

Designations of “undesirable organisations” by Russia must end

Statement by members of the Civic Solidarity Platform

4 June 2021

The continuing inclusion of foreign civil society organisations in the list of so-called “undesirable” organisations in Russia harms international people-to-people contacts and collaboration, one of the principles of the European cooperation and security order based on the 1975 Helsinki Final Act.

Undersigned organisations strongly deplore [the recent designation as “undesirable” of three German NGOs](#) and urge a review of this decision. This decision is based on a claim of the Prosecutor General’s Office that their activities “represent a threat to the foundations of the constitutional order and security of the Russian Federation” and means a total ban on their work in the country and any cooperation with them by Russian organisations and citizens under a threat of criminal persecution.

Completely contrary to the determination of the Prosecutor General’s Office, we note that in particular the almost 30 years of capacity-building, youth, volunteer and professional exchange work of [DRA - Deutsch-Russischer Austausch e.V.](#) has been of great value for the development of human rights based, social and journalistic activities by civil society in Russia, Germany and around Europe, and for fostering dialogue, understanding and cooperation among active citizens. Many people and organisations in Russia have greatly benefited from the work of DRA and see it as a true friend of Russia. The criminalization of the work of the three German NGOs by the Russian authorities means a great loss for Russian society and directly contradicts the spirit and letter of OSCE human dimension commitments.

The legislation on “undesirable” organisations was introduced in 2015, establishing extra-judicial designation of this status and criminalizing any cooperation by Russian entities or citizens with organisations that receive this label. The recent amendments to this legislation have made criminal liability easier to apply and corresponding penalties harsher. The three new designations continue an unfortunate trend of ever stricter application of the legislation, bringing the total number of NGOs on the list to 34. In recent years, the human rights based work of [People in Need](#), the [European Platform for Democratic Elections](#), the [Prague Civil Society Center](#) and the [Association of Schools of Political Studies](#) of the Council of Europe has already been prohibited in the country.

At the same time, we observe that the leadership of the Russian Federation is engaged in stimulating other ways of interacting with societies abroad. These include supporting multiple NGOs that spread the Russian authorities’ skeptical human rights narrative, the financing of Russian propaganda media channels and stoking polarization in social media debates. Freedom

of expression and association allow a large degree of freedom for such activities. In addition, however, we observe covert operations by intelligence agencies, attacks on cyber infrastructure, and even armed assaults on the soil of other countries, as well as large-scale corruption invading the international financial, economic and political playing field. These types of interaction with foreign societies are in many ways illegal and must be countered with increased priority and resolve by law enforcement and judicial authorities of the countries concerned, in line with OSCE commitments in the security and economic dimensions and with standards developed by other international organisations.

We call on the Russian authorities to abolish the policy of labeling foreign organisations as “undesirable”. We also urge an end to the use of the “foreign agent” designation to label Russian NGOs and individuals that receive or allegedly receive foreign funding and are working to improve public policies. The label has been and continues to be used for stigmatizing and thwarting the work of many bona fide human rights, environmental, and social justice NGOs, whose activity is essential for achieving much needed improvements in the country.

Signatures:

Albanian Helsinki Committee
Association UMDPL (Ukraine)
Austrian Helsinki Association
Barys Zvozkau Belarusian Human Rights House
Bir Duino (Kyrgyzstan)
Bulgarian Helsinki Committee
Center for Civil Liberties (Ukraine)
Center for Participation and Development (Georgia)
Centre for the Development of Democracy and Human Rights (Russia)
Citizens' Watch (Russia)
Crude Accountability (USA)
Freedom Now (USA)
Helsinki Citizens' Assembly – Vanadzor (Armenia)
Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia
Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights (Poland)
Human Rights Center (Azerbaijan)
Human Rights Center (Georgia)
Human Rights Center ZMINA (Ukraine)
Human Rights Club (Azerbaijan)
Human Rights House Foundation
Human Rights in Mental Health-FGIP
Human Rights Monitoring Institute (Lithuania)
humanrights.ch (Switzerland)
Hungarian Helsinki Committee
Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety (Azerbaijan)



International Partnership for Human Rights
Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and the Rule of Law
KRF Public Alternative (Ukraine)
Libereco Partnership of Human Rights (Switzerland)
Macedonian Helsinki Committee (N Macedonia)
Minority Rights Group Europe
Netherlands Helsinki Committee
Norwegian Helsinki Committee
Public Association Kadir Kasiet (Dignity) (Kazakhstan)
Public Verdict (Russia)
Sova Center for Information and Analysis (Russia)
Swedish OSCE Network
Swiss Helsinki Committee
WILPF Germany
World Organisation against Torture (OMCT)

The Civic Solidarity Platform is a network of independent civic groups from across the OSCE region, bringing together non-governmental organizations, activists and experts committed to improving the situation with human rights, rule of law, and democratic institutions in Europe, Eurasia and North America. Its aim is to serve as a conduit through which civic activists can build alliances, strengthen mutual support and solidarity, and improve their influence on national and international human rights policy. For more information, please visit <http://civicsolidarity.org>

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