



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

### **Stop Attacks on Human Rights Defenders and Journalists in the North Caucasus, Conduct Effective Investigation, and Bring Perpetrators to Justice**

#### **Statement of the Steering Committee of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum**

The Steering Committee of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum expresses its indignation at a series of violent attacks that took place yesterday in Chechnya and Ingushetia at independent journalists and staff of the Committee for the Prevention of Torture, a member of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum.

In the evening of 9 March 2016, a minibus with human rights defenders and independent journalists from Russia, Sweden, and Norway, participating in a press tour organised by the Committee for the Prevention of Torture, experienced a shameless attack by a group of unknown persons at the administrative border between Chechnya and Ingushetia. Three cars blocked the bus on its way to Grozny, and around twenty young men in masks and with truncheons smashed the windows of the bus, forced the passengers and the driver get off the bus, brutally beat them all with truncheons and sticks, put the bus on fire with personal belongings and documents of the human rights defenders and journalists, and left. Four people among the attacked were admitted to a hospital with serious traumas.

Soon after this event, in the evening, another group of people in camouflage clothes wearing masks and armed with automatic guns and pistols attacked the headquarters of the Joint Mobile Group of the Committee for the Prevention of Torture in Karabulak (Ingushetia). The attackers came in five cars, failed to force the office door, and broke inside through the windows. It is not clear what happened next because attackers smashed the surveillance video cameras. Fortunately, nobody was inside the office at this moment.

According to the human rights defenders, during the last few days they had been constantly followed by people in cars with license plates from Chechnya.

There is every reason to assert that this was a series of coordinated attacks. Their rude and demonstrative character leave no doubts that their organisers pursue the goal of intimidating human rights defenders and independent journalists and forcing them to quit their professional activities.

We want to recall that the office of the Joint Mobile Group had been already violently attacked two times in the past. In 2014, the office was set on fire by unknown persons, and in 2015 it was vandalised and destroyed. In both cases, official investigation has failed to identify the perpetrators. Numerous other attacks, threats, abductions, torture, and even murders of journalists and human rights defenders in the North Caucasus also remain unsolved. Open pressure on human rights defenders and journalists by the Chechen leadership, inaction of federal authorities, and lack of effective investigation create an atmosphere of impunity and lead to the new crimes.

