



EUROPEAN UNION

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EU Statement on the “Foreign Agents” Law in Russia

The European Union attaches great importance to the freedom of association which is clearly enshrined in many international and regional human rights instruments including OSCE commitments. It is intrinsic to any democratic society and facilitates the enjoyment of many other rights and freedoms.

We have previously expressed concern about legislation in the Russian Federation requiring non-governmental organisations receiving foreign funding and engaged in unclearly defined “political activities” to register as “foreign agents”. For more than a year already, this legislation has led to a wave of intrusive inspections against human rights advocacy groups, and to a series of trials. According to data recently published by Human Rights Watch, since March 2013 various prosecutors’ offices and the Ministry of Justice have filed a number of administrative cases against NGOs and NGO leaders for failure to register under the “Foreign Agents” law. This has deeply affected their work and led to the voluntary closure of some of those NGOs.

In the context of this legislation, it is of concern to the EU that a Moscow court on 23 May rejected an appeal filed by Memorial, Russia’s oldest human rights organisation, winner of the European Parliament’s Sakharov Prize in 2009, against a prosecutor’s order requiring it to register as a “foreign agent”. This decision is another setback for those that work hard to protect and promote human rights in Russia. Regrettably, this decision coincided with the recent Constitutional Court decision to recognise the constitutionality of the “Foreign Agents” Law.

Furthermore, we are deeply concerned to hear that Russia’s Federation Council on 28 May approved a draft amendment to the “foreign agents” law, which

would see power given to the Ministry of Justice to designate NGOs as “foreign agents” if they do not register themselves, and without any judicial process. We understand that yesterday President Putin signed this draft amendment into law. This amendment will further restrict the exercise of the right to freedom of association and further constrain the work of Civil Society, Human Rights Defenders and NGOs.

Next week the Swiss OSCE Chairmanship will hold an important high level conference in Bern on the topic of Human Rights Defenders. The conference will discuss the essential role that human rights defenders play in exposing human rights violations and advocating the respect of human rights for all. We call on the Russian Federation to ensure that its laws and practices are consistent with international standards so that those defending human rights can focus on the important function that they fulfil.

The Candidate Countries MONTENEGRO*, ICELAND+, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate ALBANIA, and the EFTA country NORWAY, member of the European Economic Area, as well as UKRAINE align themselves with this statement.

* Montenegro continues to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

+ Iceland continues to be a member of the EFTA and of the European Economic Area.