



ANDREI SAKHAROV
RESEARCH CENTER
FOR DEMOCRATIC
DEVELOPMENT
at Vytautas Magnus University



POLITICALLY MOTIVATED MISUSE OF PSYCHIATRY IN THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

As of September 1, 2026

*A joint report of the Federation Global Initiative on Psychiatry
and the Andrei Sakharov Research Center*

In contemporary Russia, mechanisms of involuntary hospitalization and forensic psychiatric assessment are used as instruments of political pressure and the suppression of civic activism. These abusive practices are deeply embedded in the state's repressive apparatus, while remaining flexible and adaptive in their application. At the same time, the extreme lack of transparency surrounding specialized institutions, the persecution of human rights defenders, and widespread social fear conceal the true scale of these violations from public view, creating an "iceberg effect."

1. The New Operational Environment

Systematic monitoring of Politically Motivated Misuse of Psychiatry in Russia conducted by the Federation Global Initiative on Psychiatry (FGIP) in cooperation with the Andrei Sakharov Research Center for Democratic Development (ASRC) in Lithuania encountered new challenges in 2025: a sharp decline in access to information due to pressure on the legal profession, the media, and human rights organizations, as well as the normalization of compulsory psychiatric evaluations in cases involving "terrorism" and "extremism" in Russia in 2025. A particularly serious setback for us, in June, 2026, was the complete prohibition of the activities of such human rights projects and organizations as the Memorial and OVD-Info, which the Russian state has designated as an "extremist movement". Given that we deliberately collect data only from open sources, both to avoid causing harm to the individuals concerned and to ensure the reliability of the information, this significantly complicated our monitoring efforts.

2. Data, Scope and Methodology

In response to these challenges, we revised our methodology for counting cases: whereas previously we included the broadest possible range of abuses, including threats of psychiatric hospitalization, statistical analysis now includes exclusively legally effective court decisions declaring individuals legally incapacitated and ordering compulsory medical measures, either

inpatient or outpatient. This approach allows us to rely on cases that are more readily verifiable and legally significant.

At the same time, we continue to record the full range of cases involving violations in our regularly updated monitoring table, available here: https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/e/2PACX-1vRbg_NF5qL9Dq0HgkVwThuBMxWvnjnydpE5mmYbFAIuVj7knkYddQ-TVJM5kt8vVL9hkzRtdrFMEpDj/pubhtml

The Macro-Medical Context: Rosstat and 'Routine' Normalization

On February 2, 2026, Rosstat reported that between 2020 and 2024, the number of newly registered cases of depression, anxiety, and stress-related disorders in Russia increased by 21.5%, from 281,000 to 341,400 cases. At the same time, sales of antidepressants were also rising. This trend broadly mirrors global developments and may be explained either by a growing prevalence of mental health problems – a negative trend – or by more people seeking professional help, which, conversely, may indicate greater mental health literacy and declining stigma around psychiatric care.

However, in the Russian context, both trends — the positive trend of more people seeking help and the negative trend of a growing prevalence of mental health problems across the population — paradoxically have the same consequence: more and more people are coming into contact with a system that in recent years has demonstrated its capacity to use psychiatry as an instrument of repression. This medical normalization of mental health creates a convenient 'routine' backdrop under which selective, politically motivated hospitalizations are easily hidden and normalized within general healthcare structures.

3. APUS Study and Our Monitoring: Two Perspectives on the Same Problem

The analytical relationship between our monitoring and the independent research is highly complementary. While FGIP's monitoring provides a macro-level quantitative and legal framework (focusing strictly on legally effective court decisions to ensure high verifiability), the APUS study provides the micro-level qualitative reality of courtroom conveyor belts, systemic institutional cultures, and the harsh day-to-day conditions inside facilities. Together, they offer two vital perspectives on the same unfolding crisis.

In 2026, a significant event was the publication of the large-scale independent report by the human rights project APUS, "You Will Not Get Out of Here" (file:///C:/Users/mashez/Downloads/Telegram%20Desktop/APUS_doklad_o_karaelnoy.pdf). This study, which covered a two-year period of data collection, offered a new methodological perspective, combining macro-level statistical trends with micro-sociological analysis of data on psychiatry-related repression in Russia.

The quantitative component of the study involved the automated collection, extraction, and mathematical processing of official judicial statistics from the Judicial Department at the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation. In particular, it included a detailed analysis of aggregated indicators from Form No. 2 on civil and administrative cases for the period 2022–2024.

The qualitative component involved in-depth, semi-structured interviews with lawyers, independent practicing psychiatrists, former employees of the Federal Penitentiary Service of the

Russian Federation (FSIN), journalists, as well as representatives of leading human rights and support organizations, such as the Memorial Human Rights Defense Centre and the Team Against Torture.

The authors of the report identified an important methodological limitation of their study: a high rate of refusals to participate in interviews among people who had themselves experienced such repression and had already been discharged from inpatient psychiatric facilities. Even individuals who had previously spoken publicly about their experiences in the media chose not to participate in the study amid mounting pressure. This reluctance is attributable to the persistent social stigma surrounding mental health, the severe psychological trauma caused by confinement in closed psychiatric wards, and the constant fear of being subjected to involuntary hospitalization again.

The APUS researchers concluded that contemporary Russia lacks the centralized Soviet system of “punitive psychiatry,” with its total ideological medicalization of dissent, exemplified by the fabrication of pseudoscientific diagnoses such as Snezhnevsky’s concept of “sluggish schizophrenia.” Instead, in their view, “punitive psychiatric practices” have emerged: the deliberate use of psychiatric diagnosis, assessment, or treatment without medical indications in order to pursue punitive, disciplinary, or political objectives.

As noted by Sergey Davidis, head of the Political Prisoners Support Program at the Memorial Human Rights Defense Centre, contemporary repressive agencies do not seek to prove that every critic of the authorities is “insane.” Instead, law enforcement agencies operate according to a “mechanistic” logic of persecution: the psychiatric route is selected automatically if an individual charged in a politically motivated case has any previously documented or diagnosed mental health condition or other mental health-related characteristic.

The qualitative analysis of the forensic psychiatric process in the APUS report demonstrates why the official judicial statistics appear to reflect a flawlessly functioning conveyor belt. According to estimates by the Federal Chamber of Lawyers of the Russian Federation, Russian courts consider up to 20,000 involuntary hospitalization cases each year. At the same time, judicial hearings held on the premises of psychiatric hospitals take place behind closed doors and in an “express” format: judges consider 20–30 cases in half a working day, spending no more than 10 minutes on each person’s case. It is therefore unsurprising that courts grant more than 99% of applications for involuntary hospitalization.

4. Key Trends and Patterns

As of September 1, 2026, our updated monitoring has documented 64 court decisions ordering compulsory psychiatric treatment issued between 2017 and 2025, inclusive. Analysis of this cohort reveals the following key trends and patterns:

Trends Over Time: Repressive Rulings and Peaks

A pronounced peak in repressive court decisions was recorded in 2023, with 22 cases, 16 of them anti-war-related. In 2025, 12 such decisions were documented, 9 of them anti-war-related.

See Chart 1.

We stress that such rulings are often difficult to document: court records are rarely transparent, and cases may remain unknown unless they reach human rights lawyers or organizations. New

information about past cases can also emerge years later. The gap between documented and actual cases is therefore likely substantial.

Increase in Inpatient Confinement and Anti-War Dominance

By the end of 2025, 49 of the 64 individuals subjected to this procedure remained physically confined in closed psychiatric hospitals, including 37 isolated in connection with anti-war cases.

Furthermore, 37 cases (57.8% of the total) were directly or indirectly triggered by individuals' anti-war views or protest activities after February 2022, primarily involving charges under Articles 207.3 and 280.3 of the Russian Criminal Code. This highlights the absolute dominance of the anti-war factor in current psychiatric repression.

See Chart 2.

Demographic Transition: The Age Shift

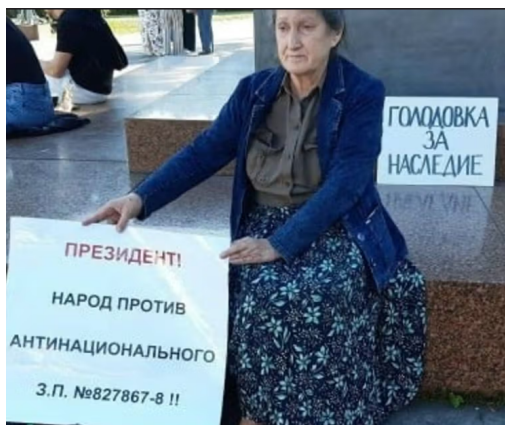
Age Shift: A clear trend toward younger victims has emerged. The largest group among those affected consisted of young people born after 1990 – 28 individuals (including 3 women). The middle age group (born between 1970 and 1990) comprised 19 individuals (4 women), while the older age group (born between 1950 and 1970) comprised 17 individuals (5 women). This shift toward the younger, post-Soviet generation reflects the state's focus on intimidating youth and student activism. *See Chart 3.*

5. How Contemporary Psychiatric Repression Works

Modern Russian medical repression hardly can be called an ideologically uniform system. It is rather a collection of flexible, dispersed, and highly opportunistic practices. Below, the active cases are categorized by their primary tactical function.

A. Political Subduing of Civic Activism

The Case of Natalia Shamina (Novosibirsk)



Neither her age nor her high social standing protected 76-year-old biologist and urban heritage preservation activist Natalia Shamina from being sent to a psychiatric hospital as a means of silencing her activism.

In July 2026, Shamina came to Moscow to take part in a public campaign against a federal bill that would give regional authorities the power to strip cultural heritage sites of their protected status at their own discretion. According to heritage preservation activists, this would pave the way for their mass demolition. She held several solo pickets, calling on Vladimir Putin not to sign the bill. According to Shamina, she was detained by police

several times, and a psychiatric emergency team was also called, but the medical staff did not consider hospitalization necessary.

On July 25, she formally notified the police that she was beginning an individual protest action and announced an indefinite “Hunger Strike for Heritage” at the monument to Cyril and Methodius near

the Presidential Administration on Staraya Square. An hour later, Natalia was detained and taken to the Kitay-Gorod district police station. From there, she was forcibly transported, without her consent and without notifying her relatives, to N. A. Alekseev Psychiatric Clinical Hospital No. 1 (formerly known as “Kanatchikova Dacha”). Police officers claimed that she had behaved aggressively during the detention, while doctors interpreted her decision to go on hunger strike as a suicide attempt. At the hospital, Shamina’s mobile phone was immediately confiscated, all communication with her was cut off, and lawyers, fellow human rights defenders, and family members were denied access to her.

This is how she herself described her experience at the hospital:

“When I was first brought in, I was ordered, quite roughly, to undress. I resisted, but one of the orderlies asked mockingly, ‘Need some help?’ So I had to undress.”

“They took absolutely everything away from me and put me in Ward 3, in a room with nine beds. The woman in the bed next to mine promised she would ‘strangle everyone to death tonight’—and I’m the closest one to her, so she’ll start with me! The women with dementia had some fascinating conversations... there were many women who had completely withdrawn into themselves.”

“Just before the court hearing, a nurse suddenly came up to me and said I had been prescribed an injection. I refused, so the orderlies came into the room. Between them, they forced some kind of drug into me and then tied me to the bed. I believe this was done to push me to a nervous breakdown and make me burst into tears in court.”

On July 27, two days later, a court hearing was held at the hospital. Interestingly, it was psychiatrist Nikita Berezin who requested Shamina’s hospitalization at the hearing, but the prosecutor’s office did not support this position. The judge found no grounds for hospitalization and ordered Shamina’s release.

The Case of Alexander Gabyshev (Yakutia)



One of the longest-standing and best-known figures in human rights reports on abuses involving psychiatry, shaman Alexander Gabyshev, remains confined at the Yakutsk Psycho-Neurological Dispensary. Since the beginning of 2026, his case has continued to follow a familiar pattern: doctors have once again deemed him “a danger to society,” courts have extended his compulsory treatment, and his defense team has repeatedly but unsuccessfully sought an independent psychiatric assessment. Against this backdrop, according to his lawyer Alexey Pryanishnikov, Gabyshev’s condition has deteriorated: he has lost considerable weight and become visibly gaunt, which the lawyer attributes in part to psychotropic medication. In June, the court extended his treatment until December 18, while in August the Supreme Court of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) upheld that decision and rejected a request for a new assessment. Notably, the defense’s position was also supported by a representative of the guardianship authorities, yet the court nevertheless sided with the doctors.

The case of Khristolyub Vegan



In April, 2026, devastating news emerged: under unclear circumstances, Khristolyub Vegan (formerly Dmitry Kuznetsov) died in prison. He was a Christian preacher, pacifist, and staunch opponent of war, nationalism, and violence of any kind. After the full-scale invasion began, he spoke out openly against the war, and in 2023 a criminal case was opened against him over two videos he had posted on YouTube.

As part of an inpatient psychological and psychiatric assessment, he was diagnosed with “schizotypal disorder,” and it was claimed that, because of this condition, he was allegedly unable to fully understand the

nature and social danger of his actions. One of the grounds for this conclusion was an experience he had described as early as 2009, when he said he had encountered God. His religious beliefs and preaching were, in effect, interpreted as manifestations of a mental disorder.

In February 2025, he was sentenced to three years in a penal colony settlement, while also being subjected to compulsory outpatient psychiatric monitoring and treatment. After refusing to report voluntarily to the penal colony, he was detained at an anti-war protest, and in 2026 he was transferred to a general-regime penal colony. On April 17, he was found hanged in a punishment cell at Penal Colony No. 2 (IK-2) in Voronezh. Shortly after his death, a farewell video recorded by him in the summer of 2025 was published, in which he said that he was afraid he would not return from the penal colony alive.

B. Punitive Pressure Within the Penitentiary System

The Case of Mikhail Fetisov (St. Petersburg)



Intimidation and subduing defendants facing politically motivated charges are the purpose behind most abuses involving psychiatry. Mikhail Fetisov, a St. Petersburg resident born in 1974, contracted COVID-19 while working as a neurologist and spent 30 days on mechanical ventilation, subsequently becoming a person with a Group III disability. After the start of the war, he openly referred to what was happening as an invasion, criticized the Russian military, disseminated information about crimes in Bucha and Mariupol, and published instructions on surrendering to captivity. In 2024, his home was searched for the first time, and in the autumn of 2025 he was detained and remanded in pre-trial detention on charges of disseminating “fake news” about the Russian armed forces (Article 207.3, Part 2, paragraph “d” of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation) and publicly calling online for activities directed against state security (Article 280.4, Part 2, paragraph “c”).

Despite suffering from serious medical conditions that are included in the official list of conditions incompatible with detention, Fetisov was kept in pre-trial detention. He himself claims that this was preceded by an FSB officer falsifying documents relating to his medical examination. Once in

detention, he was twice transferred without explanation to the psychiatric ward of the detention facility's hospital. Fetisov considers this not medical care but a means of exerting pressure: "This is revenge, a punitive measure by the administration, intimidation in response to my lawful demands, including those concerning my health."

The Case of Lyudmila Razumova (Tver Region)

Political prisoners who have already been convicted and are serving their sentences may also face the use of psychiatry against them as a form of punishment. Lyudmila Razumova, an artist born in 1967 from Konakovo, Tver Region, spoke out against the invasion together with her husband, Alexander Martynov, after the start of the full-scale war. They participated in rallies, wrote about Ukrainians who had been killed, and painted anti-war graffiti. In March 2023, Razumova was sentenced to seven years in a penal colony for disseminating "fake news" about the Russian armed forces (Article 207.3, Part 2, paragraph "d" of the Criminal Code) and politically motivated vandalism (Article 214, Part 2 of the Criminal Code). During her imprisonment, she was repeatedly placed in a punishment cell (ShIZO) and a disciplinary isolation unit (PKT), and after a conflict with another prisoner at a prison hospital, a new criminal case was opened against her.

In early June 2026, Razumova was sent to a hospital in Burashovo for an inpatient psychiatric assessment. This is how she herself described her stay there in a letter:



"I sit here like an animal in a zoo. Everything is still unclear; I am feeling very bad. But the staff treat me well. As for the living conditions: there is no hot water, no electrical outlet, no refrigerator, no television. I am allowed to smoke once a day during the outdoor walk. It is bitterly cold outside, and I am freezing in my cell again. Visits and phone calls are also impossible. I have a cellmate, and I do not communicate with her. She does not talk either, but she stares intently only at me. Where else? She is like a third pair of eyes in the cell. I find this extremely difficult to bear; it has always been this way for me. I am even afraid to tell her to stop staring or not to stare so intently, without taking her eyes off me. I have never felt this bad before, and it is not going away. It is only growing, like a tumor. I try to draw, but I cannot. I do not read. And I keep thinking: why did they come up with all this? My doctor – I could tell her all of this and ask her for help. But I no longer trust psychiatrists. There have already been so many of them here in my case. Doctors, an investigator, a prosecutor. It is all like one tangled mass. A viscous, hopeless substance, a SYSTEM that destroys everything. A system of EVIL."

C. Pharmacological Coercion and Abuse

The Case of Robert Gilman (US Citizen)

The case of Robert Gilman, a former U.S. Marine from Massachusetts, illustrates the arbitrariness and inhumanity of Russia's law enforcement, judicial, prison, and medical systems. In January 2022, he was arrested in Voronezh. According to the authorities, Gilman, who was intoxicated, caused a disturbance on a train and kicked a police officer. His family disputed this account, saying that Robert was seriously ill, that the kick had been accidental during the arrest, and that the officer later dropped the complaint. Nevertheless, in 2022 Gilman was sentenced to three and a half years in a penal colony.

While serving his sentence, Gilman faced additional charges over alleged assaults on prison staff. By the end of 2025, following appeals and the aggregation of his sentences, his final sentence stood at 10 years in prison.

The organization Global Reach reported that the conditions of Gilman's detention became significantly harsher after he was subjected to pressure to make him participate in the war in Ukraine on Russia's side. Gilman reported sleep deprivation, beatings, and forced physical exercises, including squats.

According to some sources, Gilman's medical history included a diagnosis of "persistent personality disorder," for which he received psychotropic treatment. In 2026, however, the situation took a critical turn.

According to Global Reach, prison guards forcibly administered psychotropic drugs to Gilman, altering his state of consciousness. In June 2026, amid this treatment and the abuse he was subjected to, his condition deteriorated sharply: he developed a "dissociative stupor." He stopped responding to his surroundings, lost the ability to speak, and required tube feeding. Experts later described his condition as catatonia-like.

At the end of June, Gilman was transferred to the psychiatric ward of a civilian hospital in Voronezh, where, while in a stuporous state, he was kept handcuffed to his bed. His mother and lawyers were denied all access to him.

On August 11, 2026, Robert Gilman was unexpectedly released after being pardoned by Vladimir Putin. By the time Gilman boarded a U.S. aircraft, his condition had improved: he was once again able to walk and speak.

The forcible administration of psychotropic drugs by prison staff, the profound deterioration in his condition that followed, and the handcuffing of a seriously ill person to his hospital bed are important elements of the broader pattern of abuses in Russia's places of detention.

D. Selective Non-Application and Denying Treatment

The hypocrisy of the current system is demonstrated by a double standard: while healthy, active dissidents are declared insane to strip them of their procedural rights, individuals with documented mental disorders might be declared fully sane and capable of understanding their actions in order to inflict maximum punitive damage through harsh prison terms.

The Case of Dmitry Rupenko (Irkutsk)



The case of Dmitry Rupenko, a resident of Irkutsk born in 1994, is one such example. Despite his diagnoses, in June 2026 the Irkutsk Regional Court found Rupenko guilty of high treason (Article 275 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation) and aiding the commission of an act of sabotage (Article 281.1, Part 3).

Rupenko was detained in September 2024 near an aircraft manufacturing plant in Irkutsk. According to the investigators, he had offered the plant as a target for a Ukrainian drone strike "on the instructions of an unidentified handler." At the time of his detention, he was filming the railway tracks near the plant with a quadcopter.

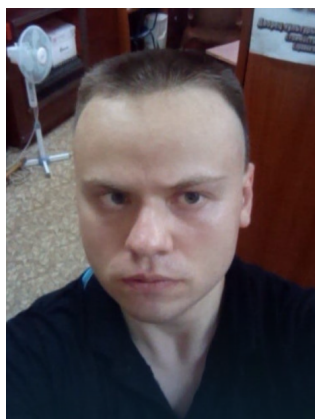
Rupenko maintains that he was filming scenic views for an advertising project at his new place of employment.

As Rupenko's mother told journalists from SOTAvision, Dmitry's psychiatric problems began when he was 11, and by the time he reached adulthood, doctors had diagnosed him with an organic personality disorder. His mental health difficulties left him withdrawn, isolated, and extremely trusting, making him particularly susceptible to other people's influence. Even before his detention, Dmitry had made multiple suicide attempts.

An official forensic psychiatric assessment concluded that his personality changes amounted to 70 percent, while nevertheless finding that Rupenko fully understood the danger posed by his actions and was capable of controlling them. The assessment itself took only eight days, rather than the prescribed 21. Dmitry was denied access to the documents on which the assessment was based, which triggered another suicidal crisis. His mother managed to engage an independent psychiatrist, who testified in court and criticized the official assessment, but his opinion was disregarded.

In addition, Rupenko suffers from epilepsy and ulcerative colitis and has had a non-healing opening in his larynx since 2017 following an unsuccessful tracheostomy. Denying him appropriate placement in a medical-correctional facility is a severe violation of basic medical rights.

The Case of Aleksei Seregin (Yoshkar-Ola)



The case of Aleksei Seregin, born in 1985 and a resident of Yoshkar-Ola (Mari El), a journalist, blogger, and former coordinator for the election rights advocacy group "Golos," is notable in that he is simultaneously being denied the psychiatric care he needs and subjected to abuses involving psychiatry. It is also notable that this is the second case involving him in our statistics since the beginning of the war in Ukraine. The first occurred in 2024, when police detained him following a provocation staged by a former participant in the so-called "SMO" and took him to a psychiatric hospital, where doctors declined to admit him, finding no grounds for hospitalization. The journalist was subsequently designated a "foreign agent."

The second episode dates to 2026. On June 4, 2026, Seregin was detained at a bus stop in Yoshkar-Ola on charges of publicly justifying terrorism (Article 205.2, Part 2 of the Criminal Code). According to Seregin, he was beaten during his arrest, had his phone confiscated, and was subsequently subjected to electric shocks at the police station in an attempt to force him to unlock his phone.

In a letter from the pre-trial detention center, Aleksei reported that he was in poor condition: he had developed depression and anxiety, as well as "speech impairment, zero coordination of attention, [and] stupor." According to him, following his detention he was sent for a preliminary psychiatric assessment at a hospital in Yoshkar-Ola, where "the doctors began to question my sanity because I told them about the torture." His severe anxiety requires psychiatric care and makes detention in a pre-trial detention center medically contraindicated. At the same time, the way he was treated by the doctors, along with the prospect of being declared legally incompetent due to mental illness and confined to a hospital indefinitely, is only worsening his condition.

In August, it became known that a separate case had also been opened against Seregin under Article 330.1 of the Criminal Code (evading the obligations established by legislation concerning "foreign

agents”). The terrorism-justification case, meanwhile, concerns a comment Seregin posted in 2024 about Chechen separatist leader Dzhokhar Dudayev. In August 2026, Aleksei was due to be transferred to Moscow for a psychiatric assessment at the Serbsky Institute.

6. The Limits of What We Know

The “Iceberg Effect”

The process of collecting data on politically motivated abuses of psychiatry in contemporary Russia can be compared to assembling a border-less jigsaw puzzle when we know for certain that a substantial – though unknown – number of pieces are missing. Some of the pieces we do have fit clearly and unambiguously into the overall picture, while others are impossible to place with any confidence because they belong to a blurred background.

The dotted lines on our statistical chart illustrate the “iceberg effect”: available data captures only a fraction of the problem (See Chart 1). For example, in 2024, around 48 teenagers in the so-called Donetsk People’s Republic were reportedly sentenced to compulsory psychiatric treatment after being labeled “extremists.” The information was disclosed at an interagency meeting on youth crime prevention in occupied Mariupol in October 2024, but the dates and details of these rulings remain unknown, so the cases are not included in our primary statistical dataset. We nevertheless believe this example is indicative of a much broader layer of cases that remain completely undocumented and shielded from human rights observers on occupied territories.

The Systematic Purge of the Legal Profession

The problem of underreporting is further exacerbated by another factor: the systematic purge of the legal profession. According to the First Department project, denying lawyers access to their clients and directly persecuting lawyers have become systemic practices of the authorities. A particularly striking embodiment of this trend was the arrest in May 2025 of Maria Bonzler, a leading human rights lawyer in Kaliningrad who represented activist Oleg Savvin, on charges of “confidential cooperation with a foreign state.” Bonzler was accused of passing human rights defenders information about law enforcement officers that she had obtained in the course of her legitimate professional activities as a lawyer.

At present, Bonzler, who has been diagnosed with hypertensive heart disease accompanied by fluctuations in blood pressure and a high risk of stroke, is being held at Pre-Trial Detention Facility No. 1 in Kaliningrad under conditions approaching those of torture. The persecution of lawyers paralyzes the defense of those affected and deprives human rights groups of primary, reliable data on new court decisions.

A Blurred Image and the Quintessence of Absurdity: The Case of Ilya Remeslo

We do not include the case of Ilya Remeslo in our monitoring and regard it as one of those “puzzle pieces” with an indistinct image. Nevertheless, we cannot ignore it.

Lawyer Ilya Remeslo, born in 1983, became widely known in Russia as a pro-government blogger and a “professional informer.” From 2017 to 2023, he served as a member of the Public Chamber of the Russian Federation and, by his own account, received payments from the Presidential Administration. Remeslo acted as a kind of “law-enforcement officer without a uniform,” providing the authorities with legal pretexts for repression. For example, investigations and criminal proceedings against Alexei Navalny – including the case involving “defamation of a veteran” and the

fraud case concerning donations – were initiated following complaints and reports filed by Remeslo. In opposition circles, he acquired a reputation as an extremely unscrupulous and brazen figure who was thoroughly integrated into the system.

The situation changed dramatically in early 2026. Remeslo unexpectedly began harshly criticizing the authorities: at first, he lashed out at the national messaging app MAX and the United Russia party, and on March 17, 2026, published a manifesto in which he called Vladimir Putin a “war criminal and a thief” and demanded his resignation.

Psychiatry soon became a major part of Remeslo’s story. Just one day later, he was forcibly admitted to City Psychiatric Hospital No. 3 named after I. I. Skvortsov-Stepanov in St. Petersburg. Independent Russian and international media immediately drew parallels with Soviet practices of punitive psychiatry. Remeslo spent 30 days in the hospital.

From the outset, the circumstances surrounding his hospitalization gave rise to competing interpretations. One possibility was that Remeslo had deliberately used hospitalization as a way of temporarily avoiding the criminal prosecution that, as he could hardly have failed to anticipate, was inevitable. In this context, there was also speculation about psychiatric relatives who might have helped him “hide” in this way. Remeslo himself later dismissed as “utter nonsense” the claims that he had used his family connections to avoid prison, stressing that when he was admitted, he was “completely clean of drugs and alcohol.”

At the same time, more elaborate interpretations emerged: the possibility that the Kremlin had orchestrated some sort of a “special operation.” According to one of these theories, Remeslo’s entire political break with the authorities and his subsequent treatment could have been part of a sophisticated scheme: his stay in a psychiatric hospital would “rehabilitate” him in the eyes of the opposition and the wider public, establish him as a victim of the regime, and ultimately enable him to be used as an agent of influence.

Another theory was that Remeslo had genuinely “lost his mind,” since that was supposedly the only way to explain the unexpected truth he began speaking about the situation in the country after having previously served as a pro-government propagandist and an inveterate liar.

After his discharge, Remeslo continued to speak out, although he became more cautious in his wording. On July 17, 2026, however, he was detained on charges of disseminating “fake news” about the Russian armed forces (Article 207.3 of the Criminal Code). The case was based on his social media posts.

In July and August 2026, Remeslo spent a month at the Serbsky Institute of Psychiatry in Moscow undergoing a court-ordered psychological and psychiatric assessment. According to his lawyer, Sergei Badamshin, the doctors concluded that Remeslo was legally competent and that he “had not and does not suffer from any mental disorder.”

The paradox of the Remeslo case is also that, despite attracting extraordinary media attention, no commentator has been able – and quite possibly no one ever will be – to determine with certainty what is actually happening or to conclusively rule out any of the competing explanations. That is precisely the point: psychiatry is being used in the context of opaque political maneuvering, and, most importantly, this no longer surprises anyone. It demonstrates the total loss of public trust in psychiatric institutions, which are viewed as tools for dirty political maneuvers.

Sparse and Undocumented Regional Cases

There are also several cases that have received virtually no media attention. Almost everything we know about them comes from sparse reports published on court and prosecutor's office websites, and these fragments of information are not sufficient for us to include them in our monitoring. Nevertheless, we believe it is important to list them in this report:

Vladimir Bulanov (Tula)



Vladimir Bulanov, 34, is a resident of Tula. On the night of April 12, 2026, he attended an Easter procession at a church in the village of Mikhailovskoye (Kurkinsky District, Tula Region) wearing a demon mask – or, as it was described in the Russian media, a Satan mask – and shouting, “Christ is risen.” Bulanov was detained by police, fined for disorderly conduct (Part 1, Article 20.1 of the Code of Administrative Offenses), and sentenced to three days of administrative arrest. It is also known that he later apologized on camera, explaining that he had intended it as a joke.

However, at the end of April 2026, a criminal case was also opened against him under Part 2 of Article 148 of the Criminal Code (insulting the religious feelings of believers in places specifically designated for religious services, rites, or ceremonies). On July 13, 2026, a magistrate of Judicial District No. 26 of the Bogoroditsk Judicial District of Tula Region found Bulanov legally incompetent due to mental illness and ordered compulsory outpatient psychiatric treatment. The court heard the results of a forensic psychiatric assessment, which stated that Bulanov had suffered, and continued to suffer, from an unspecified mental disorder.

It should be noted that many human rights advocates, including the SOVA Research Center, oppose the criminalization of such a legally ambiguous concept as “insulting the religious feelings of believers.” In contemporary Russia, “insulting the religious feelings of believers” is considered a criminal offense for essentially ideological reasons: the legislation was tightened in 2013, following and directly in response to Pussy Riot’s notorious anti-Putin punk prayer. From this perspective, the prosecution of Bulanov itself appears disproportionate to his conduct. On the other hand, we have no additional information that would allow us to question the validity of the psychiatrists’ conclusions or the lawfulness of the court’s actions.

Unnamed 26-year-old Resident of Tomsk

Unknown individual, a 26-year-old resident of Tomsk. In 2025, she/he was charged with “disseminating online information expressing clear disrespect for society concerning Russia’s days of military glory and commemorative dates” (Part 4, Article 354.1 of the Criminal Code). Apparently, she/he had posted some disrespectful comment on social media, perhaps about the May 9 celebrations. On March 31, 2026, the Tomsk Regional Court issued a ruling releasing her/him from criminal liability and ordering compulsory medical measures.

This provision of the Criminal Code is also explicitly ideological. It was introduced in 2014 and subsequently tightened in 2021 and 2026 with the aim of protecting Soviet historical narratives and combating dissent in contemporary Russia. In essence, this person should never have been drawn into the criminal justice system, regardless of what she/he may have written in his comments. However, since we have no information about either the substance of the court’s claims or the psychiatric aspects of the case, we do not include him in our monitoring.

Desecration of Symbols Cases (Irbit and Kurgan)

Two similar cases were brought under the provision criminalizing the desecration of Russia's military glory symbols (Part 3, Article 354.1 of the Criminal Code). In both cases, the defendant used the Eternal Flame to light a cigarette.

On April 1, 2026, the Sverdlovsk Regional Court released Vladimir Dobrychev, a resident of the city of Irbit, from criminal liability and ordered compulsory medical treatment. Then, on August 11, 2026, the Kurgan Regional Court ordered compulsory medical measures for a 23-year-old resident of Kurgan facing the same charge after an outpatient forensic psychiatric assessment identified "signs of a mental disorder."

Unfortunately, no further information is available in either case—not even whether the court ordered outpatient or inpatient treatment.

7. Conclusions and Implications

In conclusion, contemporary politically motivated psychiatric abuse in the Russian Federation is not merely a centralistic revival of the Soviet apparatus. Though widely spread, it is a highly flexible, decentralized, and opportunistic tool used selectively alongside other brutal forms of repression. This dispersed nature makes it far harder to detect, catalog, and expose. The systematic targeting of the legal profession, particularly represented by the arrest of Maria Bonzler, the escalating attacks on human rights defenders and organizations such as Memorial and OVD-Info, and the severe curtailing of monitoring rights make international vigilance and academic rigor more crucial than ever before.

Expert Appeal: The Ethical Responsibility of the international psychiatric community

For almost two decades the agenda of the World Psychiatric Association was dominated by the issue of political abuse of psychiatry in the Soviet Union. The Soviet member organization was condemned in 1977, forced to withdraw in early 1983 and allowed back in in 1989 conditionally and under strict conditions. It was forced to acknowledge that systematic political abuse of psychiatry took place. It also promised that the psychiatric leadership would be democratized, which never happened: most of the current leadership of the Russian Society of Psychiatrists is part of the same environment as those who were in charge in Soviet times. In fact, Russian psychiatry is now even more centralized than at the end of Soviet times.

We have been reporting on the resumption of political abuse of psychiatry in Russia since 2012-2013. Yet even after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and its widespread attacks on civilians, the Russian Society of Psychiatrists remains a full member of the WPA. The Russian Society of Psychiatrists has never publicly condemned the political abuse of psychiatry, despite the ethical standards set by the WPA. Efforts to suspend its membership have been blocked by procedural arguments. The European Psychiatric Association (EPA) suspended the membership of the Russian Society, but in practice this did not have any effect and even maintains a Russian psychiatrist on the Education Committee.

This raises a fundamental question: how long can international scientific bodies refrain from excluding collaboration with a member organization that has become complicit in repression under an increasingly dictatorial regime?

7. Charts

Chart 1:

Number of politically motivated court decisions on involuntary hospitalization in psychiatric facilities in Russia, 2017-2025

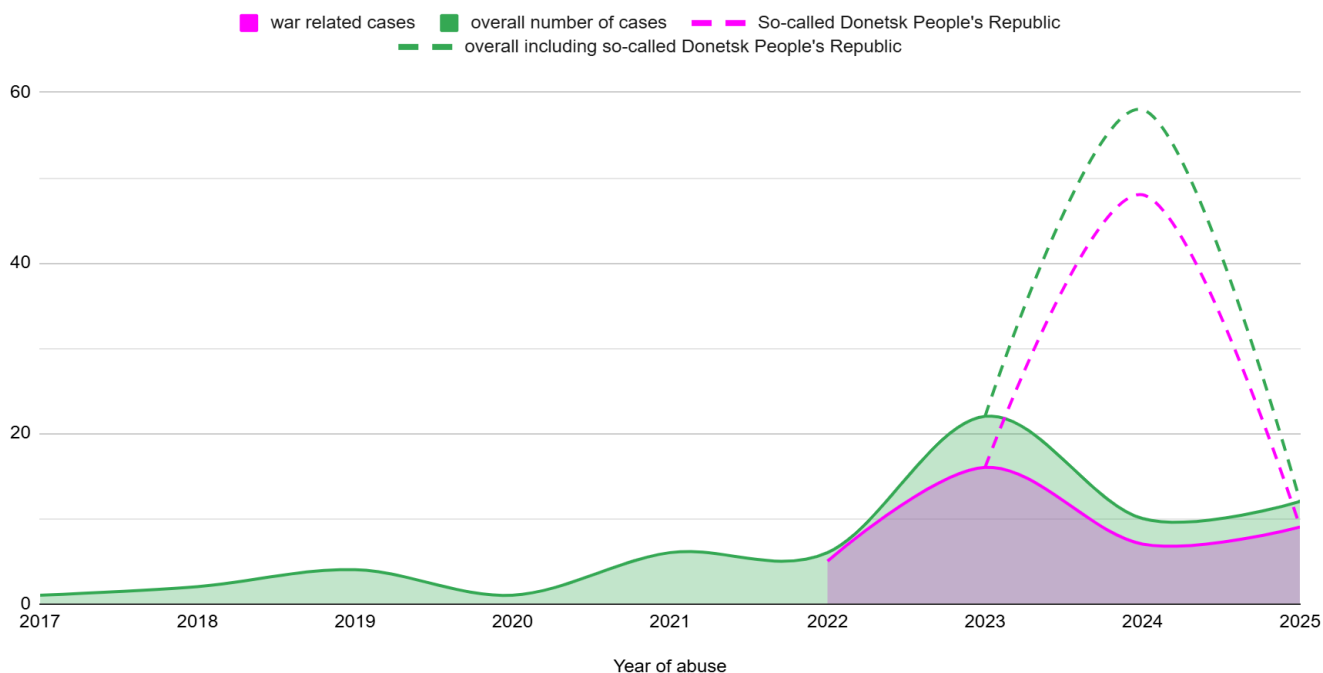


Chart 2:

Triggers: Over 57% of Cases Driven by Anti-War Stance

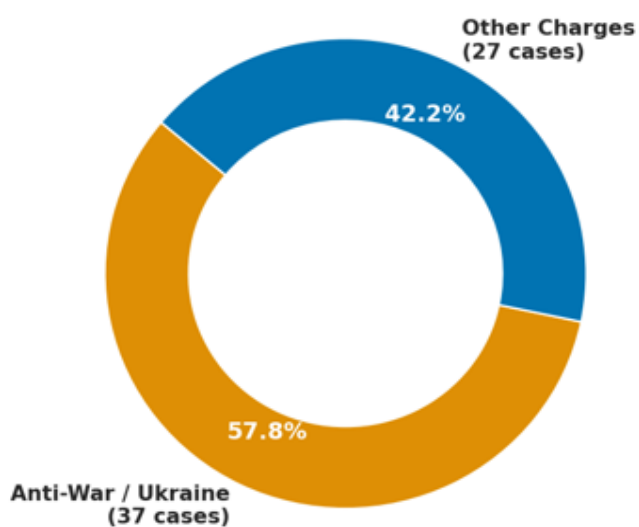


Chart 3:

