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# Mussolini Ruling Seen as PR Stunt

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A Bashkortostan district court banned as extremist the memoirs of Italian dictator Benito Mussolini on Monday, but an independent analyst dismissed the measure as a cheap ploy by local authorities to boost their anti-extremism record.

All works by fascist leaders are considered extremist under a 2002 federal law, so no special analysis was needed to add Mussolini's "Memoirs 1942-1943" to a federal list of extremist materials, Larisa Kuchina, a spokeswoman for Bashkortostan prosecutor's office, said by telephone.

But Galina Kozhevnikova, head of the Sova Center anti-extremism watchdog, said the 2002 law means that oeuvres by fascist leaders do not require special court rulings to be declared extremist.

Bashkortostan authorities deliberately misinterpreted the law to boost their record on fighting extremism, she said.

"This is a fertile field for reports that say, 'Here, we are fighting extremism,'" Kozhevnikova said by telephone.

Bashkortostan courts have added 53 items to the federal list of extremist materials, started in 2007 and available on the Justice Ministry's web site. In comparison, only 39 items have been added by courts of the North Caucasus Federal District, which comprises the seven regions where extremism is on the rise.

The North Caucasus republics may have no time to target publications because they are too busy fighting terrorists, Kozhevnikova said.

Thirty-six items blacklisted by courts in Bashkortostan concern Islam, in particular the Hizb-ut-Tahrir group, banned in Russia in 2003. The religion itself is prominent in the region, but Bashkortostan has never seen large-scale Islamic violence on par with the North Caucasus.

Also banned by Bashkortostan officials are Mussolini's "The Doctrine of Fascism," Adolf Hitler's "Mein Kampf" and anti-Semitic materials, as well as more unusual entries, such as a picture of Winnie the Pooh wearing a swastika, a non-existent Livejournal blog, a video titled "Maniac, Satan, Kuzmich" and a leaflet called "Maidan."

Mussolini's "Memoirs," which deal with the collapse of his regime during World War II, remained available online in Russian on Monday. The Russian edition of the book, published by Eksmo in 2004, was also for sale at the country's largest online book retailer, Ozon.ru, for 1,200 rubles ($38). Amazon.com carries an English version of the memoirs.

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