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Russian Lawmakers Move to Ban Satanism, Decry Alleged Azov 'Ritual Orgies'

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State Duma roundtable "On countering the spread of Satanism and other destructive cults and ideology on the territory of the Russian Federation." **duma.gov.ru**

Russia's lower-house State Duma hosted a roundtable late Tuesday dedicated to combating "Satanism" and other ideological beliefs that authorities claim threaten Russian statehood.

Lawmakers at the meeting identified Satanism as a "misanthropic ideology based on the justification of evil," saying that its goal was to destroy Russia's religious denominations as part of Western hybrid warfare. They compared it with Nazism and LGBTQ+, according to the newspaper Vedomosti.

"Why do we want to restrict the rights of Satanists? Because they pose a serious threat to our country," said Vyacheslav Leontiyev, a senior member of the Duma's anti-Satanism working group.

The group and the Duma Committee on Issues of Public Associations and Religious Organizations are expected to start drafting amendments to Russia's laws on freedom of conscience, information and commerce to fight the spread of "satanism and other destructive cults and ideologies." It was not immediately clear when lawmakers would vote on the bills.

"We need to see how these Satanists make a living. Who prints their books and posters? Who pays for their shows and performances? Who's the customer?" asked State Duma lawmaker Andrei Kartapolov, a member of the ruling United Russia party.

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Vedomosti reported that the three-hour roundtable was introduced with a video of the controversial far-right Ukrainian military unit Azov, which Russia's Supreme Court declared a terrorist organization in August 2022. The video was spliced with a voiceover about "Satanic ritual orgies."

"We're getting numerous complaints of Satanic sex orgies in Moscow and other Russian cities from citizens," said Nikolai Burlyayev, a senior member of the Duma's religious committee, adding that the encroachment on Russia's traditional conservative values threatens the "collapse of our civilization state."

Bishop Pitirim from the Skopinsky diocese of the Ryazan region claimed the number of "magicians, psychics, tarot card readers, numerologists and witches" tripled in the past year and now totals 800,000 people. That compares with 40,000 Russian Orthodox priests, he claimed.

Head of the Russian Orthodox Church Patriarch Kirill has recommended drawing on past experience and banning the so-called "internationalist satanist movement," said senior church official Fyodor Lukyanov.

Russia's Supreme Court banned the so-called "international LGBT movement" as an extremist organization in November 2023, effectively criminalizing any form of LGBTQ+ displays or rights advocacy in the country.

The influence of the Orthodox Church has steadily risen as Russia takes an increasingly conservative social turn.

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