



EU-RUSSIA CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM ГРАЖДАНСКИЙ ФОРУМ ЕС-РОССИЯ

Call for Immediate Release of Participants in Peaceful Protests against Corruption in Russia

Statement by the Steering Committee of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum

The Steering Committee of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum is concerned about the reaction by Russian authorities to the peaceful protests against corruption, which took place on 26 March 2017 in numerous regions of the Russian Federation.

On 26 March 2017, tens of thousands of people took to the streets in towns and cities across Russia to join peaceful protests against corruption. Of 80 demonstrations, only 21 had formal permission from local authorities. The denial of permission for such public events is per se in violation of freedom of expression and freedom of assembly, fundamental rights of citizens as guaranteed inter alia by the Constitution of the Russian Federation (Articles 29 and 31¹).

In the course of the peaceful demonstrations, police detained about two thousands of citizens throughout the country – including in Chelyabinsk, Kazan, Khabarovsk, Komsomolsk-on-Amur, Krasnodar, Makhachkala, Moscow, Naberezhnye Chelny, Nizhny Novgorod, Pskov, Samara, St. Petersburg, Tambov, Vladivostok, Volgograd, Yekaterinburg, Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk, and other cities. The authorities' actions against the demonstrators not only were in violation of the rights to freedom of expression and assembly, but often accompanied by excessive use of force and appeared to be quite random in nature, as among those arrested were people who were not a part of the protest.

The legal violations continued in police stations, where detainees often waited for hours to be questioned or were secretly transported without a lawyer to another police station. In many cases, detainees were kept in police stations till court hearing and had to spend one or even two nights in custody without hot meals, sleeping in turns. There are cases, when time for detention without court decision exceeded 48 hours. In addition, the authorities did not always respect the legal provisions related to minors, such as the obligation to make immediate calls to parents and interrogation in the presence of parents. Finally, the courts hearing administrative cases have already sentenced dozens of people to 7, 10, 15, and even 25 days in custody, many others are still waiting for court consideration.

The Steering Committee of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum calls on the Russian authorities to immediately release the participants in peaceful protests and to ensure the unconditional observance of their rights. We urge the Russian Federation to fully respect fundamental freedoms, such as freedom of expression and freedom of assembly. We also ask international organisations, in particular the Council of Europe, to monitor the developments in the aftermath of the 26 March protests and request the Russian Federation to comply in full with its obligations under international agreements.

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¹ See <http://www.constitution.ru/10003000/10003000-4.htm>

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The EU-Russia Civil Society Forum was established in 2011 by non-governmental organisations as a permanent common platform. At present, 153 NGOs from Russia and the European Union are members of the Forum. It aims to foster cooperation among civil society organisations from Russia and the EU and enhance participation of NGOs in the EU-Russia dialogue. The Forum has been actively involved, inter alia, in the questions of facilitating the visa regime, the development of civic participation, protection of the environment and human rights, understanding history, and civic education.

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