

EU-RUSSIA CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM ГРАЖДАНСКИЙ ФОРУМ ЕС-РОССИЯ

Statement by the Steering Committee of EU Russia Civil Society Forum 21 March 2013

The Steering Committee of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum is seriously concerned about massive inspections of non-profit organisations currently conducted in Russia.

Over the past couple of weeks reviewers have visited dozens, if not hundreds, of organisations in Moscow, Orenburg, Penza, Saratov and Rostov provinces, Krasnodar, Primorsky, Perm and Altai territories, and in St. Petersburg; many of the visited organisations are members of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum.

Some cases were limited to an inspection conducted by prosecutors, while some others also involved an extensive inspection of specialists from the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the FSB, the Ministry of Emergencies, Rospotrebnadzor (the Federal Service for Supervision of Protection of Consumer Rights and Human Well-Being), and the Tax Inspectorate. The inspectors were not always willing to provide any documents to justify the inspection. At times they mentioned a request from the General Prosecutor's Office to check NGOs' compliance with the federal law on countering extremist activity.

However, the massive nature of the inspections raises questions. Is it possible that the prosecutors had simultaneously received information about alleged extremist activities in hundreds of organisations?

We are also outraged by the way these inspections have been conducted. Organisations have been given between three and six days for preparation and submission of required documents. In some cases, inspectors have stayed in the NGO's office to view and copy documents for further study. The requested documents vary in content and in volume (from five to a few dozen items on the list), and always include an item concerning the sources of funding. The wording is often vague, preventing full and comprehensive understanding of the prosecutorial requirements; e.g. some lists of requested documents contain an item described as 'other documents about the organisation's activities'. The inspection process paralyses the NGO's ability to do the work it was established to perform.

Today, inspectors came to the International Memorial Society, accompanied by a film crew of the NTV television channel, notorious for its sensationalism and propaganda against critics of the government.

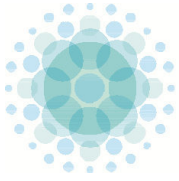
We recognize that the Russian Prosecutor's Office has the right, as part of its supervisory mandate, to review any legal entity's compliance with the Russian law. However, the massive nature of these inspections, coupled with short deadlines to provide a huge amount of documents, vague and non-

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exhaustive lists of requirements, and TV crews coming along clearly suggest a campaign against civil society organisations. We strongly believe that such practices are unacceptable.

We urge the Russian authorities to provide clear and accurate explanation of the massive inspections. We urge to stop the pressure against Russian non-profit organisations.

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