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INDOCTRINATION IN THE RUSSIAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

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This briefing exposes how Russian authorities are systematically directing the educational system to indoctrinate children, promote pro-government and pro-war narratives, and suppress dissent. It documents propaganda, surveillance and coercion in schools that undermine critical thinking and violate rights to education, freedom of expression and privacy, and calls for an end to these practices and alignment with international human rights standards.

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This document examines how the Russian authorities manipulate and abuse the educational system, seeking to ensure that the young generation unquestioningly supports all their policies and decisions, including those that expressly contravene Russia's human rights obligations, encompass military aggression abroad and otherwise defy international order. This practice violates international law, including the UN Charter, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which require amongst other obligations that education promotes respect for human rights, understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations. Amnesty International has analysed Russia's evolving legislation, official documents, education materials, internal educational "methodological recommendations" and other data — all revealing a disturbing picture of schools being converted from temples of knowledge into factories of compliance.

Schools play a dual role for the purpose of indoctrination. On one hand, they are instructed to spread propaganda, often filled with disinformation, that undermines the notion of human rights, whitewashes violations of international humanitarian law in the name of Russia's national interests and instructs children to stay away from independent media and other sources of alternative information and opinion. This is done through a centrally controlled curriculum, propaganda-filled history textbooks, special weekly classes and other means such as special lectures justifying Russian aggression against Ukraine.

On the other hand, educational institutions are expected to screen, identify and target those critical of the authorities or having dissenting opinion on a broad range of political and social issues. Schools are encouraged and instructed to monitor their students and even own employees, online as well as offline, to collect files with information about their opinions, sympathies and social contacts and to report unwanted behaviour to administrations and law enforcement agencies.

While most of the analysis below is focused on schools, which most Russians typically attend between the ages of six and 17, many of the practices mentioned here apply to older as well as younger ages: to universities, colleges and kindergartens.

These policies, which have been especially actively pursued by the Russian authorities since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, violate the human rights to quality education and to privacy and freedom of expression, including freedom of information. They undermine the entire education system. The resulting education system is designed to deny children an opportunity to form their own opinions and learn independent, critical thinking at a formative age. This approach goes against Russia's international human rights obligations and must stop.

2. INTRODUCTION

After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the formation of the Russian Federation, the country's leadership vowed to build a pluralistic society and not to repeat the mistakes and violations of the past. The Russian Constitution, adopted in 1993 (and significantly amended in 2020), guaranteed freedom of opinion and prohibited imposing a state ideology. However, elements of such an ideology soon began to emerge, developed and promoted by top officials.

This new quasi-ideology is based on the idea of a powerful state whose interests take priority over everything else, including individual rights and international law. The concept of universal human rights is seen as alien or even subversive. Instead, the authorities have introduced what they call "Russian traditional spiritual and moral values" grounded in national exceptionalism and a patriarchal family.

This doctrine, furthermore, paints Russia as surrounded by hostile countries that seek to destroy it and rob it of its resources. War is automatically justified as a means to protect the state from an existential threat. President Vladimir Putin has claimed, for example, referring to the invasion of Ukraine, that “[i]t is a struggle for the very existence of Russian statehood, because our enemy [the West]... has one objective...: to destabilize [Russia], to tear it apart”.¹ In the face of such a purported dramatic danger, international law, which prohibits use of force between states, is simply brushed away.

To engage in full-scale modern warfare, such as that waged by Russia in Ukraine, and to sustain it for years, without being able to present a quick and convincing victory, to justify huge ongoing losses at the frontline to mobilize the country’s resources for the voracious war economy and to account for the loss of Russia’s international standing — this has all required a considerable consolidation of public opinion in support of the government. Russian state ideology has been busy carrying out this task, and its particular focus has been children’s education.

The use, and abuse, of children’s education and school curriculum for the purposes of state propaganda is not a new phenomenon in Russia,² nor is it in many other countries. However, what is different about it in the wake of Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine is the depth of this abuse, the degree to which indoctrination has become a central, mainstream element of school education at every level. The price for this, paid by every school child in Russia, is their human right to quality education.

Indoctrination in Russian schools has been fuelled by the centrally provided, officially endorsed discourse. Its content has been incorporated into the federal-level compulsory school curriculum. To guide schools through adopting and integrating this content into their daily activities, specific institutions and initiatives have been designated and centrally resourced to generate and disseminate the relevant methodology. Legislation has been adopted to make the indoctrination in education compulsory and to ensure penalties for non-compliance.

In the broader domestic context, the Russian authorities have legally forbidden any criticism, however slight, of Russia’s war of aggression in Ukraine (officially called a “special military operation”) and of the actions of the Russian forces, however atrocious, through the war censorship laws, which they adopted in the wake of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Under current law enforcement and judicial practice, only the official reports on the war in Ukraine are regarded as “facts”, irrespective of how questionable or manifestly untrue they are, whereas any criticism is regarded as “discreditation” or “false information”, and is severely penalized, including by long-term imprisonment.³

Expressing dissenting opinions on many other issues has been criminalized as “insulting religious feelings”, “calls to violation of Russia’s territorial integrity”, “dissemination of false information about activities of the USSR during the Great Patriotic War”⁴ and so on.

What makes the situation even more menacing is the way in which the authorities are weaponizing the educational system against potential dissenters. School staff are instructed to constantly, clandestinely monitor students’ behaviour, in and out of school, record their opinions on political and other issues, conduct “individual work” with those falling out of the line and coordinate these activities with governmental agencies, including police and security services. Amnesty International has previously documented instances in which teachers and school administrations reported disloyal students to the

¹ TASS, “Путин заявил, что Россия на Украине борется за Русский мир” [“Putin stated that Russia is fighting for the Russian world in Ukraine”], 14 March 2023, <https://tass.ru/politika/17261539>

² For example, school education in the Soviet Union was tightly controlled by the Communist Party through centralized development of curricula, censorship of textbooks, ideological vetting of teachers and other means.

³ Amnesty International, *Russia: Under the “Eye of Sauron”: Persecution of critics of the aggression against Ukraine* (Index: EUR 46/7017/2023), 20 July 2023, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur46/7017/2023/en>

⁴ Criminal Code, Articles 148, 280.1 and 354.1, respectively.

authorities, resulting in reprisals against them and their families.⁵ The number of such cases is certainly greater than is publicly known and is bound to grow further.

A striking visualization of what indoctrination means in practice comes from the documentary, *Mr Nobody Against Putin*.⁶ A whole generation of children in Russia, let alone children in Russian-occupied Ukraine,⁷ is deprived of their rights to quality education, freedom of expression and other fundamental human rights, leaving their future — and therefore the future of the entire society they will be part of — uncertain and bleak.

3. INTERNATIONAL LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 26(2)

International human rights law contains many important provisions relating to the aims, content and forms of education. Starting with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the role of education was seen not only as development of technical skills but rather as a foundational element of a society based on respect for human rights.

This understanding of education has been confirmed and further developed in binding human rights instruments that Russia is a state party to, such as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights⁸ and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The latter contains a detailed definition of states' obligation to ensure that children's education is directed, among other things, to the development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations and to the preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of "understanding, peace, tolerance and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups".⁹ The right to education encompasses therefore not just access to it but its content and quality as well,¹⁰ and states have an obligation to ensure that school curricula

⁵ Amnesty International, *Russia: "Your children will go to an orphanage": Children and the crackdown on protest* (Index: EUR 46/8085/2024), 31 May 2024, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur46/8085/2024/en>

⁶ Storyville, *Mr Nobody Against Putin*, 2025.

⁷ See Amnesty International, "Ukraine: Children's education is one more casualty of Russian aggression" (Index: EUR 50/7508/2023), 11 December 2023, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur50/7508/2023/en>

⁸ International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Article 13(1).

⁹ Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), Article 29(1).

¹⁰ Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment 1 (CRC/GC/2001/1), 2001, para. 3.

are directed to human-rights friendly objectives.¹¹ Promotion of mutual understanding, peace and tolerance is particularly important in education systems in societies affected by conflict.¹²

Freedom of expression, including freedom of information, is intimately linked to education. Both adults and children have the right to hold and express their opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of any kind. This right may only be restricted by law when it is necessary to protect rights of others, national security, public order or public health.¹³ At the same time, international human rights law expressly prohibits propaganda for war and advocacy of hatred.¹⁴ International law also guarantees every person, including children, protection of their privacy, family, home and correspondence against arbitrary or unlawful interference.¹⁵

4. DOMESTIC LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The Russian Constitution “recognizes” “ideological diversity”, as opposed to imposing a single, state-mandated ideology, and nominally guarantees the rights to freedom of expression, to privacy and to education.¹⁶ The latter is defined in more detail in the Law on Education. According to the Law, the content of education shall promote mutual understanding and cooperation between individuals and peoples regardless of their racial, national, ethnic, religious and social affiliation, take into account the diversity of world outlook approaches, contribute to the realization of the right of students to free choice of opinions and beliefs, ensure the development of each person’s abilities and the formation and development of their personality.¹⁷ In December 2023, the Law was amended to add that education must conform to “traditional Russian spiritual-moral values”.¹⁸ The Law also prohibits discrimination in education¹⁹ and guarantees students’ “academic rights” to freedom of expression and information.²⁰ Violation of these rights is punishable with a fine of up to 30,000 roubles (approximately US\$ 369 at the time of writing).²¹ At the same time, the Law contains a discriminatory ban on participation of those arbitrarily designated as “foreign agents”²² in children’s education, on teaching at state and municipal educational institutions²³ and on producing any information materials for children.²⁴ Russian domestic legislation also lacks any direct references to promotion of peace through education, which international law provides for.

Apart from the Law, as the foundational legal act governing all levels of education, other pieces of primary and secondary legislation too, directly define, or substantively influence, school education’s content. This includes criminal law, presidential decrees and federal documents which determine single educational standards and the content of educational curricula.

¹¹ Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, General Comment 13 (E/C.12/1999/10), 1999, para. 49.

¹² Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment 1 (previously cited), para. 16.

¹³ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Article 19; CRC, Articles 13 and 17.

¹⁴ ICCPR, Article 20.

¹⁵ ICCPR, Article 17; CRC, Article 16.

¹⁶ Constitution of the Russian Federation, Articles 13(1), 29 and 43, respectively.

¹⁷ Федеральный закон «Об образовании в Российской Федерации» [Federal Law “On Education in the Russian Federation”], 29 December 2012, Article 12(1).

¹⁸ Federal Law 685, 25 December 2023.

¹⁹ Law on Education (previously cited), Article 3(1)(2).

²⁰ Law on Education (previously cited), Article 34(1)(10).

²¹ Code of Administrative Offences, Article 5.57(2).

²² See The Moscow Times, “How the Kremlin’s ‘Foreign Agents’ Law Strangled Freedom in Russia”, 22 October 2025, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2025/10/22/how-the-kremlins-foreign-agents-law-strangled-freedom-in-russia-a90872>

²³ Law on Education (previously cited), Articles 12.2(1.1), 21(3) and 46(4.1) (as amended on 5 December 2022).

²⁴ Федеральный закон «О контроле за деятельностью лиц, находящихся под иностранным влиянием» [Federal Law “On Control over Activities of Persons under Foreign Influence”], Articles 11(9) and 11(10) (as amended on 21 April 2025).

There are, for instance, numerous articles of the Criminal Code that have been used to restrict and control public discourse on matters of war and beyond. These include “dissemination of false information about” and “discreditation of the Russian Armed Forces”, “incitement of hatred or animosity”, “calls to extremist activities”, “justification of terrorism” and “rehabilitation of Nazism”.²⁵ The latter charge, as amended in 2021 to expand its scope, envisages penalties of up to five years’ imprisonment for expressing opinions on a broad range of historical subjects (such as, for example, the USSR’s foreign policy under Joseph Stalin’s leadership) that contradict official narratives.²⁶

4.1 NATIONAL REGULATION OF EDUCATION CONTENT

School education in Russia is state regulated through a compulsory system of licensing and accreditation, the single mandatory guidance documents and mandatory federal curricula and programmes. School textbooks require official approval, by inclusion in the federal list of the Ministry of Education. The system’s oversight is provided via the federal-level educational authorities (Ministry of Education, Ministry of Science and Higher Education, Federal Service for Supervision in Education and Science (Rosobrnadzor) amongst others) and the relevant departments within the regional and municipal authorities.

The content of education is defined by the federal authorities, mainly through the centrally adopted and periodically revised Federal State Educational Standards (abbreviated as FGOS in Russian) and the more detailed Federal Educational Programmes and Federal Working Programmes. School education is covered by the FGOS on Secondary General Education, introduced in 2012 and amended multiple times since then.

The recent amendments have added increasingly more emphasis on “patriotic and spiritual and moral upbringing” and military training. For example, the subject “Fundamentals of life safety” was replaced with “Fundamentals of safety and defence of the Motherland” in 2024 with a more explicit focus on combat skills.²⁷

These regulatory documents reflect the greater emphasis on “traditional values”, including their homophobic elements. For example, the curricula for Social Studies and History set as their objectives that, as a result of education, pupils should feel “a responsibility... to establish a family based on the conscious acceptance of family values in accordance with the traditions of the peoples of Russia”, a clearly implied reference to only heterosexual relationships.²⁸

Another recent trend is the reduction of Social Studies instruction. The number of hours for this subject has been halved between 2024 and 2027 for most school students. In its place, authorities have introduced a new subject called “Spiritual and Moral Culture of Russia” (its officially used shorthand, “DNK of Russia”, also means “Russia’s DNA”).²⁹ These developments raise concerns that even the little time previously dedicated to human rights-related topics as part of this subject will be reduced or removed altogether.

²⁵ Criminal Code, Articles 207.3, 280.3, 282, 280, 205.2 and 354.1, respectively.

²⁶ See, for example, Mediazona, “Присяжные со второй попытки признали архитектора из Иванова виновным в «реабилитации нацизма» из-за поста про Сталина и Гитлера” [“Jury found an architect from Ivanovo guilty of ‘rehabilitation of Nazism’ for a post about Stalin and Hitler on second try”], 12 July 2023, <https://zona.media/news/2023/07/12/volkov>

²⁷ Ministry of Education, Order 1028, 27 December 2023.

²⁸ Ministry of Education, Федеральная образовательная программа среднего общего образования [Federal Educational Programme of Secondary General Education], adopted on 18 May 2023, paras 121.5.1(3), 123.5.1(3).

²⁹ See respective Federal Educational Programmes; also Ministry of Education, Письмо Министерства просвещения №03-320 «Об изменениях в ФООП» [Letter 03-320 “On Changes to Federal Educational Programmes”], 2 March 2026, <https://www.garant.ru/products/ipo/prime/doc/413712154>

4.2 REGULATION OF EDUCATION BY DECREES

An important element of statutory regulation of education in Russia is the portfolio of presidential decrees issued following the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Among them is the November 2022 document entitled the Fundamentals of State Policy on Preservation and Strengthening of Traditional Russian Spiritual and Moral Values.³⁰ The document contains a list of “traditional values”, ranging from human rights to “patriotism” to “a strong family”. Protection of these “values” is defined as a national security issue, and the decree specifically tasks security services and the police with implementation of this policy.

Among the “threats” to these “values” the decree lists “foreign non-profit organizations”, “unfriendly foreign states” (specifically mentioning the United States) and “certain mass media outlets”. These and other entities allegedly seek to undermine ideas of marriage (understood as a union of a man and a woman), of having many children and of serving in the Russian armed forces, while also attempting to “promote non-traditional sexual relations”. The decree mandates state agencies to combat this “destructive ideology”, including through “improvement of the forms and methods of upbringing and education” and “law enforcement activities” (which implies policing, surveillance and prosecution).

Another presidential decree goes even further by regulating the content of the school subject of History. In May 2024, the decree on Fundamentals of State Policy in the Area of History Education was issued. The goal of History instruction, according to this document, is to “strengthen the community of the Russian world based on traditional Russian spiritual, moral, cultural and historical values”, where “the Russian world” is an ideological term which refers to Russian speakers around the world and implies the need for their protection and patronage over them by the Russian state.³¹

Like protection of “traditional values”, History education is seen through the lens of national security. In the above State Policy decree, it is presented as a part of a political struggle against “the collective West”, which allegedly seeks to “distort historical truth”, promote “negative assessments of events and periods of the Motherland’s history” and “undermine [its] territorial integrity”.³² To combat these purported threats, diverse tools are to be used, from legislation to tighter control over the teaching of History, including the introduction of a single History textbook for each grade, and ensuring that all schools and all teachers in the country teach History uniformly.

The approaches to education set out in these decrees do not comply with Russia’s international human rights obligations. The authorities effectively establish only one permitted historical narrative, which alone can be taught in schools throughout the country (and also in the occupied territories of Ukraine), while all other narratives are labelled as “hostile”, “destructive” and inspired from abroad.

Not only does this approach violate the rights to freedom of information and freedom of expression of school students and teachers, but it also inevitably undermines quality of education by curbing discussion and diversity of opinions and historical narratives. In addition, some of the language of the decrees is explicitly discriminatory, particularly against LGBTI people.

³⁰ President of Russia, Указ №809 «Об утверждении Основ государственной политики по сохранению и укреплению традиционных российских духовно-нравственных ценностей» [Decree 809 “On Approving the Fundamentals of State Policy on Preservation and Strengthening of Traditional Russian Spiritual and Moral Values”], 9 November 2022.

³¹ President of Russia, Основы государственной политики Российской Федерации в области исторического просвещения [Fundamentals of State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Area of History Education], approved on 8 May 2024, para. 8.

³² President of Russia, Fundamentals of State Policy in the Area of History Education (previously cited), para. 6.

5. POLITICAL PROPAGANDA IN SCHOOLS



*A teacher conducting a lecture on the “special military operation” at School 250 of St. Petersburg
© School 250*

The issue of political propaganda in schools is a growing human rights concern in Russia. It involves politicization of several subjects of the curriculum, most visibly History and the subjects relating to Social Sciences, and deliberate dissemination of misleading information and disinformation to shape the political views and beliefs of students. This practice undermines the educational system's integrity, affects quality of education and compromises the development of critical thinking skills among young learners. The Committee on the Rights of the Child, an independent body of experts overseeing implementation of the eponymous Convention, published its concluding observations in 2024 recommending that Russia “put an end to the politicization and militarization of schools” and “prevent any attempt to rewrite school curricula and textbooks to reflect the political and military agenda of the Government”. It noted with particular concern “the interference of the ruling party in the educational process and the creation of ‘hero’s desks’³³ to provide positive information about the participants in the armed conflict in Ukraine”, “widespread and systematic State propaganda in schools about the armed conflict in Ukraine, including the introduction of a new history textbook, a new school subject entitled ‘Conversation about important things’³⁴ and a new training manual for teachers conveying the Government’s position on the armed conflict in Ukraine”.³⁵

The section below explores the various ways in which political propaganda manifests itself in the content of school education in Russia and the potential implications for students, educators and society as a whole.

³³ A nationwide programme whereby schools designate certain desks as “hero desks”, usually named after killed participants of the invasion of Ukraine, who had attended the school.

³⁴ *Разговоры о важном*, also translated as “Important Conversations” (see below).

³⁵ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding observations on the combined sixth and seventh periodic reports of the Russian Federation, 1 March 2024, UN Doc. CRC/C/RUS/CO/6-7, paras. 40 and 39.

5.1 HISTORY TEXTBOOKS

Since 2023, the Russian Ministry of Education replaced a relatively diverse range of History textbooks approved for use at schools with a single series³⁶ written by Vladimir Medinsky, an Advisor to President Vladimir Putin, and Anatoly Torkunov, the Rector of the Moscow State Institute of International Relations, a university affiliated with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Both authors are vocal supporters of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, a position that is clearly reflected in their books. For example, Vladimir Medinsky said in 2023 that "individual heroism, the loyalty to the oath of our military" involved in the war "cannot be questioned" and must be "beyond criticism" at schools,³⁷ while Anatoly Torkunov signed an open letter calling the full-scale invasion a "necessary decision" and urging the society to "rally round our President".³⁸

The History of Russia textbook, mandatory for use at 11th grade (for ages 16 to 18), depicts Russia as a victim of a Western plot rather than the aggressor in Ukraine. It claims that prior to Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022, NATO advisers actively prepared Ukraine to "attack Donbas", a reference to the areas of eastern Ukraine that have been under Russian occupation since 2014.³⁹ It also states that if Ukraine were allowed to join NATO, it could have led to a destructive war and "possibly the end of the civilization", which Russia had no choice but to prevent.⁴⁰

The textbook claims that Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine is a "special military operation" and quotes President Vladimir Putin on 24 February 2022, the day he ordered the invasion, as saying: "This is ultimately a question of life and death, the question of our historic future as a people".⁴¹ As mentioned above, even the slightest criticism of the invasion of Ukraine is effectively prohibited in Russia, carrying serious administrative or criminal sanctions.

The invasion of Ukraine is, however, not the only example of the textbooks promoting justifications for the unilateral use of military force by Russia, or the USSR as its predecessor, against other states.⁴² In the chapters describing the USSR's post-Second World War foreign policy, the authors portray the Soviet invasions of Hungary in 1956, Czechoslovakia in 1968 and Afghanistan in 1979 as legitimate actions, a necessary response to vaguely described "activities of Western secret services".⁴³ The coverage of these events, which still remain highly controversial in the Russian society, is one-sided, absolutely silent on problematic issues such as the civilian death toll of these military interventions or the criticism they were met with at home.

In a similar way, the History textbook avoids discussion of alleged war crimes, crimes against humanity and other violations of international humanitarian law by Russian forces and their allies and

³⁶ Ministry of Education, "Федеральный перечень учебников" ["Federal list of textbooks"], accessed on 24 June 2025, <https://fpu.edu.ru>

³⁷ TASS, "Мединский заявил, что героизм участников СВО и работников тыла должен быть вне критики" ["Medinsky stated that the heroism of the SMO participants and home front workers should be beyond criticism"], 9 December 2023, <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/19498363>

³⁸ Russian Union of Rectors, "Обращение Российского Союза ректоров" ["Appeal of the Russian Union of Rectors"], 4 March 2022, <https://rsr-online.ru/news/2022/3/4/obrashenie-rossijskogo-soyuza-rektorov>

³⁹ Amnesty International, "Ukraine/Russia: New history textbook is a blatant attempt to unlawfully indoctrinate school children in Russia and Russian-occupied Ukrainian territories", 1 September 2023, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/09/ukraine-russia-new-history-textbook-is-a-blatant-attempt-to-unlawfully-indoctrinate-school-children-in-russia-and-russian-occupied-ukrainian-territories>

⁴⁰ Vladimir Medinsky, Anatoly Torkunov, *История России. 1945 год – начало XXI века. 11 класс. Базовый уровень* [History of Russia. 1945 – early 21st century. 11th Grade. Basic level], 2023, p. 402.

⁴¹ *History of Russia. 11th grade* (previously cited), p. 403.

⁴² See UN General Assembly, Resolution 1004 (ES-II) "The situation in Hungary", 4 November 1956; UN General Assembly, Resolution "The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security" (ES-6/2), 14 January 1980, paras 1 – 2.

⁴³ *History of Russia. 11th grade* (previously cited), pp. 130, 198 and 197, respectively.

paramilitary proxies during these and other conflicts. Those include the two internal military conflicts in the North Caucasus known as the Chechen wars in 1990s – 2000s,⁴⁴ the Russian intervention in Ukraine in 2014 and since, in Syria⁴⁵ and in a number of African countries since 2015.

The textbook for the 10th grade, which deals with the period between 1914 and 1945 (written by the same group of authors and also designated by the Ministry of Education as mandatory for schools), likewise consistently presents all instances of territorial acquisition or occupation by military means and associated human rights violations by the Soviet Union in the 20th century as justified and legitimate. For example, it states that in 1939, Poland was “making plans to seize Soviet territories, expecting to ally with Hitler”.⁴⁶ The book uses this unsubstantiated claim to justify the USSR’s military invasion of the country in September 1939 and annexation of the territories that it took control of, as “protection” of their population. Important but inconvenient facts, such as of the USSR’s politically and militarily collaboration with Germany at the time, are simply ignored.

The invasion of Finland the same year, 1939, is justified in the same History textbook solely by the desire to “foil Hitler’s plans to turn” that country into “a springboard for aggression against the USSR”.⁴⁷ A similar explanation — foiling their “possible transfer under German protectorate” — is given to the occupation and annexation of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in 1940, which is presented as these countries’ “request to be admitted into the Soviet Union”. The simultaneous annexation of parts of Romania is likewise claimed to come from the country’s “consent” to a Soviet demand, the grounds for which in this case are not even explained to the reader, but which involved threat of the use of force that is also not mentioned.⁴⁸ The book, again, fails to mention mass arrests and deportations conducted by the Soviet authorities in the occupied territories. Criticism of the Soviet activities in the period, such as a suggestion that the USSR thus played a direct role in the beginning of the Second World War by siding militarily with Germany and invading Poland, is a criminal offence in Russia punishable by up to five years in prison.⁴⁹

The version of history provided in these mandatory textbooks propagandizes the worldview whereby any military action taken by the Soviet Union or Russia at home or abroad is necessary and justified, and neither its lawfulness nor the conduct of the troops need to be put in question. Nearly all facts that contradict this position are simply omitted, preventing the children from learning of alternative opinions on these highly contested issues. This approach to history coupled with repressive legislation is designed to leave no room for meaningful discussion or diversity of opinions, undermining students’ rights to quality education and freedom of expression.

The 11th grade textbook also shows clear contempt for the very notion of human rights. The term itself is only mentioned seven times in more than 440 pages. Most of the mentions are placed in quotation marks and refer to what the authors consider malign criticism of the Soviet and Russian authorities. For example, they describe the Helsinki Accords, a key regional agreement that included clear human rights commitments and which the USSR signed alongside all other countries in wider Europe, the US and Canada, as a “[d]eclaration of the need to respect human rights [that] began to be used... as a pretext for interference in their [USSR and Eastern European countries’] internal affairs”.⁵⁰ On the other hand, human rights advances, such as the abolishment of press censorship in the late 1980s,

⁴⁴ See, for example, Amnesty International, *Russian Federation: Failure to protect or punish: human rights violations and impunity in Chechnya* (Index: EUR 46/004/2002), 21 January 2002, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur46/004/2002/en>

⁴⁵ See, for example, Amnesty International, *Syria: “Civilian objects were not damaged”: Russia’s statements on its attacks in Syria unmasked* (Index: MDE 24/3113/2015), 23 December 2015, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde24/3113/2015/en>

⁴⁶ Vladimir Medinsky, Anatoly Torkunov, *История России. 1914 – 1945 годы. 10 класс. Базовый уровень [History of Russia. 1914 – 1945. 10th grade. Basic level]*, 2023, p. 279.

⁴⁷ *History of Russia. 10th grade* (previously cited), p. 288.

⁴⁸ *History of Russia. 10th grade* (previously cited), p. 289.

⁴⁹ Criminal Code, Article 354.1(1 and 2).

⁵⁰ *History of Russia. 11th grade* (previously cited), pp. 195-196.

are presented as a grave mistake that caused “an avalanche of destructive and hostile information” and showed a lack of an “adequate reaction” from the authorities.⁵¹

By approving these textbooks in spite of some criticism in academia,⁵² which contain numerous questionable and unsubstantiated claims, and, moreover, by making them mandatory at all schools across the country and in Russia-occupied Ukrainian territories, the Russian authorities have disregarded their obligations to promote respect for human rights, peace, tolerance and understanding among all peoples in its educational system, thereby violating the students’ right to quality education.

5.2 "IMPORTANT CONVERSATIONS"

Since September 2022, every Monday in every school in all grades starts with an hour of so-called “Important Conversations”. They were introduced in the wake of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine and the criticism it faced. In June that year, Sergei Novikov, an official at the Presidential Administration, announced “Important Conversations” as a way “to talk to children about our values” and to promote “love for their Motherland, pride for their country, patriotism”.⁵³ From September 2026, similar classes will be introduced at all kindergartens.⁵⁴

“Important Conversations” are officially considered an extracurricular subject, but the authorities effectively insist that participation is mandatory. Students who, with their parents’ permission, skip these classes may face pressure from the school administration, including threats and administrative sanctions. For example, in October 2022, 10-year-old pupil Varvara Galkina was taken to a police station for questioning after her school Director had filed a complaint about the girl not attending the “Important Conversations” and using a pro-Ukrainian WhatsApp profile picture. Soon after, the local Commission for Juvenile Affairs (an inter-agency state body) concluded that her mother, Elena Jolicoeur, was “improperly fulfilling” her parental duties. Fearing criminal prosecution, the family left Russia.⁵⁵

The Ministry of Education publishes online methodological recommendations (teaching manuals), including teachers’ scripts, for the “Important Conversations”.⁵⁶ The content of many of the lessons seeks to justify Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine or other topics related to the Russian authorities’ initiatives and policies at home and abroad. One of the methods suggested by these recommendations is to steer the students towards the government-approved conclusions while preserving an outward impression of a dialogue through a sequence of guiding, highly suggestive (or plainly manipulative) questions.

For example, on 27 January 2025, the script prompted the teachers to ask students: “Why do the warriors of the Special Military Operation deserve to be called defenders of the Fatherland?” The “correct answer” is provided immediately: because “their task is to defend the civilians, our safety and

⁵¹ *History of Russia. 11th grade* (previously cited), p. 228.

⁵² Kommersant, “От Рюрика до Анкориджа” [“From Rurik to Anchorage”], 24 January 2026, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/8378659>

⁵³ Ministry of Education, “Программа уроков «Разговоры о важном» предполагает 34 занятия в учебном году” [“Important Conversation programme envisions 34 classes in a school year”], 20 June 2022, <https://edu.gov.ru/press/5363/programma-urokov-razgovory-o-vazhnom-predpolagaet-34-zanyatiya-v-uchebnom-godu>

⁵⁴ RIA, “В детских садах появится аналог «Разговоров о важном»” [“Kindergartens will have a version of ‘Important Conversations’”], 8 April 2026, <https://ria.ru/20260408/razgovory-2085858603.html>

⁵⁵ Amnesty International, *Russia: “Your children will go to an orphanage”. Children and the crackdown on protest* (Index: EUR 46/8085/2024), 31 May 2024, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur46/8085/2024/en>, pp. 1–2.

⁵⁶ Ministry of Education; Institute for Childhood, Family and Upbringing Research; *Разговоры о важном* [Important Conversations], <https://xn--80aafadv9bifbaeqg0p.xn--p1ai>

territorial integrity, our culture and language... national interests of our state”.⁵⁷ The scripts thus embed the narrative of Russia and its people facing existential external threats and leave no room for different opinions on this subject.

A similarly formulated question is found in a script from 9 December 2024: “Why does the heroism of our soldiers in the zone of SMO arouse in you the same strong feelings as the heroism of the Soviet soldiers [in the Second World War]?” The teacher is then instructed to tell the pupils that the participants of the invasion of Ukraine (of course, the term banned in school) “had to stand up for our people, defend the integrity and sovereignty of Russia, fight against those who wishes to destroy our country”.⁵⁸

The “Important Conversations” classes also serve to reinforce Russian authorities’ control over information. Not only do they effectively play a role of mandatory weekly lectures on topics arbitrarily selected by the Ministry of Education, but they also strive to isolate students from alternative information. For example, at one of the lessons the teachers were instructed to inform children that “only official sources of information should be trusted” in order to “form the right opinion, a responsible position on a certain issue”.⁵⁹

5.3 THE “UKRAINIAN QUESTION” OF THE MILITARY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Russian Military Historical Society (abbreviated as RVIO in Russian) is one of the principal parts of the Kremlin’s propaganda machine. Established by a decree of Vladimir Putin in 2012, the organization declares among its goals “patriotic upbringing” and “raising the prestige of military service”.⁶⁰ Its chairperson is Vladimir Medinsky, Vladimir Putin’s advisor and an author of the history textbook discussed earlier; the head of the Supervisory Board is Sergei Ivanov, another of President Putin’s close associates. RVIO’s governing body (Central Board) is made up of senior politicians, public officials and other prominent figures associated with Russia’s political establishment,⁶¹ and most of the funding apparently comes from the state.⁶²

RVIO’s activities include, among other things, provision of supplies to the Russian troops fighting in Ukraine (including drones, vehicles and radio stations), organizing “military-historical camps” for children between the ages of 12 and 17 and erecting monuments.⁶³ It also uses its semi-official status to produce various “methodological materials” for teachers that cover certain historical issues in detail. One such publication deals with what the authors call “the Ukrainian question”. It reflects the main tenets of the official Russian propaganda, packaged as a quasi-academic research paper.

⁵⁷ Ministry of Education, “Разговоры о важном. Год защитника Отечества. 8–9 классы. Сценарий занятия” [“Important Conversations. The Year of defenders of the Fatherland. 8-9 grades. Lesson script”], 27 January 2025, <https://archive.is/QRlKt>, p. 7.

⁵⁸ Ministry of Education, “Разговоры о важном. День Героев Отечества. 10–11 классы. Сценарий занятия” [“Important Conversations. The Day of Heroes of the Fatherland. 10-11 grades. Lesson script”], 9 December 2024, <https://cloud.mail.ru/public/9sHL/oWRh8rSZ7/10-11%20%D0%BA%D0%BB%D0%B0%D1%81%D1%81.zip>, p. 6.

⁵⁹ Ministry of Education, “Разговоры о важном. День российской печати. 10–11 классы. Сценарий занятия” [“Important Conversations. The Day of Russian Press. 10-11 grades. Lesson script”], 13 January 2025, p. 6.

⁶⁰ President of Russia, Указ №1710 «О создании Общероссийской общественно-государственной организации “Российское военно-историческое общество»» [Decree 1710 “On establishment of All-Russian public-governmental organization ‘Russian Military Historical Society’”], 29 December 2012.

⁶¹ RVIO, Центральный Совет [Central Board], <https://rvio.ru/official/central>

⁶² Novaya Gazeta, “Как важно быть историком” [“How important it is to be a historian”], 17 February 2022, <https://novayagazeta.ru/articles/2022/02/17/kak-vazhno-byt-istorikom>

⁶³ Russian Military Historical Society (RVIO), “Деятельность РВИО, 2023” [“Activities of RVIO, 2023”], accessed on 9 July 2025, <https://rvio.histrf.ru/temppdf.pdf>

The “methodological materials” deny not only Ukrainian statehood, referring to Ukrainian independence as “so-called”,⁶⁴ but also the existence of a distinct Ukrainian identity stating: “Ukrainians and Russians — it’s just different names. But the people is one”.⁶⁵ They further claim, without providing any evidence, that by 2014 (the beginning of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and annexation of Crimea) “80% of the population of Ukraine was comprised of people who considered the Russian language, Russian culture as their native”.⁶⁶ It contradicts authoritative demographic data, including the latest Ukrainian census of 2001, which found that 78% of people in the country were ethnic Ukrainians and more than 67% spoke Ukrainian as their mother tongue.⁶⁷ Moreover, the premise behind this claim precludes the very thought that people who speak native Russian may have a distinct national identity. The authors then cite the desire to “protect the Russian-speaking population” from alleged “fighters of the Kyiv regime” to justify Russia’s use of its armed forces to occupy and annex Crimea.⁶⁸

In a similar way, the document claims that Ukraine was about to launch a “punitive operation”⁶⁹ in Donetsk and Luhansk regions, then controlled by Russia-backed armed groups, “within days” in February 2022. This claim is used to justify the full-scale invasion of Ukraine as Russia’s response to an “aggression unleashed against it by the West via the Kyiv regime”.⁷⁰

Provision of disinformation under the guise of educational materials not only violates the right to education but, in this case, also serves to normalize a grave violation of international law — unilateral, unprovoked use of force against the sovereignty and territorial integrity of another country. Russian authorities took no measures against the publication or RVIO. On the contrary, in April 2025, Vladimir Putin appointed RVIO’s chairperson Vladimir Medinsky the deputy head of the Supervisory Board of the Presidential Centre for Historical Memory.⁷¹ In May that year, he was appointed the head of the Russian delegation at the Russia–Ukraine talks in Istanbul.

5.4 ZNANIE AND LECTURES ON “NEO-NAZISM”

Another semi-official organization that promotes the Kremlin’s narratives to justify war is “Znanie” (“Knowledge” in Russian). Like RVIO, it was instituted in 2015 by a presidential decree as an “All-Russian public-state educational organization”.⁷² The organization is funded almost solely by the government (state subsidies comprised about 96% of its last publicly available budget in 2024⁷³), and

⁶⁴ RVIO, “Чёрная книга. Методические материалы по истории «украинского вопроса»” [“The Black Book. Methodological materials on the history of the ‘Ukrainian question’”], 2025, p. 7.

⁶⁵ RVIO, Methodological materials (cited above), p. 5.

⁶⁶ RVIO, Methodological materials (cited above), p. 10.

⁶⁷ See, for example, Institute of Geography of National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, *National Atlas of Ukraine*, accessed on 11 July 2025, <http://wdc.org.ua/atlas/en/5010000.html>; State Statistics Service of Ukraine, *Databank*, accessed on 11 July 2025, http://db.ukrcensus.gov.ua/MULT/Database/Census/databasetree_en.asp, section 19A050501_02 (Distribution of the population of Ukraine’s regions by native language).

⁶⁸ RVIO, Methodological materials (cited above), p. 15.

⁶⁹ This term (*karatel'naya operatsiya* in Russian), previously associated with atrocities committed by Axis occupiers in the USSR during the Second World War, has been widely used by the Russian propaganda since 2014 to describe actions of Ukrainian forces against Russia-backed armed groups in eastern Ukraine.

⁷⁰ RVIO, Methodological materials (cited above), p. 18.

⁷¹ President of Russia, Указ №235 «О членах наблюдательного совета автономной некоммерческой организации “Национальный центр исторической памяти при Президенте Российской Федерации”» [Decree 235 “On members of the Supervisory Board of the autonomous nonprofit organization ‘National Centre for Historical Memory of the President of the Russian Federation’”], 16 April 2025.

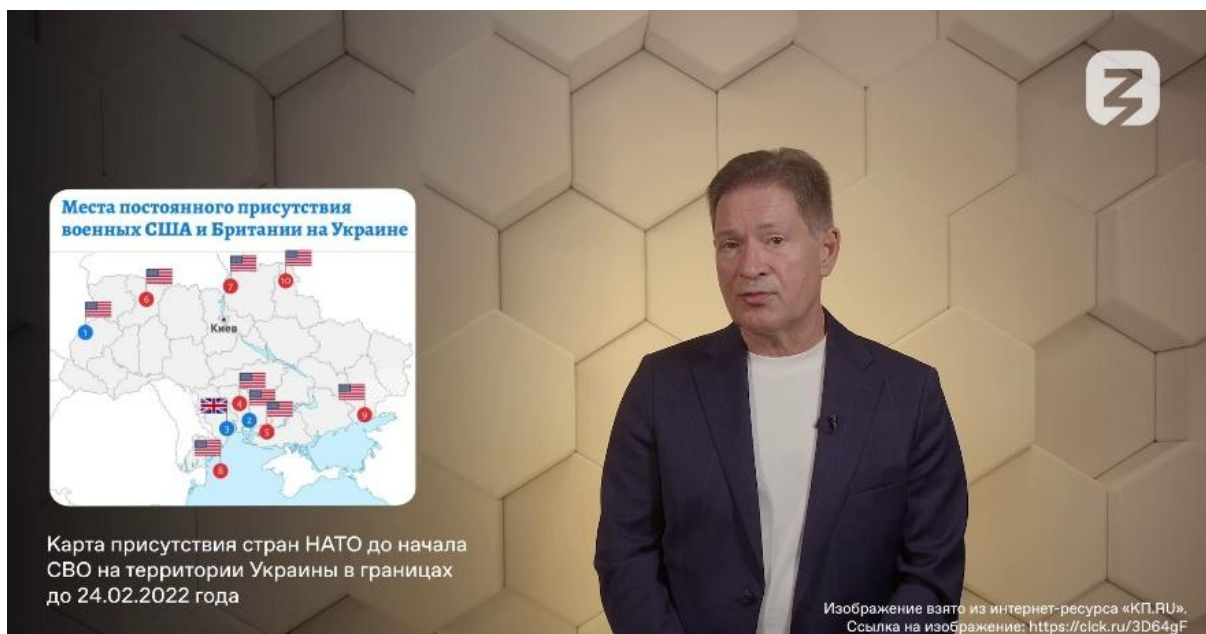
⁷² President of Russia, Указ №617 «О создании Общероссийской общественно-государственной просветительской организации “Российское общество «Знание»» [Decree 617 “On establishment of All-Russian public-governmental educational organization ‘Russian Society “Knowledge”’”], 11 December 2015.

⁷³ Znanie, “Отчёт об использовании имущества за 2024 год” [“Report on the use of property in 2024”], <https://archive.is/S3Pwq>

its leadership is nominated by the Ministry of Education.⁷⁴ Its mandate is broader than that of RVIO, however, in that Znanie is tasked with promoting education and science more generally.

Much of Znanie's activities are, however, focused on disseminating propaganda through lectures and classes on politics, history and "patriotic upbringing". It has provided content for the "Important Conversations" and similar events aimed at children, including, for example, a lecture justifying the unlawful annexation of Russian-occupied Ukrainian territories in Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson oblasts. The organization called their occupation a "reunification" and claimed that it was "a logical process", whereby Russia was "not so much expanding the country's borders as restoring historical justice and creating conditions for the progressive development of our Fatherland, protecting our own security and providing prospects for the new generation of Russians".⁷⁵

Amnesty International has a copy one of Znanie's flagship products, an online course on "prevention of the spread of the Neo-Nazi ideology among children and young people". The course is intended for teachers and other professionals working with children in schools and beyond. It advocates "careful inclusion" of its elements in the day-to-day school activities, without explicitly mentioning its "preventative" goal to the students.⁷⁶



*Still frame from the Znanie video course, depicting a map of Ukraine with alleged deployment of Western military forces
© Znanie, KP.ru*

The publication's title is a direct reference to the Kremlin's official narrative which has described the Ukrainian state as "(Neo-)Nazi" and insisted on its "de-Nazification" as the officially stated reason for the invasion.⁷⁷ The content of this course is littered with the Kremlin's anti-Ukrainian propaganda clichés that deny national identity, and the right to statehood, to the people of Ukraine, by calling

⁷⁴ Znanie, Statute, Article 7.2, <http://bit.ly/40g534o>

⁷⁵ Znanie, "Сценарий лекции «Возвращение в состав России: сила единства»" ["Lecture script: 'Return to Russia: the power of unity'"], 2024, <http://bit.ly/3GQCdB5>

⁷⁶ Znanie, "Профилактика распространения идеологии неонацизма в детской и молодежной среде" ["Prevention of the spread of neo-Nazism ideology among children and young people"], 2025, on file with Amnesty International, Presentation 5.2, slide 2.

⁷⁷ See, for example, President of Russia, "Обращение Президента Российской Федерации" ["Address of the President of the Russian Federation"], 24 February 2022, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67843>

Ukraine's independence "accidental", Ukrainian historic statehood "a nationalist myth",⁷⁸ and claiming that the Ukrainian state is undergoing "unfinished geopolitical decomposition".⁷⁹ The online course combines disinformation, such as the claim that NATO countries were conducting research into biological weapons in Ukraine and were finishing the construction of a military base in Mykolaiv oblast, with belligerent statements. For example, it says that the "ultimate goal" of the use of military force in Ukraine is to show to the West that "Russia is a steamroller that cannot be stopped" and that it "will not end with the defeat of Ukraine".⁸⁰

In effect, the lectures promote the worldview of Russia protecting its national interests and engaged in a perpetual existential conflict, where its ambitions and military might in themselves justify the invasion of a neighbouring country and the subordination of any weaker countries within what is regarded as Russia's sphere of influence. Such propaganda, distributed by a state-sponsored organization, is incompatible with Russia's obligation to provide education to children in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance and friendship among all peoples.

6. MONITORING AND COERCION OF STUDENTS AND SCHOOL STAFF

At its core, the official Russian system of indoctrination requires acceptance of a certain, single narrative or point of view, to the exclusion of the alternatives and of the possibility to explore them. As such it involves compulsion and coercion, where participation and compliance of both students and the teaching staff is ensured by a constant threat of serious sanctions. Educational institutions not only disseminate disinformation produced or approved by the authorities but also help silence alternative opinions, especially those critical of the authorities. Such use of the educational system to stamp out dissent and suppress freedom to opinion and to freely receive and impart information has become particularly widespread after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine.⁸¹

As mentioned above, a presidential decree explicitly tasks the federal law enforcement agencies, including security services, with overseeing the implementation of government policies related to the promotion of "traditional values", the official version of history and "patriotic" education. Amnesty International has reported multiple instances of police and the Federal Security Service (FSB) intimidating, prosecuting and ill-treating school pupils and their parents for expressing anti-war and other views considered by the Russian authorities as "unpatriotic" or "destructive".⁸² In some cases, it was school staff who took the initiative to contact the police to report "troublesome" students.

However, the teaching staff have themselves been the targets of pressure and persecution, and sometimes it was their students who reported them to the authorities. One of the first known criminal cases under Russia's war censorship laws was initiated in March 2022 against Irina Gen, an English teacher at a sports school in Penza (a city about 650km southeast of Moscow), who mentioned an air strike by the Russian forces on a maternity ward in Mariupol in a conversation with her pupils.⁸³ Unbeknownst to her, one of the children recorded the conversation on a mobile phone, and the recording became the basis for Irina Gen's prosecution for "dissemination of knowingly false

⁷⁸ Znanie, "Prevention" (previously cited), Lecture 5.

⁷⁹ Znanie, "Prevention" (previously cited), Lecture 2.

⁸⁰ Znanie, "Prevention" (previously cited), Lecture 6.

⁸¹ Amnesty International, "Russia: Educators fired, students indoctrinated — academia is the latest victim of the ongoing crackdown", 12 May 2022, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/05/russia-educators-fired-students-indoctrinated-academia-is-the-latest-victim-of-the-ongoing-crackdown>

⁸² Amnesty International, *Russia: "Your children will go to an orphanage"* (previously cited).

⁸³ Amnesty International, "Russia: Schoolteacher faces 10 years in prison for telling students about a strike on a Ukrainian hospital" (Index: EUR 46/5512/2022), 26 April 2022, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur46/5512/2022/en>

information about the Russian Armed Forces”.⁸⁴ She had to resign as a teacher, and in August 2022, a court handed Irina Gen a suspended sentence of five years’ imprisonment.⁸⁵

Russian human rights watchdog OVD-Info has identified 148 cases of persecution of teachers for their opposition to the war, between the full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 and 14 July 2024,⁸⁶ including 23 criminal cases and 82 dismissals.⁸⁷ About a third of these incidents started with the teacher’s anti-war position being reported to the authorities, usually by their students, by students’ parents or by other school staff. These figures only include cases known to human rights groups and have likely increased since OVD-Info’s publication.

6.1 “PROFILAKTIKA”



A placard by the St. Petersburg Prosecutor's Office warning about alleged efforts of Ukrainian military to recruit Russians online and implying that participating in hostilities on the side of Ukraine amounts to terrorism

The informal screening of political and other personal views of pupils and students in Russian schools is commonplace and is often framed by the administrations and educational authorities as so-called “profilaktika”, or preventative, prophylactic measures against “terrorism”, “extremism” and other “destructive ideologies”. The definition of “extremism” in the Russian law is unduly broad and vague and potentially encompasses any peaceful protest or political or social activity and expressed opinion critical of the Russian authorities. Among the groups and organizations that have been arbitrarily designated and criminalized as “extremist” are the Jehovah’s Witnesses, Aleksei Navalny’s Anti-

⁸⁴ Criminal Code, Article 207.3.

⁸⁵ RBC, “Учительнице дали 5 лет условно за дискредитацию армии в беседе с ученицей” [“A teacher was given suspended five years for discreditation of the army in a conversation with a pupil”], 4 August 2022, <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/04/08/2022/62eb9f509a7947b05ec0baf9>

⁸⁶ OVD-Info, “«Либо государственное мнение, либо никакого»: как преследуют преподавателей, которым вменили антивоенную позицию” [“‘Either a state opinion or no opinion’: how teachers who have been impugned for their anti-war stance are persecuted”], 1 September 2024, <https://reports.ovd.info/teachers>

⁸⁷ OVD-Info’s figures include cases in Russia-annexed Crimea.

Corruption Foundation, the youth protest group Vesna (“Spring” in Russian) and the non-existent “International LGBT public movement”.⁸⁸

Likewise, the notion of “terrorism” is used loosely and extensively, including to cover various forms of legitimate activities that Russian authorities consider harmful to their interests, such as membership of or vocal support for Ukraine’s armed forces and Ukraine’s self-defence against Russia’s war of aggression, membership (often purported) of the Islamic movement Hizb ut-Tahrir (which is legal in Ukraine, has never been implicated in any violence or its advocacy in either Russia or Ukraine, but is pursued as “terrorist” in Russia and Russian-occupied Crimea), and since November 2025, the same Anti-Corruption Foundation. As shown above, the Russian authorities also misuse terms such as “Neo-Nazism” to smear their political critics and to justify own persecution or, in the case of Ukraine, justify the attack on the country and its population.

”Profilaktika” has been one of the tasks of educational institutions, including schools, according to the Strategy of Prevention of Extremism, approved by President Vladimir Putin, and includes “work with students [who are] prone to extremist ideology, and with members of their families”.⁸⁹ Plans for such “profilaktika” activities are adopted regionally and at the level of individual schools.⁹⁰ For example, one such plan a copy of which has been obtained by Amnesty International, included year-round “preventive measures to foster a consistent rejection of the ideology of terrorism and to inculcate traditional Russian spiritual and moral values” as well as “fostering patriotism in children and adolescents, and developing an all-Russian civic identity, civic duty and a sense of pride in Russia’s history”. Special attention is given in the plan to children from Syria, Iraq and the occupied territories of Ukraine: they require “timely detection of radicalization... and development of a critical attitude towards... radical ideas (terrorism and Neo-Nazism)”.⁹¹

Among “profilaktika” activities are, for example, lectures, such as ones based on aforementioned “Znanie” manuals, and provision of aid to former participants of the war against Ukraine. These measures, according to materials obtained by Amnesty International, also involve clandestine monitoring of teachers as well as students to identify those with dissenting political and personal views. We will discuss these in detail in the following sections.

6.2 “MONITORING MUST BE CONDUCTED ON AN ONGOING BASIS”

Schools receive from federal and regional authorities detailed instructions for such activities and whom to target them with. Amnesty International has found several such documents on websites of specific schools, universities and regional ministries of education, uploaded there apparently for use by the staff. Some of these “methodological recommendations”, as they are invariably called, do not list their authors, merely mentioning the city of publication — Moscow and Rostov-on-Don — and the

⁸⁸ See Amnesty International, “Russian Federation: terrorising the dissent: abuse of terrorism-related charges in Russia” (Index: EUR 46/7705/2024), 19 February 2024, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur46/7705/2024/en>

⁸⁹ President of Russia, Стратегия противодействия экстремизму в Российской Федерации [Strategy of Prevention of Extremism in the Russian Federation], approved on 28 December 2024, para. 36(6)(15).

⁹⁰ Ministry of Education, “Информационно-методические материалы по организации профилактической работы в образовательных организациях, реализующих основные общеобразовательные программы начального общего, основного общего и среднего общего образования, а также в профессиональных образовательных организациях по вопросам предотвращения распространения идеологического воздействия террористических течений на обучающихся” [“Information and methodological materials on the organization of profilaktika work in educational organizations implementing the main general educational programs of primary, basic and secondary general education, as well as in professional educational organizations on issues of preventing the spread of the ideological influence of terrorist movements on students”], 11 April 2023, p. 3.

⁹¹ School 87 of St. Petersburg, “План мероприятий по профилактике правонарушений несовершеннолетних, обучающихся в ГБОУ СОШ №87 Петроградского района на 2024/2025 учебный год” [“Plan of measures to prevent juvenile delinquency among minors studying at School 87 for the 2024/2025 academic year”], 6 September 2024, <https://archive.is/Qhts5>

year of publication. Their texts, however, have large overlaps suggesting shared authorship. Nearly all documents mention the National Centre for Information Countering Terrorism and Extremism in the Educational Environment and on the Internet (NCPTI), a Rostov-on-Don-based organization, whose website lists Spetsvuzavtomatika, a state-owned company, as its founder and the Ministry of Education, FSB and Ministry of Interior (which controls the police) among its partners.⁹² NCPTI also collaborated with Znanie to produce the abovementioned online course on “prevention of the spread of the Neo-Nazi ideology among children and young people”.

One of the methodological recommendations was sent by the Federal Youth Agency (shortened as “Rosmolodezh” in Russian, a governmental body within the Ministry of Education responsible for implementing youth-related policy) to the governors of the constituent entities of the Russian Federation on 27 February 2025. The letter requested that the governors “ensure dissemination of the methodological materials” among the relevant institutions and report back on the measures taken by 1 April.⁹³

The attached materials, consisting of a 70-page-long brochure, several videos and presentations, which Rosmolodezh officials also uploaded online,⁹⁴ reveal a concerning scale of surveillance over students, their activities and beliefs, that schools are instructed to carry out. The brochure calls it “monitoring to identify persons exposed to the destructive influence of the ideology of terrorism, extremism and Neo-Nazism, as well as those who have fallen under its influence”, and emphasizes that this activity is “mandatory” and “must be conducted on an ongoing basis”.⁹⁵ Elements of this process include “regular review of [online] accounts and communities that are predominantly used by the students”, “systemic pedagogical observation with subsequent recording of the results”, “systematic maintenance of students’ social passports” and “liaising with law enforcement officials to share information on an ongoing basis”.⁹⁶ The brochure’s preface focuses mainly on students from the territories of Ukraine occupied by Russia since 2022 and their “deradicalization and integration into the Russian society”.⁹⁷ The bulk of the text, however, appears to be in line with other documents intended for schools teaching Russian children.

6.3 TEACHING OR SPYING?

The recommendations instruct school staff to conduct “psychological portraiture” of their pupils, which includes “a detailed analysis of the student’s beliefs, statements, contacts and actions to determine the level of commitment to destructive ideas”. This is done, among other methods, through an analysis of their social media activities and “their statements and actions in real time, for example, while in the educational organization”. The document recommends paying special attention to social media posts, comments, images and videos shared by the student, photos or stories they are tagged in, their subscriptions and even their usernames, to work out their interests.⁹⁸

Another set of methodological recommendations that Amnesty International has reviewed gives detailed instructions on how offline monitoring should be carried out. They recommend teachers to

⁹² NCPTI, website, accessed on 9 April 2026, <https://archive.is/yByQk>

⁹³ Federal Youth Agency, “Письмо высшим должностным лицам субъектов Российской Федерации №ГГ/1449-06 «О направлении методических рекомендаций»” [Letter to regional governors GG/1449-06 “On sending methodological recommendations”], 27 February 2025, on file with Amnesty International.

⁹⁴ Federal Youth Agency, “Методические рекомендации и информационные материалы по профилактике распространения терроризма, экстремизма и неонацизма с учетом современных вызовов и угроз, связанных с проведением специальной военной операции” [“Methodological recommendations and information materials on profilaktika of spread of terrorism, extremism and neo-Nazism taking into consideration challenges and threats caused by the Special Military Operation”], uploaded on 20 February 2025, on file with Amnesty International.

⁹⁵ Federal Youth Agency, “Methodological recommendations” (previously cited), p. 35.

⁹⁶ Federal Youth Agency, “Methodological recommendations” (previously cited), p. 36.

⁹⁷ Federal Youth Agency, “Methodological recommendations” (previously cited), p. 3.

⁹⁸ Federal Youth Agency, “Methodological recommendations” (previously cited), p. 37.

conduct “private interviews and chats” with students, to note “individual radical statements” made by them during the lessons and to undertake a “mapping of pedagogical observations” and “a ‘portfolio’ of students’ works made during the lessons, lectures, practical exercises, creative activities”⁹⁹ — in order to identify students requiring “targeted profilaktika”.

Various formats of activities are proposed in the documents to both discover and influence students’ opinions on sensitive issues. One of them is called “Open Dialogue”, where a speaker is invited to give a lecture on a specific topic (the recommended topics are the “special military operation”, “traditional spiritual-moral values”, Russian history amongst others) and answer students’ questions. The instructions stress that the organizers should motivate the students to speak up “in order to reveal their real position” on the issue. The teaching staff should then analyse the results and “pay particular attention to those students who have clearly demonstrated their disrespect of the guest or unhappiness with his answers” and then subject them for closer scrutiny for the purpose of “identifying markers of radical behaviour”.¹⁰⁰ One set of recommendations also tells the teachers who encounter students’ “aggression” towards speakers during “profilaktika” activities to record details of the incident for further sharing them with the law enforcement.¹⁰¹

Another format called “Jeff’s Discussion” likewise instructs the teachers to make sure the participants express their opinions (with only three options of “yes”, “no” and “maybe”) on questions posed to them. These positions are then used “in order to identify persons susceptible to destructive ideological influences”. The document recommends inviting a psychologist to record the students’ statements and to make a list of those who “may influence other participants”. It goes even further and suggests also including teachers and professors in the activities “to determine their attitudes towards destructive ideological influence”.¹⁰²

In other words, the school staff are told to spy on their students (and even on other teachers), in and out of classrooms as well as online, provoke them into conversations that may reveal their dissenting views, collect a broad range of information about them and, as implied by the references to coordination with the law enforcement, share this information with security services. It is a direct violation of the rights to freedom of expression, to privacy, to quality education, and other human rights. It goes without saying that the need to “monitor” students undermines, and distracts schools from, their main mission: education.

The actual purpose of this “monitoring”, however, is even worse, as further details show.

6.4 “DESTRUCTIVE ORGANIZATIONS”

The methodological recommendations state that the school personnel should identify students suspected of participating in “destructive movements and organizations”. The document singles out, amongst others, several groups which “represent the greatest threat for the youth”, including the Anti-Corruption Foundation, Vesna, the Feminist Anti-War Resistance and the non-existent “international LGBT public movement”, none of which have been known to engage in, or endorse, violence or commit any internationally recognized crimes.¹⁰³

⁹⁹ Authors unknown, “Методические рекомендации по организации индивидуальной профилактической работы с лицами, подверженными идеологическому воздействию международных террористических организаций, украинских неонацистских структур и других деструктивных течений” (“Methodological recommendations on the organization of individual preventive work with persons exposed to the ideological influence of international terrorist organizations, Ukrainian neo-Nazi structures and other destructive currents”), 2024, on file with Amnesty International, p. 15.

¹⁰⁰ Federal Youth Agency, “Methodological recommendations” (previously cited), 2025, pp. 53-54.

¹⁰¹ Authors unknown, “Methodological recommendations” (previously cited), 2024, pp. 17-18.

¹⁰² Authors unknown, “Methodological recommendations” (previously cited), 2024, p. 14.

¹⁰³ Authors unknown, “Methodological recommendations” (previously cited), 2024, p. 6.

One more of the methodological recommendations, developed by NCPTI and the Ministry of Education and intended for the higher education institutions, has a similar list of “risk groups”, including “opposition-minded students” and those “justifying, romanticizing or openly supporting” LGBTI, the Anti-Corruption Foundation, Jehovah’s Witnesses or Meta (the US company that owns Facebook and Instagram and which the Russian authorities have arbitrarily designated an extremist organization).¹⁰⁴

The school staff should look for “indicators of participation” of pupils in such groups, the recommendations say, such as “demonstrating awareness of events, individuals and objects” related to these organizations, expressing “certain radical political sympathies in social networks” and “demonstrated dissatisfaction with incumbent political leaders and their decisions”.¹⁰⁵

6.5 CALLING PUTIN NAMES

In a part marked “for internal use, not for distribution”, the methodological recommendations specify what opinions the school staff should look for in their “monitoring”, in particular the monitoring of students’ social media. The “indicators” of the “risk groups” include, for example:

1. “approval or support” of the Ukrainian Armed Forces. This includes supporting Ukraine’s right to self-defense in the face of the Russian aggression;
2. pro-Ukrainian slogans (such as “Glory to Ukraine, glory to the heroes”, which the document considers “indicator words of Nazi movements”);
3. content “dehumanizing the image of the Russian soldier, discrediting the Russian Armed Forces, political leaders” or “ridiculing the official information” about the war and its participants;
4. “broadcasting opinions of foreign agents and opinion leaders who follow the pro-Ukrainian and pro-Western agenda” and of others who “criticize the special military operation”;
5. references to the war’s negative social and economic impact, such as growing inflation and falling living standards;
6. even individual words “indicative of pro-opposition or anti-Russian attitudes”, such as the word “Pynia”, a widely-used in social media diminutive nickname for Vladimir Putin.

The document also singles out as a “risk group” those “committed to anarchist ideas”. Their “indicators” include quoting from the “founders of Anarchism” (a list of 20 theoreticians of anarchism is provided), the mentioning of Anarchist groups or symbols, calls to participate in protests organized by Anarchist groups as well as publications “supporting Anarchist political prisoners”. The document mentions several names (Azat Miftakhov, Vyacheslav Lukichev and Ekaterina Muranova) and fabricated criminal cases (those known as “The Network” and “New Greatness”).¹⁰⁶

The discovered “indicators”, both those found online and during offline monitoring, are to be meticulously recorded. One of the proposed formats for keeping these records is a “Card of pedagogical observations”. The example provided in one of the methodological recommendations displays a table with various “subjects of observation” and specific questions, such as the student’s “position... towards the ongoing special military operation” and “to what extent the students share the

¹⁰⁴ NCPTI, “Методические рекомендации по организации адресной и индивидуальной профилактики в образовательной организации высшего образования” [“Methodological recommendations on organization of targeted and individual profilaktika at an educational institution of higher education”], 2023, on file with Amnesty International, pp. 13-14.

¹⁰⁵ Authors unknown, “Methodological recommendations” (previously cited), 2024, p. 9.

¹⁰⁶ Federal Youth Agency, “Methodological recommendations” (previously cited), 2025, pp. 37-44.

[traditional spiritual and moral] values”. The teacher needs to fill out “current observation notes” and come up with “conclusions” on each of the subjects.¹⁰⁷

The recommendations emphasize that “even if there are currently no signs of danger, monitoring should continue once any risk indicators are detected”. School employees conducting the monitoring are further instructed to “immediately report” students engaged in what they consider “openly unlawful online behaviour” or when they have “a suspicion of a preparation of a crime” to the law enforcement.¹⁰⁸

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Amnesty International urges Russian authorities to:

1. Respect, protect and fulfil students’ rights to quality education, to freedom of expression and association and to privacy;
2. Review the curricula, content of history and other textbooks, materials for “Important Conversations” lessons and other educational materials recommended for use in schools and ensure that they do not stifle or prevent free expression and free exchange of opinions, contain mis- or disinformation nor undermine respect for human rights, tolerance and friendship among peoples;
3. Repeal the discriminatory legislation and other regulations prohibiting or preventing individuals and groups with dissenting views, including so-called “foreign agents”, from working in education and producing information materials for children;
4. Repeal or bring in line with international human rights law and standards the articles of the Criminal Code that unduly restrict free expression of opinions and discussion of current and historical political events, including in literature and in educational institutions, and ensure that everyone who has been unlawfully prosecuted under these regulations is provided with effective remedy;
5. Ensure that students and teachers have access to a broad range of sources of information on history and current events and can freely express their opinions on these and other subjects, without fear of intimidation or reprisal, in accordance with international human rights law;
6. Conduct an effective, full, prompt and impartial assessment of the effects of the practices and violations documented in this publication on children’s right to quality education and other human rights, and ensure that everyone affected receives full and adequate reparation for the violations suffered, including restitution; and in particular
7. Immediately stop the unlawful “monitoring” of students and educators, their beliefs, opinions and activities. Immediately notify the targets of the “monitoring” and/or their legal guardians (in case of minors) that they were subject to this practice; safely, permanently and completely destroy all unlawfully collected information, unless the targets or their legal guardians request to see this content prior to its destruction, and ensure that everyone, whose rights have been violated through such practices, has access to effective remedy and full and adequate reparation, including truth, compensation and guarantee of non-repetition;
8. Conduct a prompt, effective and transparent investigation of violations identified in this publication, including of distribution of mis- and disinformation among students, unlawful “monitoring” and persecution of students and teachers, and bring those responsible to account;

¹⁰⁷ Authors unknown, “Methodological recommendations” (previously cited), 2024, p. 16.

¹⁰⁸ Authors unknown, “Methodological recommendations” (previously cited), 2024, pp. 13-14.

9. Implement all relevant recommendations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child made in their concluding observations in March 2024.

Amnesty International calls on the international community to:

1. Closely monitor Russia's violations of students' and teachers' human rights, raise them in bilateral and multilateral fora and urge Russian authorities to stop those and implement the recommendations above;
2. Support independent civil society efforts aimed at combating political propaganda, indoctrination and persecution at educational institutions;
3. Support those facing persecution for using or defending the rights to education, to freedom of expression and association, and the right to privacy in the context of education, including by providing humanitarian visas where necessary;
4. Ensure that human rights are protected in international cooperation and development assistance, exercising due diligence to ensure these activities do not result in human rights abuses, including indoctrination, unlawful monitoring and other violations of human rights of students in Russia and territories under Russian control.

Amnesty International is a movement of 10 million people which mobilizes the humanity in everyone and campaigns for change so we can all enjoy our human rights. Our vision is of a world where those in power keep their promises, respect international law and are held to account. We are independent of any government, political ideology, economic interest or religion and are funded mainly by our membership and individual donations. We believe that acting in solidarity and compassion with people everywhere can change our societies for the better.

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