



EU-RUSSIA CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM ГРАЖДАНСКИЙ ФОРУМ ЕС-РОССИЯ

The Memorial Centre of History of Political Repressions “Perm 36” Should Be Preserved Statement of the Steering Committee of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum

The Steering Committee of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum calls on the Government of the Perm Region and its Governor Viktor Basargin to immediately resume co-operation with the Autonomous Nonprofit Organisation (ANO) “Memorial Centre of History of Political Repression “Perm 36” (Perm Region, Russia) and to preserve the unique site which is the only existing GULAG museum in Russia in its exposition and restored integrity.

“Perm 36” is the only museum-camp in the world from the GULAG and post-GULAG era (1972-1988). The camp was built in 1942 but had been located on this place since 1946. Usually such camps were in use for no more than 5-6 years, but “Perm 36” had been open – in different modifications – until the Perestroika. Unlike other sites, in “Perm-36” original GULAG buildings – a barrack, a bathhouse, an isolation cell – survived intact. In 1996, “Perm-36” opened to the public as a museum, co-founded by the International Memorial Society and the Perm Branch of the “Memorial” Society. Historian Viktor Shmyrov and his wife Tatyana Kursina, Director and Executive Director of the ANO “Memorial Centre of History of Political Repressions “Perm 36” respectively, have devoted their energies to museum’s development from its initial plans.

In 2014, the institution was split upon initiative of the regional government into two organisations - a state-owned one, which possesses buildings and infrastructure of the former GULAG camp, and a nonprofit one (ANO), which owns museum's collection, runs exhibitions and related events – conferences, workshops, summer schools. (This move was explained as a need for the accurate implementation of the Federal Programme “On Commemoration of the Victims of Political Repressions” (see below) with “Perm 36” as its integral part.) ANO is widely known in Russia and abroad for organising the annual International Civil Forum “Pilorama” (www.pilorama.perm36.ru) which has been the main regional event to address such topics as historical memory, fundamental freedoms, democracy development, and others.

After the split, Kursina was appointed the interim Director of the state museum, while Shmyrov remained the head of ANO. The split de-facto put an end to “Perm-36”’s functioning as an institution aimed at preserving historical memory and educating about political repressions during the Soviet era.

The regional Ministry of Culture, Youth Policy, and Mass Communications, which was providing financial support to the museum, ceased the funding for 2014. In the meantime, the museum had no resources to pay the bills, while water and electricity on site were cut off. The guided tours service discontinued. This situation was used to blame the management for incompetence. Tatyana Kursina was dismissed, and several complaints filed against her. Natalia Semakova, former regional Deputy Minister of Culture, Youth Policy, and Mass Communications, replaced Kursina as the director of the state-owned institution.

Since then, ANO was informed that any public event on the territory of "Perm 36" should be authorised in written by the state-owned entity. Only limited number of tours was allowed on site. On July 22, 2014, a group of historians from Poland and Germany visiting the site were asked to present their identifications and visas to check them for compliance with the Russian migration regulations. About the same time, the state-owned NTV channel shot and aired a controversial documentary on the history of the "Perm-36" camp. The crew was accompanied by its former prison wardens and representatives of the far-left "Essence of Time" Movement, one of the "Perm 36"'s most ardent opponents.

On August 7th, the Arbitration Court of the Perm Region upheld a claim by the regional Ministry of Culture, Youth Policy, and Mass Communications. According to the judgment, ANO "Memorial Centre of History of Political Repressions "Perm 36" needs to pay 463,500 roubles (around 10,000 euros) to the claimant. Further trials are on-going.

Finally, some of the museum's original GULAG items (the former camp gate, etc) were recently destroyed by the new management. On July 28, 2014, Sergei Malenko, Perm Regional Administration representative, announced that the new museum exhibition would change its focus and also cover such topics as "History of Political Repressions from Boris Godunov to the USSR" and "Prisoners of the "Perm 35", "Perm 36 ", and "Perm 37" – State Criminals and Victims of the State". Another innovation would be to involve veterans of the Federal Service for Execution of Punishments in creating these. According to Viktor Shmyrov, such approach would equate "mass terror by the state <...> and court intrigues of the 16th century" and ruin the spirit of the museum and preservation of historical memory completely. As a result, ANO ceased its projects on the territory of the former GULAG camp.

Traditionally, the last weekend of July at "Perm-36" was reserved for the International "Pilorama" Forum. In 2012-2013, the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum, along with local and international partners, contributed to it by organising an accompanying event – the European Forum for Young Professionals "Pilorama Lab" - and several discussions. In 2014, for the second year in a row, "Pilorama" did not happen - officially due to the lack of co-financing and past ineffective management. In reality, it was prevented by the regional administration. Nevertheless, a group of local activists proposed to organise "Pilorama" as a meeting, but failed to be approved by the local authorities either. As a result, this year's "Pilorama" was held as a "picnic" on a private spot beside the former GULAG camp on August 9th. The State Traffic Safety inspectors turned in to check documents of the participants. Besides, activists were prohibited from entering the museum, due to "sanitation days" in the institution and the firemen maneuvers nearby.

The Steering Committee of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum believes that actions of the new museum management are in conflict with the Federal Programme "On Commemoration of the Victims of Political Repressions" (supported by the then President Medvedev in 2011, later reiterated by the President Putin). "Perm 36" is seen as an integral part of the Programme and must be preserved in its originality. Disruptive acts on behalf of the state-owned museum's new management insult memory of survivors of repressions and hinder further preservation and development of "Perm-36", hence, prevent following the Programme's guidelines.

Although several Russian ministries consulted against funding a separate Federal Programme on the issue, on July 29, 2014 Vladimir Putin promised to study a draft bill on commemoration of the victims of political repressions. The draft was provided by Mikhail Fedotov, Chairman of the Council for Development of Civil Society and Human Rights. According to Fedotov, President Putin also expressed his concern about the situation around "Perm-36".

Several campaigns supporting "Perm 36" were launched in May-July 2014. [Open letter by the Perm Branch of the "Memorial" Society to Governor Basargin](#) gathered over 60,000 signatures (see <http://tinyurl.com/o4odxxh>). Similar campaigns started in Germany, Czech Republic, etc. So far Perm Regional Administration has been ignoring these calls.

The Steering Committee of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum calls on Viktor Basargin, Governor of the Perm Region, the Ministry of Culture, Youth Policy, and Mass Communications of the Perm Region, and the new management of the state-owned museum “Perm 36” to immediately resume negotiations and drop charges against ANO, and to help preserve the unique historical complex in its integrity and originality. We urge the government of the Russian Federation to act in compliance with the guidelines of the Programme “On Commemoration of the Victims of Political Repressions” approved by President Medvedev and President Putin.

We call on individuals, groups and institutions interested in commemoration of victims of political repressions in Russia and Europe to help save and support development of ANO “Memorial Centre of History of Political Repressions “Perm 36” and its important work.

From its side, the Steering Committee of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum expresses its willingness to contribute – along with the Presidential Council for the Development of Civil Society and Human Rights - to the implementation of the Programme “On Commemoration of the Victims of Political Repressions” and its ideas in the Russian Federation and grants its support and commitment to the cause of ANO “Memorial Centre of History of Political Repressions “Perm 36”.

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The EU-Russia Civil Society Forum was established in 2011 as a permanent common platform of non-governmental organisations. It aims at cooperation and coordination of at the moment 126 member organisations from Russia and the European Union as well as greater participation of NGOs in the EU-Russia dialogue. It has been actively involved inter alia in the questions of visa regulation, development of social, environmental and human rights standards, dealing with history, and civic participation.

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

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