



United States Mission to the OSCE

Legislation Restricting the Rights to the Freedoms of Expression, Peaceful Assembly and Association, and Religion in Russia

As delivered by Deputy Permanent Representative Kate Byrnes
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
July 14, 2016

The United States is concerned by the Russian Federation's recent adoption of amendments to its antiterrorism law, which President Putin signed on July 7. The amendments include a number of provisions, which place greater restrictions on the exercise of the rights to freedoms of expression, peaceful assembly and association, and religion.

Civil society actors and members of the political opposition who attempt to stage peaceful protests now face more severe penalties.

The amendments also introduce criminal penalties for those who do not inform the authorities of possible violations.

Particularly troubling are the amendments dealing with religious practices and missionary activity, which we see as an assault on religious freedom, freedom of expression, and freedom of association, in contradiction of Russia's international human rights obligations and OSCE commitments.

The new legislation also contains provisions that require communications companies to retain data on their users' telecommunications and Internet usage for six months. Without proper safeguards, such provisions can make it easier for Russian security services to access users' information and thus produce a chilling effect on freedom of expression on the Internet.

Members of Russian civil society, including human rights activists, legal scholars, and members of religious groups, have expressed concern about this legislation. President Putin's own Council on Human Rights has criticized the law.

Under the guise of getting tough on terrorism, these new amendments are part of a troubling Russian trend of intimidation and harassment of members of civil society and political activists, which runs counter to Russia's international human rights obligations and OSCE commitments.

Separately, we read with interest the statement of the Representative on Freedom of the Media (RFoM), who expressed concern about several journalists and members of the media being included on a list of "terrorists and extremists" published by the Russian Federal Financial Monitoring Service. The RFoM said this could put these journalists at risk and jeopardize their safety.

We hope these concerns will be addressed.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.