



EU-RUSSIA CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM ГРАЖДАНСКИЙ ФОРУМ ЕС-РОССИЯ

Summoning Employees of Nonprofit Organisations to Security Agencies for "Questioning" Has No Basis in the Law

Statement by the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum Steering Committee

The Steering Committee of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum expresses its profound concern and indignation over the reports that the leaders of the "Citizens' Watch", a highly respected Russian human rights NGO and a Forum's member, were summoned to the Federal Security Service (FSB) for questioning.

On the evening of 19 February 2016, an FSB officer visited the office of the "Citizens' Watch" in St. Petersburg and handed notices to Elena Shakhova, Chair of the organisation, and Maria Razumovskaya, Deputy Chair, requiring them to come to the FSB for questioning. While the notices did not mention the reason, there are substantial grounds for believing that the would-be questioning is connected with the NGO's human rights activities and its listing in the "foreign agents" register.

A few days before the incident, on 14 February 2016, two FSB officers accompanied by a policeman visited Maria Razumovskaya in her home and attempted to interview her, as they said, about the activities of the "Citizens' Watch" in connection with its listing in the "foreign agents" register. Razumovskaya then refused to speak to them informally, advising them that they should serve her official summons. A few days later, the story continued when the NGO's leaders were officially called to the FSB for questioning.

We are convinced that the practice of "questioning" and informal interviews by FSB officers has no basis in the law and is used to put pressure on civil society organisations and intimidate their leaders and employees. It is therefore unacceptable and incompatible with the principles of democracy and the rule of law; indeed, it sends us back in time to the Soviet era with its infamous arbitrariness and omnipotence of security services. We urge the Russian authorities to take immediate action to put an end to security agents' unacceptable practices in regard of members of a human rights NGO.

"Citizens' Watch" is one of Russia's leading human rights organisations, which has worked for many years to strengthen the rule of law in the country, is highly respected in Russia and internationally, and has engaged productively with the Council of Europe and the UN bodies.

We extend support and solidarity to our colleagues from the "Citizens' Watch" and will closely monitor the situation.

24 February 2016

