media identifies RF Minister of Justice Vladimir Konovalov as one of the most active proponents of anti-cultist ideas (he has held this position since 2008).

Because V. Konovalov was known for his loyalty to the Russian Orthodox Church and has been awarded many church medals, rumor spread that he was a "secret monk."¹³ In response to questions in the *Rossiyskaya gazeta*, V. Konovalov stated that he studied by correspondence at the St. Tikhon's Orthodox University, where he received an Orthodox theological education.¹⁴ According to the president of the Guild of Experts in Religion and Law, Roman Lunkin, A. Dvorkin¹⁵ was the teacher and mentor of the future minister of justice, V. Konovalov, while he studied at St. Tikhon's Orthodox University.

13 The story about the Minister of Justice being a "secret monk" is groundless; V. Konovalov is married with three children.

14 *Rossiyskaya gazeta* (federal issue) No. 4417 dated 19 July 2007, <http://www.rg.ru/2007/07/19/konovalov.html>

15 R. N. Lunkin. "The Ministry of Justice on the War Path. Instead of an Expert Council for Conducting Religious Expert Studies, Minister of Justice Alexander Konovalov has created an 'Orthodox Brigade,'" portal—credo.ru, <http://www.portal-credo.ru/site/?act=news&id=69754&topic=646>

V. Konovalov turned out to be a good student and supported anti-cultists. He established close ties with FECRIS¹⁶—one of the main international anti-cult organizations.

In 2009 the composition of the Expert Council on Conducting State Religious Expert Studies under the Russian Ministry of Justice was radically altered. The Expert Council had been composed of qualified scholars and specialists. The Ministry of Justice took the initiative to exclude professionals from the Expert Council and to appoint in their place several active supporters of anti-cultism. As a result, on 3 April 2009 A. Dvorkin was chosen as chairman of the Expert Council on Conducting State Religious Expert Studies under the Russian Ministry of Justice.

The Campaign of Protest Against the Increased Role of Anti-cultists in Government Agencies. In response to the growing influence of anti-cultists, the all-Russian initiative for freedom of conscience for all citizens and against the presence of radical anti-cultists in the Expert Council on Conducting State Religious Expert Studies under the Russian Ministry of Justice and other government agencies was launched in 2009.

This initiative appeared on the Internet under the title “No to Inquisitors!” Scholarly religious experts, human rights advocates, believers, and leaders of several Protestant churches, which suffer from discrimination most directly, as well as some Muslim leaders, openly supported the initiative.

Originally the initiative (signatures of participants, articles, and commentaries) was posted on the popular website Slavyanskiy Legal Center and Institute of Religion and Law (www.sclj.ru). In a short time, approximately 14,000 signatures were collected in support of the initiative in an open letter to RF Minister of Justice Vladimir Konovalov.

However, as confirmed by one of the originators of the initiative in a letter to Dmitri Medvedev, president of the Russian Federation in 2009, at the end of September 2009—as a result of pressure from representatives of government agencies who were sympathetic to anti-cultists, including calls from “the top,” demanding that the

¹⁶ European Federation of Centres of Research and Information on Sectarianism. A. Konovalov presented his report at the FECRIS conference in Hamburg in 2007; in 2009, he met with the participants in the FECRIS conference in St. Petersburg and discussed the perspective for cooperation with this organization.

administration of the Slavyanskiy Legal Center and Institute of Religion and Law terminate the initiative “No to Inquisitors!” and remove all materials from the Web site—the initiative had to be moved to the less popular Web site Zhivoy Zhurnal (<http://inkvisitoramnet.livejournal.com/>).¹⁷

Subsequently, large-scale campaigns were occasionally held to have A. Dvorkin dismissed from the position of chairman of the Expert Council on Conducting State Religious Expert Studies under the Russian Federation Ministry of Justice. Thus, in 2012 the corresponding petition collected close to 9,000 signatures.

The RF Ministry of Justice refused to grant the demand, however, in effect, due to the large-scale protests the Expert Council on Conducting State Religious Expert Studies did not play an active role. Nevertheless, A. Dvorkin and other anti-cultists, as members of the Expert Council, freely use their status to attack religious minorities during lectures and appearances in the media.

The Strengthening of Government Support for Anti-cultism Was Especially Noticeable in 2009 and the Period That Followed. From 2009 until now, anti-cultists and their ideas started to dominate state organizations responsible for developing and carrying out policies regarding religious organizations. Anti-cultists have been acting as informal authors (or co-authors) of conceptual approaches to solving problems between the state and religious associations. Frequently, anti-cultist mythology motivates law-enforcement agencies to initiate and investigate cases against new religious movements and motivates courts to render unlawful decisions.

To combat new religious movements and religious minorities, anti-cultists rely on two main methods: dissolving and banning religious organizations and declaring religious literature of “sectarians” extremist materials.

Religious Organizations That Are the Primary Targets of Anti-cultists. In recent years, anti-cultists have mainly attacked Pentecostals, Jehovah’s Witnesses, the Church of Scientology, and the Society for Krishna Consciousness.¹⁸

Despite criticism from anti-cultists, all these religious organizations continue to progress and strengthen their position.

17 R. N. Lunkin, director of the Institute of Religion and Law. Letter to President of the Russian Federation D. A. Medvedev regarding anti-missionary draft law and the “No to Inquisitors!” initiative, <http://inkvisitoramnet.livejournal.com/2297.html>

18 This is described in greater detail in S. I. Ivanenko’s book, *Obyknovenniy antikultizm* [Ordinary Anti-cultism]. Saint Petersburg, 2012.

Manifestations of Anti-cultist Views in the Activity of State Agencies.

Violations of rights of believers, including those committed under the influence of anti-cultist's prejudice, were analyzed in the Report of the Ombudsman for the Russian Federation for 2012.¹⁹

As a result of anti-cultism, the following typical violations of the rights of adherents of new religious movements and religious minorities may be noted.

1. In recent years, mainly adherents of minor religious confessions have regularly filed complaints with the Ombudsman for Human Rights of the Russian Federation against the incorrect and at times unlawful actions of law-enforcement officials. These officials burst into places where religious services were being conducted and, under the guise of a search, document inspection, or personal search of citizens, photographed and even fingerprinted the citizens. Jehovah's Witnesses, more than other religious minorities, were the objects of such actions.

In February 2012, because of such violations of the rights of believers, the Ombudsman for Human Rights of the Russian Federation sent a letter to the Minister of Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation. The RF Ministry of Internal Affairs immediately responded to this letter and circulated a directive to all territorial subdivisions to train their staff on how to comply with legislation on freedom of conscience. As a result, toward the end of 2012 there were fewer complaints to the Ombudsman for Human Rights of the Russian Federation from believers against the actions of police officers.

For example, according to representatives of the Church of Scientology, during a search for extremist literature in the Moscow Church of Scientology in on 6 October 2011 law-enforcement officers were extremely aggressive.²⁰ However, law-enforcement officers acted professionally during investigations in March 2013 of several Scientology organizations in Moscow, St. Petersburg, Novosibirsk, and other regions.

2. The practice of reviewing canonical religious literature for extremist attitudes and appeals has turned into a complex systemic problem. The religious

¹⁹ Published on 29 March 2013, <http://rg.ru/2013/03/29/lukin-dok.html>

²⁰ As an example, when those conducting the search were unable immediately to open the door to one of the buildings that was locked, they refused to wait two minutes for a key to be brought and broke down the door. No extremist literature was found at the Scientology church in Moscow, but the building had to be repaired after the search.

organization of Jehovah's Witnesses remains the "record holder" for the number of such inspections. Jehovah's Witnesses and adherents of other religions have repeatedly filed applications with the European Court of Human Rights, which has rendered seven judgments in their favor within only the past five years.

3. The Ombudsman for Human Rights of the Russian Federation regularly received complaints from believers and adherents of religious minorities concerning difficulties they face when acquiring land to construct religious buildings and filing the necessary approval documentation.²¹ In regard to these complaints, there was an intense and, as a rule, futile exchange of correspondence with the agencies of state authority and local self-government agencies for the city of Moscow and the Kostroma, Moscow, Pskov, and Samara Regions, the Stavropol Territory and other subjects of the Russian Federation. The Ombudsman is working on many such complaints from previous years and the list of unresolved conflicts increases from year to year. Some of them are astonishing in the level of the officials' arbitrariness as well as in the obvious disregard for the believers' feelings.

4. In 2012, another serious incident occurred in the Eastern Administrative Circuit of the city of Moscow, where, in accord with direction given by a prefect, a temporary house of prayer of the religious organization, the Church of the Holy Trinity (Christian Evangelical-Pentecostal religion), located on Nikolaya Starostina st., 10, was torn down. On the night of 6 September 2012, the believers were forcibly evicted. The authorities assigned this mission to the "people's guard."²² The latter, breaking down the door, burst into the church with the cry, "Sectarians have no place on Russian soil." Church utensils and other valuable property were trampled into the ground and some were stolen.

²¹ Usually these difficulties were encountered primarily by Catholic, Old Believers, Muslim, and Protestant communities.

²² Adoption of the Law of Moscow on the Moscow City People's Guard No. 36 dated 26 June 2002, the Moscow City People's Guard is a state-community association created to render assistance to state agencies of the city of Moscow and law-enforcement agencies to ensure public order and is composed of citizens of the Russian Federation who are admitted into its ranks in accordance with established procedure. It is united under the direction of the authorized state institution, the Moscow City Headquarters of the People's Guard. Territorial subdivisions of the Moscow City People's Guard are guard detachments of regions of the city of Moscow that are formed into guard detachments of administrative circuits.

In this incident, it is noteworthy that the state's actions do not demonstrate respect for the rights or feelings of believers, since the motivation for the removal of the Pentecostal's religious building was the perception that members of Protestant denominations are "sectarians."

5. Overall, the Ombudsman for Human Rights of the Russian Federation perceives a continuing increase in 2012 in the tendency to limit the activity of so-called non-traditional religious organizations, to disrupt their religious services, and to insult the feelings of their adherents. At the same time, attempts to negatively categorize several "non-traditional" confessions as "sectarian," "destructive," "totalitarian," and "pseudo-Christian" have been observed.

Such derogatory designations are not supported by law, and are therefore, not permitted when officials make public appearances or in official publications of state agencies. Unfortunately, the Ombudsman's mail, as well as the results of his monitoring in 2012 of official Web sites of state agencies of subjects of the Russian Federation, revealed that such rhetoric is used by officials from the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Area–Yugra, Amur, Arkhangelsk, Rostov, and Chelyabinsk Regions, and the Republic of Bashkortostan.

There were similar speeches by heads of regions in 2013. For example, on 1 April 2013 the governor for Stavropol Territory offered to use the Cossacks²³ to combat sects.²⁴

The Most Serious Failure of the Anti-cultists—the Results of the Judicial Process in the City of Tomsk to Declare *Bhagavad-Gītā As It Is* Extremist Material (2011–2012).²⁵

²³ Cossacks—a military class in the Russian Empire that played an important role in the acquisition and guarding of bordering territories. The 1897 census showed the number of Cossacks as approximately 3,000,000 (men and women), or 2.3% of the population of the Russian Empire (without Finland). In the Russian Federation, according to the All-Russia Census in 2002, there were more than 140,000 persons calling themselves Cossacks. Of them, 95.5% are in the Southern Federal Circuit (62.5% of Russia's Cossacks reside in the Rostov Region, 14.7% in Volgograd Region, 12.5% in Krasnodar Territory, and 2.8% in Stavropol Territory).

²⁴ <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=50637>

²⁵ The Tomsk city prosecutor's office filed an application with the court on 30 June 2011 to declare extremist material the book, *Bhagavad-Gītā As It Is*, by the founder of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, Srila Prabhupada (1896–1977). This book is a translation of the Hindu sacred scriptures *Bhagavad-Gītā* with comments; over 100 million copies have been

The instigators were anti-cultists who expected that in the end they would secure a ban on the Society for Krishna Consciousness. As a result of the judicial proceedings, the claim of the prosecutor's office was denied; anti-cultists suffered a serious defeat. The proceedings provoked large-scale protests in India, which greatly damaged the reputation of anti-cultists in the eyes of the Russian government.

The anti-cultists thought that it would be sufficient to state that they were not attacking the *Bhagavad-Gītā*²⁶ itself, but that they suspected extremism in one of the commentaries to this sacred book. They thought that most Hindus would not be offended by this but that only members of the Society for Krishna Consciousness would. According to anti-cultists' strange but deeply held convictions that contradict reality, the Society of Krishna Consciousness does not enjoy support and respect in India.

The actual situation is quite different. The parliament and government, India's largest political parties, religious circles, and the media viewed the judicial proceedings as a gross insult to the religious feelings of Hindus and an offense against a great holy object, the sacred book, the *Bhagavad-Gītā*. The fact is, as scholars and specialists of Indian culture well know (and unbeknownst to anti-cultists), to a Hindu, insulting the authoritative commentary on a holy book such as the *Bhagavad-Gītā* is the same as insulting the holy book itself and all Hindus.

Indian leadership rendered decisive support to the Society for Krishna Consciousness. Russian-Indian bi-lateral relations that are officially characterized as "a privileged strategic partnership," were threatened, which was an unpleasant surprise for Russian leadership. For the first time in the history of Russian-Indian relations, there were large-scale anti-Russian protests in India. Representatives of

published in 80 languages. This translation of *Bhagavad-Gītā* is the most widely distributed outside of India and one of the most widely distributed within India. The first edition of *Bhagavad-Gītā As It Is* was published in Russian in 1984. In the following years the book was reprinted and sold out at more than a million copies. According to data from the Center of Indian Research of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Science, it is the only widely distributed Russian translation of the *Bhagavad-Gītā*. Other, scholarly translations are known only by scholars and experts.

²⁶ *Bhagavad-Gītā* (Sanskrit: *Divine Song*) is a jewel of old Indian literature in Sanskrit, containing 700 verses. It is one of the most esteemed sacred texts and has a great influence on the life and culture of Indian society. *Bhagavad-Gītā* became known in Russia in 1788, after N. I. Novikov (1744–1818) was the first to publish it in Russian.

the Indian business community were outraged over the court proceedings against *Bhagavad-Gītā As It Is*.

On 28 December 2011 the Leninskiy District Court of the city of Tomsk denied the claim of the prosecutor's office, however this decision was appealed.

It was evident to all the competent experts that, if the decision of the Leninskiy District Court of the city of Tomsk was reversed and the proceedings renewed, the reaction of Indian society and the leadership of the Republic of India would be painful and severe. Russian-Indian relations would suffer greatly.

On 24 and 25 February 2012 the All-Russian Scientific Conference, "The Bhagavad-Gita in History and Modern Society," organized by the Tomsk State University in collaboration with the Department of Culture of the administration of the Tomsk Region was held in Tomsk. At the conference, a resolution was adopted, which stated that the concept of extremism cannot be applicable to such religious texts as *Bhagavad-Gītā As It Is*.

The participants of the conference expressed their distrust of A. Dvorkin as the chairman of the Expert Council on Conducting State Religious Expert Studies under the Russian Ministry of Justice. They noted the need "to create an independent and competent association of experts, composed of religious experts, linguists, historians, philosophers, sociologists, psychologists, and jurists who are capable of delivering objective, scientifically grounded conclusions."

On 14 March 2012 a number of prominent Russian scientists sent an open letter to Russian President D. A. Medvedev and the Chairman of the Government of the Russian Federation V. V. Putin. According to the opinion of prominent scholars, the book *Bhagavad-Gītā As It Is* is an authentic element of true Hinduism, and the actions of the Tomsk prosecutor's office discredit Russia in the eyes of the civilized world and drives a wedge between Russia and India.

7 On 21 March 2012 the judicial chamber of the Tomsk Regional Court upheld the decision of the court of first instance, which denied the claim of the prosecutor.

Unfortunately, the judicial proceedings that were initiated by the prosecutor of the city of Tomsk considerably damaged Russian-Indian relations and led to an anti-Russian climate in India, which was never present there before.

To a considerable degree, anti-cultists who were the ideological inspiration for

the judicial proceedings in Tomsk must bear the moral responsibility for the damage to the reputation of the Russian Federation.

The international scandal, provoked by the case in Tomsk, is clear evidence of the harmful influence that modern anti-cultism can exert on state-confessional relations.

Conclusion

For a country with so many denominations such as Russia, anti-cultism is completely unacceptable as an ideological basis for making administrative decisions regarding state-confessional relations.

It is advisable for religious experts to monitor the activity of anti-cultist centers that encourage agencies of state authority and municipal administration to violate the lawful interests of the followers of religious minorities.

Developing religious studies and making scientific knowledge of religious studies the basis for decisions is the most effective means to normalize the situation. In particular, the Expert Council on Conducting State Religious Expert Studies should be made up of individuals who have high qualifications in religious studies. Systematic work to raise the standard for religious studies is necessary, including government officials, law-enforcement officers and officials of the judiciary, and journalists.

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You can download the book *Ordinary Anti-cultism*
from www.books.google.com.