



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1306 Vienna, 18 March 2021

EU Statement on the CI raised by the US on Russia's Intensifying Campaign Against Independent Media

The European Union joins its international partners in expressing our serious concern about the worsening situation of media freedom in Russia.

At the end of December 2020, reinforced restrictive legislation within the so-called Russian "foreign agents" law was adopted, allowing the Russian authorities to put individuals, including journalists and other media actors, on the so called "foreign agents list" and to impose restrictions on them. Several other bills adopted at the same time also enable the authorities to exercise online censorship.

The EU reiterates its longstanding position that the so-called "foreign agent" law contributes to a systematic infringement of basic freedoms, and restricts civil society, independent media and the rights of political opposition in Russia. It goes against Russia's international obligations and human rights commitments.

It is therefore extremely concerning to see concrete steps by the Russian authorities to restrict the work of individual journalists and other media actors, as well as of independent media platforms and social networks with the help of this controversial legislation.

Since mid-January, the Federal Service for Supervision of Communications, Information Technology, and Mass Media, *Roskomnadzor*, has opened at least 260 cases against *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL)* alone for alleged violations of the so-called 'labelling' requirements under the above mentioned law, with the total amount of fines of nearly USD 1 million. Such systematic targeting of *RFE/RL* is a blatant attempt to silence independent media and to eventually cease *RFE/RL*'s activities in Russia.

Last week, there were also reports about *Roskomnadzor's* attempts to impose censorship with regard to content shared on *Twitter*, as well as on the subsequent slowing down of its services in Russia, after the latter refused to obey *Roskomnadzor's* demand to delete a significant number of posts published by its users.

In this context, we again condemn numerous cases of physical attacks against, and arbitrary detentions of, journalists and other media actors in Russia, who reported about the arrest, detention and sentencing of Alexei Navalny, as well as about the country-wide mass protests that followed.

It is the duty of media to report on issues of public interest, and it is the obligation of the state authorities to ensure they can do so in an atmosphere free of fear and intimidation, both online and offline, refraining from taking actions against them such as raiding their offices, freezing their accounts or harassing their personnel.

We continue to consider the court verdict against Svetlana Prokopyeva, a journalist with *Radio Ekho Moskvyy* in Pskov, on charges of “justifying terrorism” to be completely unjustified, and we regret that her appeal was rejected. Likewise, Ivan Safronov, former journalist for *Kommersant* and *Vedomosti*, remains detained for state treason charges and faces up to 20 years in prison, with his detention extended until May. We are concerned that no one has been brought to justice for the death threats against Elena Milashina, a journalist at *Novaya Gazeta*. We are also concerned about the recent administrative arrest for 15 days of Sergei Smirnov, editor-in-chief of *Mediazona* for a retweet, as well as about the administrative prosecution of Ilya Azar, journalist of *Novaya Gazeta*, for exercising his right for peaceful assembly. We are alarmed that the situation surrounding the self-immolation of Irina Slavina, formerly editor-in-chief of the news site, *Koza Press*, has not been thoroughly investigated.

The Candidate Countries REPUBLIC of NORTH MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO* and ALBANIA*, the EFTA countries ICELAND and NORWAY, members of the European Economic Area, as well as UKRAINE and GEORGIA align themselves with this statement.

* Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.