



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

### **Stop Liquidation Case against the Human Rights Organisation "Man and Law"**

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

The Board of EU-Russia Civil Society Forum is outraged by the new attacks on independent non-profit organisations in Russia. The Supreme Court of the Mari El Republic is hearing the case of the "Man and Law" - a Forum member organisation. This trial may lead to the liquidation of the organisation - the only human rights NGO in the region.

The liquidation lawsuit was filed in February 2020 by the Republican Department of the Russian Ministry of Justice. Officials justify the liquidation of the organisation by numerous violations identified during the inspection in November 2019. However, our colleagues from "Man and Law" believe that all the inconsistencies were of technical nature, and they have already eliminated them<sup>1</sup>. Unfortunately, this is not the first case when far-fetched, bureaucratic reasons are used to create obstacles to the activities of nonprofit organisations. Liquidation of the organization is an exceptional measure of the authorities, applied only in cases of gross and systematic violations by organisations and only when they refuse to eliminate them. This is certainly not the case of "Man and Law". Moreover, the Republican Department of the Russian Ministry of Justice states in the claim's elements that "the organisation publicly comments on the actions of the authorities and on the revealed law violations in its activity, thus promoting negative attitude towards the state (including state authorities) in the society"<sup>2</sup>. Such element of claim totally contradicts the fundamental principles of the civil society organisations' activity in the whole world.

We believe that the lawsuit by the Ministry of Justice of the Mari El Republic and the claims made there are unlawful interference in the operation of the non-governmental organisation, which violates international standards guaranteeing freedom of association, to which the Russian Federation has committed. In this regard, we consider such interference as a feature of repression for human rights work of the organisation in the Mari El Republic.

The organisation "Man and Law" has been working for over 20 years. During this time it has helped thousands of Mari El residents. Since 1998, they have been dealing with the problems of closed institutions: prisons, remand centres, etc. Public control over the activities of law enforcement agencies and the criminal executive system is one of the most important areas of human rights activities.

The court hearing the case against the "Man and Law" is held behind the closed doors, despite the lifting of restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the public is not allowed in the courthouse,

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<sup>1</sup> More information (in Russian): <https://www.manandlaw.info/upravlenie-minyusta-v-marij-el-hochet-likvidirovat-pravozashhitnyu-organizaciyu-chelovek-i-zakon-obyasnyuem-pochemu/>

<sup>2</sup> Information from Official Facebook page of "Man and Law":

<https://www.facebook.com/manandlaw.info/photos/a.430915610353695/2924953790949852/?type=3&theater>

applications for broadcasting of the hearing are not satisfied by the court. Thus, the basic principle of justice - publicity - is violated.

We express our solidarity with and support to "Man and Law" and demand:

- the immediate termination of the administrative case against "Man and Law";
- removal of all unlawful restrictions on NGO activities in Russia that violate human rights and freedoms standards.

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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, 182 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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