



Stop the Persecution of the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee

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

The Board of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum is deeply concerned by the recent persecution of the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee (BHC) and calls to stop all attempts to ban its work.

On 30 September 2019, one of the parties in the ruling coalition in Bulgaria, VMRO-BND, asked the Prosecutor General of Bulgaria to initiate proceedings for de-registration, i.e. prohibition of the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee¹. The VMRO-BND insists that the BHC “interferes with the judiciary” contrary to Article 117 of the Constitution of Bulgaria, which provides that the judicial power is independent, by organising seminars and other educational events with prosecutors and judges and representing clients in the European Court of Human Rights and before domestic courts. On 9 October 2019, the Prosecutor General refused to bring proceedings for the BHC closure, but VMRO stated it would continue prosecuting the organization, and filed a lawsuit with the Sofia City Court to suspend its work².

The Bulgarian Helsinki Committee founded in 1992 is the largest and the oldest human rights organisation in Bulgaria. The objectives of the committee are to promote respect for the human rights of every individual, to stimulate legislative reform to bring the Bulgarian legislation in line with international human rights standards, to trigger public debate on human rights issues, to carry out advocacy for the protection of human rights, and to make human rights instruments widely known and available.

The Board of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum considers these attacks as an assault on human rights and freedom of expression and calls on the Government of Bulgaria to reject all these attempts to attack the BHC and to ensure the free and effective work of human rights defenders in the country.

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¹ <http://www.vmro.bg/вмро-иска-от-цацаров-да-прекрати-дейността-на-бхк-заради-недопустима-намеса-в-съдебната-система-на-българия> (Bulgarian)

² <http://www.vmro.bg/вмро-не-се-отказва-внася-иск-в-сгс-за-прекратяване-на-дейността-на-бхк> (Bulgarian)

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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, 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.