

Liability to be introduced for online information searches in Russia



Русская версия

Effective 1 September 2025 administrative liability is being introduced for searches of “patently extremist” materials online. The respective law was published on 31 July 2025.^{[\[1\]](#)}

Given that the branches of foreign companies in Russia may use VPN services and other tools, resources frequently on the computers of Russian employees, which are blocked in Russia, may remain open without any content restrictions.

Let us look at the specific legal consequences that this might entail for foreign citizens staying in Russia, foreign companies in Russia and their employees.

1. Gist of the legal development and liability issues

If individuals conduct a premeditated search for “patently extremist” materials online and access them, they will be subject to an administrative fine of up to RUB 5,000 (approximately EUR 55).

Legal entities and their officials will not be held liable under this article. At the same time, however, specific individuals may be held liable, including the employees of foreign companies in Russia.

It should also be noted here that foreign citizens who have committed administrative offences in Russia will be held liable on general grounds.

At first glance it might seem that the extent of the liability is immaterial.

However, if a foreign citizen is held administratively liable, for example, twice over three years, the individual may be prohibited from entering Russia.^[2]

In addition, one cannot rule out the possibility that the computers, smartphones and other gadgets used by an individual to access prohibited content may be confiscated. Accordingly, the law enforcement agencies may also obtain access to any other confidential information stored on such devices.

2. What may serve as the grounds for liability?

The following formula for imposing administrative liability can be derived from a literal interpretation of the text of this norm:

“premeditated search” + “granting of access” to patently extremist materials = administrative liability.

As the conjunction “and” is situated between the words “search” and “granting of access” in the text of the norm, this implies that the act of the individual is deemed illegal provided that both actions have been performed.

Accordingly, a *search* per se of “extremist” materials online should not be punished.

3. What materials do the Russian authorities consider to be “extremist”?

The new norm stipulates two categories of materials which are considered “extremist”:

Firstly, this concerns the so-called "Federal List of Extremist Materials" which is kept by the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation.

This list is published on the department's [website](#), is only kept in the Russian language and contains approximately 5,500 entries.

It is clear that the general public and all the more so foreign citizens may find it extremely difficult to cross-reference material discovered during a search online with the list of Russia's Ministry of Justice.

Such difficulties are compounded by the format of the list which includes not only references to specific websites, but also the texts of songs, books and even images and videos. Furthermore, the list only provides brief textual descriptions, without including, for example, actual images or videos.

Secondly, this concerns a category of information which is not organised in any lists.

It refers to any *"documents intended for dissemination or public display, or information on other media advocating extremism or substantiating or justifying the need to engage in such activity"*.^[3]

The works of the leaders of the National Socialist German Workers' Party and Italy's National Fascist Party are cited as examples of such documents, but there is no actual list. and any materials, which may comply with a broad definition of "extremism" may be declared extremist.

4. The information search must be intentional

The imposition of administrative liability is contingent specifically on the intentional nature of the search for and access of extremist information.

It is a well-known fact that guilt has two forms – intent and negligence.

Accordingly, a search will be declared intentional only if the individual was aware, in particular, of the illegal nature of such a search.

Taking into account the presumption of an individual's innocence, the Russian law enforcement agencies will have to prove the actual guilt of the individual in the form of their intent to search for and access extremist information.

The law enforcement agencies may draw such a conclusion based on the data of Internet providers and information from the actual device – from the browser history - and the law enforcement agencies may confiscate the respective gadgets namely for this purpose.

Should have any questions related to the protection of the rights and interests of foreign persons in Russia, the CIS and the Eurasian Economic Union, please rest assured that ADVANT Beiten is always at your disposal.

[1] <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/document/0001202507310012?index=24>

[2] Sub-Clause 4 of Article 26 of Federal Law No. 114-FZ dated 15 August 1996 "On the Procedure for Exit from the Russian Federation and Entry into the Russian Federation".

[3] Clause 3 of Article 1 of Federal Law No. 114-FZ dated 25 July 2002 "On Countering Extremism".

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