



## EU-RUSSIA CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM ГРАЖДАНСКИЙ ФОРУМ ЕС-РОССИЯ

### **Drop Charges against Anastasia Shevchenko and Stop Inhumane Treatment in Russia**

#### **Statement by the Board of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum**

The Board of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum is outraged by the inhumane treatment of Anastasia Shevchenko, a civic activist from Rostov-on-Don in the South of Russia, in relation to the so-called law on “undesirable organisations”<sup>1</sup>. We demand that the charges against her were immediately dropped and the notorious legislation was abolished.

Anastasia Shevchenko is the first person in Russia, whose ‘engagement in the activities of an undesirable organisation’, as the law puts it, has resulted in criminal charges and might lead to her imprisonment of up to six years<sup>2</sup>.

On 23 January 2019, Anastasia, a mother of three, was put under house arrest by the court and later denied the right to accompany her son to school and to visit her eldest daughter, an incurably ill child living in a boarding school. The decision of the court lacks consideration for her personal circumstances and has already contributed to a tragedy. On 30 January 2019, days after she had been arrested, her eldest daughter was hospitalised in an intensive care unit with acute respiratory disease. Anastasia was finally granted a permission to visit her daughter, only to see her pass away the same day.

Regrettably, the inhumane treatment of persecuted activists in Russia has become a tendency. On 10 December 2018, the court refused to let Lev Ponomarev, a prominent human rights defender arrested on contested grounds, attend the funeral of Liudmila Alexeeva, Chair of the Moscow Helsinki Group, with whom he had been working for more than 20 years<sup>3</sup>. Four years ago, in January 2015, Svetlana Davydova, a mother of seven children including a two-month old baby, was accused of treason and put in jail just for allegedly calling the Embassy of Ukraine. It was only after a wide public campaign that she was released and the charges against her were dropped<sup>4</sup>.

What is more, a colleague of Anastasia Shevchenko from the neighbouring region of Volgograd, Roman Zaitsev, who has been protesting against the arrest of Anastasia and re-posting information in

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<sup>1</sup> See related statements by the Forum Board/ Steering Committee of 5 June 2015 and of 19 March 2018 at <http://eu-russia-csf.org/fileadmin/Statements/StatementUndesirables05.06.2015.pdf> and <https://eu-russia-csf.org/fileadmin/Statements/StatementUndesirables19.03.2018.pdf> respectively

<sup>2</sup> See [www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/01/russia-heartless-charges-against-activist-who-supported-detained-colleague](http://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/01/russia-heartless-charges-against-activist-who-supported-detained-colleague) for more information

<sup>3</sup> See related statement by the Forum Board of 11 December 2018 at <https://eu-russia-csf.org/fileadmin/Statements/StatementLevPonomarev11.12.2018.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> See [www.theguardian.com/world/2015/feb/03/petition-putin-free-russian-svetlana-davydova-treason](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/feb/03/petition-putin-free-russian-svetlana-davydova-treason)

her support, has also been accused of engaging in the activities of an undesirable organisation and might provisionally get a fine of 5,000-15,000 roubles (around 67-200 euros)<sup>5</sup>.

The Board of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum calls on the Russian authorities to halt persecution in relation to the law on “undesirable organisations” and to ultimately abolish the repressive legislation. We also demand that law enforcement agencies treat citizens in a dignified manner, and those responsible for violations of citizens’ rights are brought to justice.

4 February 2019

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**The EU-Russia Civil Society Forum** was established in 2011 by non-governmental organisations as a permanent common platform. At the moment, 161 NGOs from Russia and the European Union are members or supporters of the Forum. It aims at development of cooperation of civil society organisations from Russia and EU and greater participation of NGOs in the EU-Russia dialogue. The Forum has been actively involved, inter alia, in the questions of facilitation of visa regime, development of civic participation, protection of the environment and human rights, dealing with history and civic education.

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<sup>5</sup> See <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/01/russia-heartless-charges-against-activist-who-supported-detained-colleague> and <https://v1.ru/text/politics/65902341> (in Russian)