



EU-RUSSIA CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM ГРАЖДАНСКИЙ ФОРУМ ЕС-РОССИЯ

Stop the Unfounded and Arbitrary Pressure on the Prominent Russian NGO – the Human Rights Centre “Memorial”

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

The Steering Committee of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum expresses its serious concern and indignation at the increased campaign of pressure by the Russian authorities against the leading Russian NGO – the Human Rights Centre “Memorial” (HRC “Memorial”), a member of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum.

On 9 November 2015, the HRC “Memorial” received a report from a routine inspection carried out by the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation on 5-30 October 2015. According to this report, the NGO's members had allegedly tried to "undermine the foundations of Russia's constitutional system by calling to overthrow the current government and change the country's political regime." In support of its statement, the Ministry of Justice cites the publications on the website of the organisation criticising Russia's actions in respect of Ukraine and the verdicts handed down to protesters in the Bolotnaya Square case. On 11 November 2015, the findings from the Ministry of Justice inspection containing the wording cited above were forwarded to the Prosecutor General's Office.

These actions are not the first steps of Russian authorities in the campaign of persecution of the HRC “Memorial”. Earlier last year, in July 2014, the Human Rights Centre “Memorial” was included by the Ministry of Justice on the list of “foreign agents”. In September 2015, it received a fine of 600,000 roubles (over 8.5 thousand euros) for violating legislative requirements requesting from the NGOs “executing the functions of a foreign agent” to indicate all their publications (including those on the net) with a remark that they were published by a “foreign agent”. In both cases, the HRC “Memorial” expressed its firm disagreement with these decisions and appealed against them in courts.

The Human Rights Centre “Memorial” is one of the most respected Russian human rights organisations. Its work is widely known and praised in Russia and internationally. The HRC “Memorial” has been engaged in human rights defense efforts across Russia and is one of the few organisations operating in the areas of armed conflict and counter-terrorism operation, such as the North Caucasus, documenting human rights violations and demanding that the authorities respect their human rights commitments under both domestic and international law.

We find the accusations against our colleagues totally unacceptable, politically motivated and incompatible with the law. Monitoring and reporting human rights violations, defending victims, voicing constructive criticism of the authorities and demanding that governments take steps to respect and safeguard human rights and punish those responsible for violations are central to human rights work and enshrined both in the Russian legislation and international instruments Russia has ratified. Indeed, peaceful and legitimate human

