



EU-RUSSIA CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM ГРАЖДАНСКИЙ ФОРУМ ЕС-РОССИЯ

Elections in Russia: An Unprecedented Level of Pressure and Electoral Fraud Statement by the Board of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum

The Board of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum is dismayed at the unprecedented level of pressure on independent candidates and peaceful protesters in connection with the elections that took place in multiple Russian regions on 8 September 2019. Furthermore, we are deeply concerned about the attempts to falsify the votes during and after the elections.

Most of the independent candidates in Moscow, St. Petersburg and other regions were refused registration to stand in the elections, due to an allegedly high percentage of fake signatures in their support. Even the presence of voters, who could provide evidence that their signatures were true, was not a sufficient argument for the election committees¹.

The stance of the election committees did not change, even after the mass violation of electoral rights had resulted in regular peaceful protests on a scale unseen since the 2011 demonstrations against the fraud during the Russian parliamentary election². What is more, on 27 July 2019, 3 August 2019 and on other dates of peaceful demonstrations, the police and the authorities were brutally dispersing the protesters, detaining them and opening administrative and criminal cases against them³.

It took the investigative and judicial authorities just three days to complete a blatant process against one of the protesters, Konstantin Kotov, who was sentenced to four years in a penal colony – for repeatedly taking part in ‘unauthorised’ assemblies⁴. In fact, peaceful assemblies do not require an extra authorisation according to both the international law and the Russian constitution. The charges against another activist, student Yegor Zhukov, for coordinating and participating in a peaceful demonstration were dropped but immediately replaced by those for instigation of extremist activities on his YouTube vlog. Now Zhukov is facing up to five years in prison⁵.

Today, on 16 September 2019, Pavel Ustinov, a Russian actor, who was just standing outside an underground station in Moscow and not participating in the protest action on 3 August, was sentenced to 3.5 years in prison, as he supposedly attacked a member of Russia’s National Guard. However, a

¹ See an appeal to Council of Europe bodies signed by multiple NGOs and individuals and sent out by the Forum: <https://tinyurl.com/y4v3f7mj>

² See, e.g., www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-protests/thousands-of-russians-protest-against-putin-idUSTRE7B907W20111210

³ See the related address by Amnesty International Russia signed by multiple NGOs and individuals (in Russian): <https://amnesty.org.ru/r/2019-08-08-russia>

⁴ See, e.g., www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/09/russia-runup-to-local-moscow-election-marred-by-unprecedented-attacks-on-rights

⁵ See <http://herewestand.space>

video footage of Ustinov's arrest shows that he himself was beaten up by law enforcement authorities and later brought into custody⁶.

Despite the hurdles put in the way of candidates from parties other than the ruling "United Russia" Party, the results of municipal and regional elections showed a significant decline in support for the latter, with governors' elections as the only exception⁷. This has led to a series of further steps by the authorities to steal the well-deserved victory from the undesired candidates.

In St. Petersburg, some of the municipal election committees in the very centre of the city officially recognised the results only three days after the vote, while residents of the district were keeping the watch in front of one of them not to allow for the falsification of the vote⁸. However, the results at other polling stations have been not recognised until now. The reason appears to have been that the "United Russia" candidates and incumbents massively lost the election. The results at some polling stations were reportedly re-counted in favour of the more convenient candidates⁹.

On 12 September 2019, law enforcement authorities searched offices of supporters of independent candidates all over Russia, as well as raided on independent election observers of the GOLOS Movement¹⁰.

The Board of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum demands from the Russian authorities an unconditional observance of the freedom of assembly and of the electoral rights of Russian citizens, while all the occurrences of electoral fraud must be investigated and punished. Furthermore, we call on the Ministry of Interior of the Russian Federation, the Investigative Committee and the General Prosecutor's Office to duly investigate the cases of unproportional use of police force during peaceful protests ahead of the elections and bring perpetrators to justice. Finally, we demand release and clearing of all charges for Konstantin Kotov, Pavel Ustinov, Yegor Zhukov and other activists, who were detained and got or are facing terms in prison for their participation in demonstrations or other absurd accusations.

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⁶ See <https://meduza.io/en/feature/2019/09/16/chanting-in-absolute-silence>

⁷ See, e.g., www.theguardian.com/world/2019/sep/09/putin-party-losses-moscow-elections

⁸ See www.fontanka.ru/2019/09/12/082 (in Russian)

⁹ See www.fontanka.ru/2019/09/09/162 and www.fontanka.ru/2019/09/13/085 (in Russian)

¹⁰ See www.golosinfo.org/articles/143759 (in Russian) and www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-politics-opposition/russia-carries-out-mass-raids-on-kremlin-critic-navalnys-supporters-idUSKCN1VX0M1

The EU-Russia Civil Society Forum was established in 2011 by non-governmental organisations as a permanent common platform. At the moment, 178 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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