



United States Mission to the OSCE

On New Threats to Freedom of Expression in the Russian Federation

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires, a.i. Harry Kamian
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
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Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The new Russian legislation that allows the Ministry of Justice to label media outlets as “foreign agents” and to monitor or block certain internet activity, presents yet another threat to a free media in Russia. Freedom of expression – including speech and media, which a government may find inconvenient – is a universal human right and an obligation Russia has undertaken.

The new Russian law appears to apply to all foreign media working in Russia, as well as Russian news organizations receiving funding from abroad. The implementation of the 2012 NGO-focused “foreign agent” law raises questions about Russia’s impartial implementation of this new legislation. The new law also gives the Prosecutor General the power to block access to the websites of “undesirable organizations.”

The United States has previously highlighted the threat posed by Russia’s Foreign Agents Law, which has been used to justify a constant stream of raids, harassment, and legal proceedings that effectively obstruct non-governmental organizations from doing their work. Expanding the Foreign Agents Law to include media outlets opens the door to onerous requirements that could further stifle freedom of expression and editorial independence in Russia.

The United States urges the Russian government not to use this new legislation to further restrict the operation of media outlets. We call on the Russian government, in implementing this new legislation, to uphold commitments to freedom of expression and support – and not undermine – the essential work of the media and civil society organizations.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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