



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

### **Appeal for Justice for Anna Sharogradskaya and the Regional Press Institute Statement of the Steering Committee of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum**

The Steering Committee of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum is deeply concerned about the situation around the Regional Press Institute – a member in the Forum - and its Director Anna Sharogradskaya.

On 14 November 2014, the Moscow District Court of St. Petersburg overruled a legal claim by Anna Sharogradskaya, which had followed the events of 5 June 2014. On that date, she was stopped at the Pulkovo Airport in St. Petersburg for a 6-hour clearance control, while she was trying to leave for the United States, where she has been holding lectures on an annual basis at the Summer Institute of the Bloomington Campus of Indiana University for 20 years. As a result of this inspection, personal belongings of Anna Sharogradskaya – a laptop, an iPad, and a number of memory sticks – were confiscated.

According to Anna Sharogradskaya's lawyers, the associates of the transit police station of the Ministry of the Interior of the Russian Federation at the Pulkovo Airport also informed the court that an initiation of criminal proceedings according to Articles 280 and 282 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation (Extremism) – based on contents of files on the withdrawn storage media - was foreseen. For over 5 months, these materials have been circulating between the Ministry of the Interior, the Prosecutor's Office, and the Investigation Committee and back to the Ministry of the Interior again and again. Now it became clear that those findings would be transferred to the Regional Bureau of the Federal Security Service, which had initiated the original customs inspection.

Anna Sharogradskaya herself insisted that she had taken allegedly "extremist" materials from open sources to use them as examples for student classes<sup>1</sup>. Nevertheless, the withdrawn belongings still have not been returned to their owner.

Simultaneously, a campaign of pressure on Anna Sharogradskaya and her non-governmental organisation – Regional Press Institute - has been initiated. In particular, she was included by nationalists in the list of "public enemies", posters demanding that she be stripped of the Russian citizenship and forcibly deported out of the country were distributed.

Besides, the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation - following an earlier Prosecutor's inspection - brought an administrative action against the Regional Press Institute on 7 November 2014. It is accused of breaking the law while executing activities of a so-called "foreign agent" not

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<sup>1</sup> Please see, eg, <http://www.fontanka.ru/2014/11/06/150> for further information

being registered as a “foreign agent”<sup>2</sup>. If the court issues a respective verdict based on the protocol of the administrative violation, the Institute will be obliged to pay a fine of up to 500,000 rubles (approximately EUR 8,500). According to the Russian legislation, that procedure may be initiated, if the fact of involvement of an organisation in “political activities” is confirmed by a decision of the Ministry of Justice or a court verdict, but this presumption has been repeatedly denied by the Regional Press Institute itself.

All the facts stated above cause our deep concerns and give us a reason to assume that a campaign of pressure on the Regional Press Institute and its Director has been taking place, targeted at the limitation of operational opportunities of this organisation – prominent both in Russia and around the globe – as regards development of freedom of speech and media freedom as well as expression of independent positions to key events in Russia.

We call for justice regarding Anna Sharogradskaya’s claim, which followed the inspection at the Pulkovo Airport. We are convinced that the alleged accusations of her involvement in extremist activities have no legal ground and demand that they be dropped. We demand guarantees of Anna Sharogradskaya’s security and her protection from personal threats as well as a thorough investigation into these cases and the punishment of the persons involved. We call for benevolent working conditions for the Regional Press Institute and the cancellation of all the accusations of violation of the administrative legislation for the organisation regarding “foreign agents” activities.

The Steering Committee of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum expresses solidarity and full support for Anna Sharogradskaya and the Regional Press Institute.

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**The EU-Russia Civil Society Forum** was established in 2011 by non-governmental organisations as a permanent common platform. At the moment 135 NGOs from Russia and the European Union are member of the Forum. It aims at development of cooperation of civil society organisations from Russia and EU and greater participation of NGOs in the EU-Russia dialogue. The Forum has been actively involved, inter alia, in the questions of facilitation of visa regime, development of civic participation, protection of the environment and human rights, dealing with history, and civic education.

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<sup>2</sup> For the background story see Statements of the Steering Committee of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum from [10 June, 2014](#), [23 July, 2014](#), and [12 September, 2014](#)