

10 March 2025

UKRAINE: Conscientious objectors prosecuted, jailed as "disobedient" soldiers

By Felix Corley, Forum 18 (<https://www.forum18.org>)

Officials took Baptist Serhy Semchuk to prison in Lviv in January for his 5-year jail sentence. The Recruitment Office had told him he could serve in the military without weapons. However, later a criminal case was launched when he refused to take up weapons. "We're in such shock," a church member says. "He doesn't want to kill." Conscientious objectors to mobilisation who were not in the military also increasingly face prosecution on "disobedience" charges, including 6 Jehovah's Witnesses on trial. Many Protestant and Jehovah's Witness conscientious objectors are on trial for refusing mobilisation.

Officials took a Baptist, Serhy Semchuk, from his place of work in late January to begin serving his 5-year jail sentence for refusing as a soldier to take up weapons on grounds of conscience. The Recruitment Office had told him when he was mobilised that he would be able to serve in the military without weapons. However, in May 2024, a court handed down the jail term on criminal charges of "Disobedience". Kharkiv Appeal Court rejected his appeal in September 2024. In February 2025 the Supreme Court refused to accept a cassational appeal.

Semchuk is being held in prison in Lviv, a church member told Forum 18. At least one other conscientious objector – a Pentecostal – is held in the same prison. "We're in such shock that this happened," a member of Semchuk's Baptist church told Forum 18. "He doesn't want to kill. We support his and our church's position – we have this teaching" (see below).

Semchuk was in the military. However, a small but increasing number of conscientious objectors to mobilisation who were not in the military also face prosecution under Criminal Code Article 402, Part 4 ("Disobedience committed under martial law or in a combat situation"). This accusation can be used against those regarded as already being in the military. The punishment is a jail term of 5 to 10 years (see below).

Investigators' and prosecutors' use of Criminal Code Article 402, Part 4 seems to have stepped up in autumn 2024. "Article 402 became a tactic to use against conscientious objectors to put more pressure on them to give in, abandon their beliefs and accept military service," Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18 (see below).

The trial in Kyiv on "disobedience" charges of Jehovah's Witness conscientious objector Volodymyr Baranov is due to resume on 22 April. Forum 18 pointed out to the State Bureau of Investigation in Kyiv in October 2024 that Baranov is not a military person. It asked why he was being prosecuted under Criminal Code Article 402. Forum 18 had received no response by 10 March 2025. Five other Jehovah's Witnesses are on trial under the same charge, while investigators are preparing criminal cases against a further 7 (see below).

Forum 18 asked the General Prosecutor's Office in Kyiv why an increasing number of conscientious objectors appear to be facing charges under Criminal Code Article 402, which should only be used against soldiers. Most are not soldiers because they have not sworn the military oath and been accepted into the military (see below).

Forum 18 also asked the General Prosecutor's Office why are so many conscientious objectors are also being prosecuted also under Criminal Code Article 336 ("Refusing call-up for military service during mobilisation or in a special period, and for military service during call-up of reservists in a special period"). Forum 18 asked why they cannot be given an alternative civilian service, such as working in hospitals.

Forum 18 put the same questions to Stanislav Kulish, head of the Department of Security and Defence at the Office of the Parliamentary Human Rights Commissioner (Ombudsperson) Dmytro Lubinets.

Neither the General Prosecutor's Office nor the Office of the Parliamentary Human Rights Commissioner immediately replied to Forum 18's questions (see below).

Most conscientious objectors to mobilisation face prosecution under Criminal Code Article 336 ("Refusing call-up for military

service during mobilisation or in a special period, and for military service during call-up of reservists in a special period"). The punishment is a jail term of three to five years (see below).

In February and March, officials took four convicted Jehovah's Witness conscientious objectors - including Vitaly Kriushenko - to prison to begin serving their 3-year jail sentences. At least four other conscientious objectors – two Jehovah's Witnesses, a Pentecostal and a Baptist - will be taken to prison to begin serving their 3-year jail sentences if they lose their appeals (see below).

Perhaps 200 cases against conscientious objectors under Criminal Code Article 336 are already in court. Of these, 171 are against Jehovah's Witness, Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18. Others facing such prosecutions include Baptists (including Council of Churches Baptists), Pentecostals and Seventh-day Adventists (see below).

Investigators have opened perhaps 600 criminal cases against conscientious objectors who have requested alternative civilian service under Criminal Code Article 336 which have not yet reached court (see below).

On 15 March, the Council of Europe's Venice Commission is due to consider adopting an amicus curiae brief on alternative (non-military) service, the Venice Commission notes on its website (<https://www.coe.int/en/web/venice-commission/-/event-3768>). Ukraine's Constitutional Court requested the amicus curiae brief on 4 December 2024.

Severe human rights violations in Russian-occupied Ukraine

Serious violations of freedom of religion and belief and other human rights take place within all the Ukrainian territory Russia has illegally occupied (https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2963).

No alternative civilian service under martial law

The United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has noted that conscientious objection to military service comes under ICCPR Article 18 ("Freedom of thought, conscience and religion") and has recognised (<https://www.ohchr.org/en/conscientious-objection>) "the right of everyone to have conscientious objection to military service as a legitimate exercise of the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion."

The OHCHR has also noted in its Conscientious Objection to Military Service (<https://www.ohchr.org/en/publications/special-issue-publications/conscientious-objection-military-service>) guide that Article 18 is "a non-derogable right .. even during times of a public emergency threatening the life of the nation."

After Russia's renewed invasion of Ukraine began in February 2022, Ukraine declared a state of martial law. All men between the ages of 18 and 60 were deemed eligible for call-up in a general mobilisation and were banned from leaving the country. Ukraine's Defence Ministry insists that even the limited alternative service allowed in peacetime does not exist during wartime (https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2830).

Article 35 of Ukraine's Constitution guarantees the right to conscientious objection to military service. Officials have refused to grant alternative service to mobilised men who ask for their constitutional right to be respected.

"Disobedience" trials, sentences

A small but increasing number of conscientious objectors to mobilisation face prosecution under Criminal Code Article 402, Part 4 ("Disobedience committed under martial law or in a combat situation"). This accusation can be used against those regarded as already being in the military. The punishment is a jail term of 5 to 10 years.

Investigators' and prosecutors' use of Criminal Code Article 402, Part 4 seems to have stepped up in autumn 2024. "Article 402 became a tactic to use against conscientious objectors to put more pressure on them to give in, abandon their beliefs and accept military service," Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18.

"This is a very anxious and worrying development," Jehovah's Witnesses added. "A conscientious objector says he can't become a soldier and swear the military oath. The response of the military is to make him a soldier and punish him for violating military orders. They want to punish him for committing a crime he's not committed as he's never been a soldier."

A Baptist, Serhy Semchuk, was sentenced to jail in May 2024 under Criminal Code Article 402, Part 4. Jehovah's Witness Volodymyr Baranov is among six Jehovah's Witnesses currently on trial (see below).

Investigators are preparing criminal cases against a further 7 Jehovah's Witnesses under Criminal Code Article 402, Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18 on 6 March.

On the morning of 10 March, Forum 18 asked the General Prosecutor's Office in Kyiv in writing why an increasing number of

conscientious objectors appear to be facing charges under Criminal Code Article 402, which should only be used against soldiers. Most are not soldiers because they have not sworn the military oath and been accepted into the military.

On the morning of 10 March, Forum 18 put the same question to Stanislav Kulich, head of the Department of Security and Defence at the Office of the Parliamentary Human Rights Commissioner (Ombudsperson) Dmytro Lubinets.

Neither the General Prosecutor's Office nor the Office of the Parliamentary Human Rights Commissioner had replied by the end of the working day in Kyiv of 10 March.

The Ombudsperson's Office did not reply to Forum 18's October 2024 questions about why those who cannot serve in the military during martial law face criminal conviction; whether Ukraine will adopt a new law or legal amendment to allow all conscientious objectors to conduct alternative civilian service, whether at times of war or peace; or about the torture of conscientious objectors at Recruitment Offices and in military units (https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2937).

Kharkiv: Serhy Semchuk taken to prison for 5-year "disobedience" jail term

Serhy Mikhaylovych Semchuk (born 1992) is a Baptist from the village of Brody in the western Lviv Region. The Recruitment Office rejected his verbal request for alternative civilian service. It then mobilised him in December 2022. He told them that he was ready to serve in the military, but without weapons in line with his Christian faith. The Recruitment Office assured him this was accepted. He was then sent to a military unit.

However, in December 2023, the military commander ordered Semchuk and other soldiers to arm themselves with machine guns. Semchuk refused, telling the commander that he could not take up arms as it was against his faith. Officials detained Semchuk from 12 to 15 January 2024. He was released on bail ahead of the trial.

On 8 May 2024, Judge Tetyana Shtikh of Kharkiv's Dzerzhinsky District Court found Semchuk guilty under Criminal Code Article 402, Part 4 ("Disobedience committed under martial law or in a combat situation"). He "decided to embark on a criminal path and, acting intentionally, under martial law, commit disobedience, that is, an open refusal to carry out the order of the commander", the Judge wrote in the verdict seen by Forum 18. She sentenced him to 5 years' imprisonment.

Semchuk told the court that he has been a church member since 2012 and has a certificate confirming this from the pastor of Brody's Baptist Church. "The beliefs of the said church prohibit the use of weapons against people, so when undergoing preparation for mobilisation, he reported this to the military commissar," the verdict quotes Semchuk as declaring.

"Serhy Semchuk fully set out his views in court as to why he cannot take up arms," his lawyer Ruslan Pronin told Forum 18 on 18 February 2025. "He is ready to carry out any orders except those related to weapons."

Punishing Semchuk for refusing to take up weapons within the military (which he had informed them about on mobilisation) appears to go against statements made in court verdicts of those jailed for refusing mobilisation on grounds of conscience.

The 24 February 2025 Appeal Court verdict in the case of jailed Jehovah's Witness conscientious objector Serhy Nechayuk (see below) claims: "The panel of judges considers it necessary to note that the call-up of Serhy Nechayuk to military service upon mobilisation does not mean that he was automatically obliged to take up arms, because given his religious beliefs and constitutional duty to defend the Fatherland during his service, he could have been involved in repairing equipment, building fortifications, transporting the wounded, transporting cargo, or performing any other functions not related to the use of weapons."

With the help of his lawyer Pronin, Semchuk appealed against his conviction and sentence to Kharkiv Appeal Court. However, on 30 September 2024, a panel of Judges chaired by Mykola Savenko upheld the sentence, according to the verdict seen by Forum 18. The verdict then entered into legal force.

Officials took Semchuk from his civilian place of work on 29 January 2025 to begin serving his jail sentence. He is being held in prison in Lviv, his wife Darina Semchuk told Forum 18. At least one other conscientious objector – a Pentecostal – is held in the same prison.

"We're in such shock that this happened," a member of Semchuk's Baptist church in Brody told Forum 18 on 7 March. "He doesn't want to kill. We support his and our church's position – we have this teaching."

Semchuk lodged a further appeal to the Supreme Court in Kyiv. On 20 January 2025, the Supreme Court returned the case to lawyer Pronin, claiming that the documentation had not been in order. Pronin resubmitted the appeal on 12 February. On 21 February 2025, a panel of Judges at the Supreme Court chaired by Irina Grigoryeva refused to accept the cassational appeal.

Prisoner of conscience Semchuk's address in prison:

79007, Lvivska obl.

m. Lviv

Vul. Horodotska bud. 20

Lvivska ustanova vikonannya pokaran No. 19

Ukraine

Kyiv: "Disobedience" trial of Volodymyr Baranov to resume 22 April

Officials took Jehovah's Witness Volodymyr Oleksandrovich Baranov from the streets of Kyiv to the Recruitment Office. They did not accept his request to perform alternative civilian service on grounds of conscience, Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18. They took him to several military units but, when commanders learnt of his conscientious objection to serve in the military they refused to take him.

On 11 October 2024, the investigator of the State Bureau of Investigation started proceedings against Baranov under Criminal Code Article 402, Part 4 ("Disobedience committed under martial law or in a combat situation"). This accusation can be used against those regarded as already being in the military. On 14 October 2024, Kyiv's Pechersky District Court ordered him held in pre-trial detention for 60 days, according to the decision seen by Forum 18.

Forum 18 pointed out to the State Bureau of Investigation in Kyiv on 30 October 2024 that Baranov is not a military person. It asked why he was being prosecuted under Criminal Code Article 402. Forum 18 had received no response by 10 March 2025.

Prosecutors handed the criminal case against Baranov to Kyiv's Darnitsky District Court on 8 January 2025. The trial under Judge Olha Prosalova began with a preliminary hearing on 10 January. She rejected the defence application that Baranov should be transferred from pre-trial detention to house arrest or bail. She argued that he is at risk of absconding because he "knows about the severity of the punishment that threatens him if he is found guilty of this crime, is aware of the punishment and is aware that this crime is punishable by imprisonment for a term of up to ten years". She ordered him held in Kyiv Investigation Prison for a further 60 days, until 10 March.

Judge Prosalova also rejected the defence application that the trial should be open. "Taking into account that martial law is currently in effect in Ukraine, and the information that will be obtained during the trial may lead to the disclosure of the names of service personnel and the locations of military units, which the enemy may take advantage of, the court considers it necessary to hear the case in closed session throughout the entire trial," the Judge ruled.

Baranov's trial resumed, with hearings on 11 and 25 February. Prosecution witnesses did not turn up to the hearing on 6 March. The next hearing is due on 22 April, according to court records.

New "disobedience" case being prepared?

Officials are preparing to bring a case under Criminal Code Article 402 against Council of Churches Baptist conscientious objector Kiril Berestovoi. He has been held in a military unit against his will (https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2937) since officials detained him on 1 July 2024. An official tortured him.

"Unauthorised abandonment of a military unit" investigations

Investigators and prosecutors are preparing cases against conscientious objectors under Criminal Code Article 407 ("Unauthorised abandonment of a military unit or place of service"). This accusation can be used against those regarded as already being in the military. The punishment for offences committed under martial law under Part 5 is a jail term of 5 to 10 years.

At least 18 cases are being prepared against Jehovah's Witness conscientious objectors, Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18 on 6 March.

"Refusing call-up for military service during mobilisation" trials, sentences

Most conscientious objectors to mobilisation face prosecution under Criminal Code Article 336 (https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2939) ("Refusing call-up for military service during mobilisation or in a special period, and for military service during call-up of reservists in a special period"). The punishment is a jail term of three to five years.

Perhaps 200 cases against conscientious objectors under Criminal Code Article 336 are already in court. Of these, 171 are against Jehovah's Witness, Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18 on 6 March. Others facing such prosecutions include Baptists (including

Council of Churches Baptists), Pentecostals and Seventh-day Adventists.

Investigators have opened perhaps 600 criminal cases against conscientious objectors who have requested alternative civilian service under Criminal Code Article 336 which have not yet reached court. Of these, 582 are against Jehovah's Witness, Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18.

On the morning of 10 March, Forum 18 asked the General Prosecutor's Office in Kyiv why are so many conscientious objectors are being prosecuted also under Criminal Code Article 336. Forum 18 asked why they cannot be given an alternative civilian service, such as working in hospitals.

Forum 18 put the same questions to Stanislav Kulich, head of the Department of Security and Defence at the Office of the Parliamentary Human Rights Commissioner (Ombudsperson) Dmytro Lubinets.

Neither the General Prosecutor's Office nor the Office of the Parliamentary Human Rights Commissioner had replied by the end of the working day in Kyiv of 10 March.

Sumy Region: Serhy Ivanushchenko taken to prison, awaiting Supreme Court appeal

Police instituted criminal proceedings against Jehovah's Witness conscientious objector Serhy Viktorovych Ivanushchenko under Criminal Code Article 336 ("Refusing call-up for military service during mobilisation or in a special period, and for military service during call-up of reservists in a special period"). On 28 March 2024, Judge Anna Zamchenko of Bilopillia District Court of Sumy Region jailed him for 3 years. Disagreeing with the decision, the defence filed an appeal. Sumy Appeal Court rejected his appeal on 13 December 2024, according to the decision seen by Forum 18.

Officials took Ivanushchenko on 11 February 2025 to begin serving his jail sentence. He is being held in prison in Hrushyne south of Kharkiv. He has appealed to the Supreme Court, which has set 15 April to hear the appeal.

Prisoner of conscience Ivanushchenko's address in prison:

64131, Kharkivska obl.

Lozivsky raion

Selo Hrushyne

Vul. Primiska bud. 132

Pervomaiska vipravna koloniya No. 117

Ukraine

Sumy Region: Vitaly Kriushenko taken to prison, lodges Supreme Court appeal

On 9 February 2024 police instituted criminal proceedings against Jehovah's Witness conscientious objector Vitaly Mikhailovych Kriushenko under Criminal Code Article 336 ("Refusing call-up for military service during mobilisation or in a special period, and for military service during call-up of reservists in a special period"). On 8 July 2024, Judge Olha Tereshchenko of Bilopillia District Court of Sumy Region jailed him for 3 years.

Disagreeing with the decision, the defence filed an appeal. Sumy Appeal Court rejected his appeal on 5 December 2024, according to the decision seen by Forum 18.

Officials took Kriushenko on 27 January 2025 to begin serving his jail sentence, Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18. He is being held in a temporary detention centre in Sumy while awaiting transfer to a prison. He has appealed to the Supreme Court and is expected to remain in the Sumy detention centre until the further appeal is heard. The Supreme Court has not yet set a date for the hearing.

Kriushenko was the first Jehovah's Witness conscientious objector jailed in Ukraine.

Sumy Region: Andry Khomenko taken to prison, lodges Supreme Court appeal

On 10 April 2024 police instituted criminal proceedings against Jehovah's Witness conscientious objector Andry Borisovych Khomenko under Criminal Code Article 336 ("Refusing call-up for military service during mobilisation or in a special period, and for military service during call-up of reservists in a special period"). On 26 July 2024, Judge Tamara Yaroshenko of Okhtyrka

District Court of Sumy Region jailed him for 3 years. Disagreeing with the decision, the defence filed an appeal. Sumy Appeal Court rejected his appeal on 23 December 2024, according to the decision seen by Forum 18.

Officials took Khomenko on 3 February 2025 to begin serving his jail sentence. He is being held in a temporary detention centre in Sumy while awaiting transfer to a prison, Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18. He has appealed to the Supreme Court and is expected to remain in the Sumy detention centre until the further appeal is heard. The Supreme Court has not yet set a date for the hearing.

Khmelnitsky Region: Serhy Nechayuk taken to prison

Police instituted criminal proceedings against Jehovah's Witness conscientious objector Serhy Anatolyevych Nechayuk under Criminal Code Article 336 ("Refusing call-up for military service during mobilisation or in a special period, and for military service during call-up of reservists in a special period"). On 10 December 2024, Judge Mykola Baskov of Yarmolyntsy District Court of Khmelnytsky Region jailed him for 3 years. Disagreeing with the decision, the defence filed an appeal. Khmelnytsky Region Appeal Court rejected his appeal on 24 February 2025, according to the decision seen by Forum 18.

Officials took Nechayuk on 3 March 2025 to begin serving his jail sentence. He is being held in a temporary detention centre in Khmelnytsky while awaiting transfer to a prison, Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18.

Odessa: Oleksy Poznyak appeals against 3-year jail term

On 3 December 2024, Judge Andry Yakimiv of Komintern District Court in Odessa found Council of Churches Baptist conscientious objector Oleksy Vasilovich Poznyak (born 19 February 1978) guilty under Criminal Code Article 336 ("Refusing call-up for military service during mobilisation or in a special period, and for military service during call-up of reservists in a special period").

The Judge handed Poznyak a 3-year jail term, according to the decision seen by Forum 18.

Poznyak lodged an appeal to Odessa Appeal Court. The case has been assigned to a panel of three Judges chaired by Oleh Kopitsa. The appeal is due to be heard on 7 April 2025. The verdict will come into force only when the appeal has been heard.

Church members insist that Poznyak never hid from the authorities. "He went to the recruitment office when summoned and testified to his faith in God. He always declared that, in accordance with his religious beliefs, he was unable to undertake military training and take weapons into his hands. He did not evade and had no intention of evading his civilian obligation. He asked for military service to be replaced by non-military service." He always cited his rights under Article 35 of the Constitution.

Popilnya: Serhy Starovoiit appeals against 3-year jail term

On 18 December 2024, Judge Mykola Rudnik of Popilnya District Court in Zhytomyr Region found Jehovah's Witness conscientious objector Serhy Vasilyovych Starovoiit guilty under Criminal Code Article 336 ("Refusing call-up for military service during mobilisation or in a special period, and for military service during call-up of reservists in a special period").

The Judge handed Starovoiit a 3-year jail term, according to the decision seen by Forum 18. The Judge also ordered him to pay a fee of 4534.68 Hryvnya (about 10 days' average local wage) to cover the costs of a "forensic handwriting examination".

In his verdict, the Judge claimed that "no religious beliefs can be a reason for a citizen of Ukraine, recognised as fit for military service, to evade mobilisation in order to fulfil his constitutional duty to protect the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the state from military aggression by a foreign country".

Judge Rudnik insisted that "Starovoiit has no factual and legal grounds for conscientious refusal of military service, the legal assessment of his actions as evasion of conscription for mobilisation does not contradict the requirements of Part 4 of Article 35 of the Constitution of Ukraine and Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights".

The Judge maintained that "Starovoiit's actions in evading military service on religious grounds are criminal, and therefore his criminal prosecution for draft evasion does not constitute an interference with his freedom to profess his religion, the guarantees of which are provided for by paragraph 1 of Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights".

Starovoiit has appealed to Zhytomyr Appeal Court. The case has been assigned to a panel of three Judges chaired by Serhy Zavyazun. The appeal is due to be heard on 29 April 2025. The verdict will come into force only when the appeal has been heard.

Kyiv: Valentyn Adamchuk appeals against 3-year jail term

The Recruitment Office summoned Pentecostal conscientious objector Valentyn Oleksandrovych Adamchuk (born 1986) for mobilisation on 17 May 2024. Three days later he submitted a request for alternative civilian service based on his religious beliefs.

The Recruitment Office rejected his request.

"Guided by this, he sent a request to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Human Rights," the subsequent court verdict notes. Stanislav Kulish of the Commissioner's Office responded on 12 December 2024, in a letter seen by Forum 18, "that the Constitution of Ukraine and international treaties have higher legal force and precedence over domestic legislative acts, and therefore a person's right to alternative service and his exemption from military service is absolute and cannot be limited due to the lack of regulation on this issue in Ukrainian legislation during martial law".

"The Gospel tells us 'Do not kill' and to look after others," Adamchuk told Forum 18 on 7 February 2025. "Serving in the military doesn't accord with the Gospel or the sayings of Christ." He insisted that he would be ready to perform an alternative civilian service, such as in a hospital or cleaning the streets. "I don't reject my obligations. Our Constitution allows for alternative service. I'm ready to go to prison for my beliefs."

On 29 January 2025, Judge Andry Skuba of Darnitsky District Court in Kyiv found Adamchuk guilty under Criminal Code Article 336 ("Refusing call-up for military service during mobilisation or in a special period, and for military service during call-up of reservists in a special period"). The Judge handed Adamchuk a 3-year jail term, according to the decision seen by Forum 18. He also put him under a night time curfew from 11pm to 5am until the sentence enters legal force (though everyone is under a night-time curfew).

"In his final address in court in 2025," Yurii Sheliashenko of the Ukrainian Pacifist Movement noted, "Adamchuk read the poem 'Not for Robbery' written by Kyiv pastor Georgy Vins and read out for the first time in 1966 in his final address at the trial of Christians who were persecuted by the totalitarian regime." (In the early hours of 1 December 1966, the Moscow court jailed Council of Churches Baptist pastor Vins and a colleague for 3 years each.)

Adamchuk noted that he represented himself at his trial as he did not have a lawyer. He is looking for one for his appeal.

Adamchuk appealed to Kyiv City Appeal Court. No date has yet been set for a hearing. The verdict will come into force only when the appeal has been heard.

Stry: Andry Popik handed 3-year jail term

The Recruitment Office summoned Jehovah's Witness conscientious objector Andry Bohdanovych Popik (born 1982) for mobilisation on 17 May 2024. That day he submitted a request for alternative civilian service based on his religious beliefs. The Recruitment Office rejected his request.

Recruitment Office officials offered Popik "a service not related to carrying weapons, but another, in particular, 'working with documents'," the subsequent court verdict notes. "However, he rejected such offers, since his religious beliefs are incompatible with any military service."

On 4 March 2025, Judge Nazar Yaniv of Stry District Court in Lviv Region found Popik guilty under Criminal Code Article 336 ("Refusing call-up for military service during mobilisation or in a special period, and for military service during call-up of reservists in a special period"). The Judge handed Popik a 3-year jail term, according to the decision seen by Forum 18.

The verdict will come into force only when any appeal has been heard.

Tyachiv: Prosecutor appeals against suspended jail term

On 24 October 2023, Tyachiv District Court in Transcarpathia Region found Orthodox conscientious objector Volodymyr Volodymyrovich Ukhal (https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2906) (born 1992) guilty under Criminal Code Article 336 ("Refusing call-up for military service during mobilisation or in a special period, and for military service during call-up of reservists in a special period"). The Judge handed him a suspended 4-year jail term.

The prosecutor appealed against the suspended sentence. A panel of three Judges at Transcarpathia Appeal Court chaired by Ivan Feer is due to hear the prosecutor's appeal on 7 April 2025. The verdict will come into force only when the appeal has been heard.

Kyiv: Prosecutor appeals against acquittal

On 12 January 2025, Judge Serhy Voznyuk of Boryspil Inter-District Court in Kyiv Region acquitted Jehovah's Witness conscientious objector Serhy Oleksandrovych Tatarov under Criminal Code Article 336 ("Refusing call-up for military service during mobilisation or in a special period, and for military service during call-up of reservists in a special period"). The Judge found "the absence of elements of a criminal offence" in the refusal to serve, according to the verdict seen by Forum 18.

Boryspil Prosecutor's Office is appealing against the acquittal to Kyiv Region Appeal Court. A hearing has been set on 3 June. The

verdict will come into force only when the appeal has been heard.

Multiple criminal trials continue

Multiple conscientious objectors are on trial under Criminal Code Article 336 ("Refusing call-up for military service during mobilisation or in a special period, and for military service during call-up of reservists in a special period"). The punishment is a jail term of three to five years. All these conscientious objectors had told Conscription Offices of their readiness to perform an alternative civilian service.

A total of 171 cases against Jehovah's Witness conscientious objectors under Criminal Code Article 336 are already in court, Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18 on 6 March. Investigators have opened a further 582 criminal cases which have not yet reached court.

The trial of Council of Churches Baptist conscientious objector Andry Hennadiievych Priymak (born 1984) began with an initial hearing on 6 March 2025. Judge Oleksandr Kovtun is due to resume hearing the case at Zarichne District Court on 11 March 2025.

The trial of Council of Churches Baptist conscientious objector Nazar Serhiyovych Melnik (born 1996) continues. Judge Nadiya Zeikan is due to resume hearing the case at Zarichne District Court on 12 March 2025.

The trial of Council of Churches Baptist conscientious objector Volodymyr Viktorovych Kalenchuk (https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2906) (born 29 December 1975) continues. Judge Taisiya Ryabenka is due to resume hearing the case at Chervonoarmysky District Court on 17 March 2025.

The trial of Council of Churches Baptist conscientious objector Kostyantyn Volodymyrovich Chovhan (https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2906) (born 23 June 1971) continues. Judge Oleksandr Zimovsky is due to resume hearing the case at Sakhnovshchyna District Court on 18 March 2025.

The trial of Council of Churches Baptist conscientious objector Oleksandr Volodomyrovych Kuchinsky (born 5 January 1981) continues. Judge Andriy Rozdorozhna is due to resume hearing the case at Sharhorod District Court on 18 March 2025.

The trial of Baptist conscientious objector Oleksy Oleksandrovych Belikov continues. Judge Mariya Glos is due to resume hearing the case at Kharkiv's Kyiv District Court on 19 March 2025.

The trial of Council of Churches Baptist conscientious objector Vadim Mikhaylovych Yedinak (born 1998) continues. Judge Valery Valchuk is due to resume hearing the case at Lyubar District Court on 20 March 2025.

The trial of Pentecostal conscientious objector Mykhailo Yuriyovych Savochka continues. Judge Oleh Popovych is due to resume hearing the case at Vasylkiv District Court on 20 March 2025.

The trial of Seventh-day Adventist conscientious objector Oleksandr Volodymyrovych Kurochkin (born 24 November 1984) continues. Judge Dmytro Shkorupeev is due to resume hearing the case at Odessa's Suvorov District Court on 20 March 2025.

The trial of Seventh-day Adventist conscientious objector Mykhailo Fedorovych Matviychuk continues. Judge Serhy Makeyev is due to resume hearing the case at Dubno District Court on 24 March 2025.

The trial of Council of Churches Baptist conscientious objector Andry Yevhenovych Shuminsky (born 3 December 1991) continues. Judge Oleh Kushnir held the latest hearing in the case at Zdolbuniv District Court on 12 February 2025.

(END)

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