



Section: **Trial & Litigation**

## ECHR finds rights of Jehovah's Witnesses violated in Russia



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**MOSCOW, June 26 (RAPSI, Oleg Panfilov)** - The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) held Thursday that Russia violated the rights of members of Jehovah's Witnesses in Moscow during armed police raid in 2006.

The court found that Russia has violated Article 5 (Rights to liberty and security) and 9 (Freedom of thought, conscience and religion) of the European Convention on Human Rights (Convention) and ruled that Russia should pay 36,000 euros in damages to the applicants.

According to the case documents, on April 12, 2006 members of the Jehovah's Witnesses were holding a religious ceremony in a university building, dedicated for the annual Memorial of the Lord's Evening Meal, which is described as the most solemn and important meeting for the religious group. Ceremony was being held in rented university building when armed police blocked the entrance to the university and escorted fourteen participants of the meeting, including four applicants, to the police station. Detained members of Jehovah's Witnesses' had to spend three hours there until they were released.

The applicants complained about the police actions and the disruption of the ceremony in Russian courts, but without success. Final judgment, made by the Moscow City Court on March 22, 2007 read that police actions were lawful because Jehovah's Witnesses activism in Moscow is illegal.

Members of the organization filed ECHR application on June 20, 2007. They claimed that they were transported to the police station against their will and that they were denied from participating in peaceful and solemn worship.

Concurring opinion of ECHR Judge Pinto de Albuquerque states that Russia should reform its legislation concerning the rights and treatment of religious minorities as well as freedom of religion in general.

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