



## **EUROPEAN UNION**

### **OSCE Permanent Council No. 1310 Vienna, 22 April 2021**

## **EU statement on Freedom of the Media in the Russian Federation**

The European Union remains deeply concerned about the worsening situation of media freedom in the Russian Federation. Recent reports about incidents of intimidation against journalists, media actors, and media outlets add to our concern about the continued attempts to shrink the space for civil society, critical voices, and independent journalism in the country.

On 9 April, in Moscow, officers of the Federal Security Service (FSB) raided, briefly detained and interrogated the editor-in-chief of the independent investigative media outlet, iStories, Roman Anin, who has led numerous journalistic investigations into organized crime and corruption in Russia. On 14 April, law enforcement officers in Moscow raided the office of the student magazine DOXA and the apartments of four of its editors, Armen Aramyan, Natalia Tyshkevich, Vladimir Metelkin, and Alla Gutnikova. They were later charged in connection with a video encouraging young people to defend their right to peaceful assembly. We unequivocally condemn all such incidences of police and judicial harassment of independent journalists and media actors.

The EU also condemns the unlawful detentions of and fines imposed on journalists, bloggers and media actors because of their coverage of the protests. We deplore the fact that at least five journalists and media actors have been detained as they were reporting on a protest in support of jailed opposition leader Alexei Navalny on Tuesday, 7 April, and now face administrative penalties.

The EU will follow closely the situation of journalists and media actors facing unjust persecution for their work while covering protests, including the continuing trial against the freelance correspondent for Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) Daria Komarova.

We use this opportunity to express our deep concern about the widening scope of existing restrictions under the so-called “foreign agents” law. On 7 April, the State Duma passed a law on the participation of designated "foreign agents" in elections. If adopted, the new legislation will bar all designated "foreign agent" NGOs and media outlets from campaigning for any candidate or party or advocating any position on referendums. It would also require all individuals affiliated with a "foreign agent" organization or media outlet to announce that fact on their campaign materials.

In this context, the EU reiterates its concern about the use of "foreign agent" laws to discriminate and censor free and independent media, including by imposing the so-called “labelling” requirements. The fines imposed on RFE/RL are of particular concern. The EU calls for continued, unrestricted access to RFE/RL's websites in the Russian Federation.

The EU also reiterates its concern about continued impunity for death threats against Elena Milashina, a journalist at Novaya Gazeta, for her disclosure of extrajudicial killings in Chechnya. Both the journalist and the newspaper have been subjected to unacceptable verbal attacks, an ongoing smear campaign and intimidation by the Chechen authorities. The EU urges the Russian authorities to bring those responsible to justice and to investigate the information revealed in Ms. Milashina's article.

We reiterate our call on the Russian Federation to fully implement all OSCE commitments and international obligations related to freedom of expression and media freedom, including on the safety of journalists.

The Candidate Countries REPUBLIC of NORTH MACEDONIA\*, MONTENEGRO\* and ALBANIA\*, and 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.