



German Presidency of the Council of the European Union

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Statement of the European Union on the Closure of the Russian Chechen Friendship Society

The European Union has learnt with deep regret of the coercive closure of the Russian Chechen Friendship Society (RCFS), following the denial of an appeal by the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation on 23 January against a judicial order passed on 13 October 2006.

The Russian Chechen Friendship Society, laureate of the 2004 Recognition Award of the International Helsinki Federation, was one of the few remaining organisations in Russia reporting on human rights conditions in Chechnya and the Northern Caucasus. The EU has previously raised the harassment of this non-governmental organisation, inter alia in the context of the murder of Russian journalist Anna Politkovskaya, with whom the Russian Chechen Friendship Society had co-operated closely.

This case shows that the “Federal Law on Introducing Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation” of 17 April 2006, commonly referred to as “NGO law”, as well as the “Law on Countering Extremist Activity” can be implemented in an arbitrary manner.

We are concerned that the new legislation on ‘extremism’ – especially given the potentially wide interpretation of this legal term - might have further negative effects on the legitimate activity of civil society organisations in Russia.

The EU considers the full and practical recognition of the positive role played by NGOs and human rights defenders in promoting peaceful solutions to political and social conflicts an essential element of our shared values.

The EU takes note of the fact that NGOs have repeatedly reported about problems they face as a result of the new legislation. The EU will follow closely the implementation of these laws. We appeal to the Russian authorities to consider whether the experience so far calls for amendments to the laws or adjustments to their implementation in the light of standards and commitments undertaken in the framework of the OSCE and the Council of Europe, and we stand ready to work together with the Russian Federation on this.

The Candidate Countries Turkey, Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro, EFTA countries Iceland and Norway, members of the European Economic Area, as well as Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova align themselves with this statement.

* Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.