The Decision to Declare Two More Organisations “Undesirable” in Russia
Is a Move against Fair Elections and Independent Election Observation

Statement by the Board of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum

The Board of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum expresses its outrage about the inclusion of two civil society initiatives – the European Platform for Democratic Elections (EPDE) and the International Elections Study Centre (IESC), an EPDE member from Lithuania, in the list of “undesirable organisations” in Russia.

We call on the Russian authorities to reverse not only this decision but also to repeal the entire notorious Federal Law FZ-129 “On the Introduction of Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation” of 23 May 2015 breaching fundamental principles of international law and international obligations of the Russian Federation.

On 13 March 2018, just a few days before the presidential elections in Russia, two respected international civil society initiatives, which have been actively involved in election observation in many European countries since 2012, were put on the list of “undesirable organisations” and joined 11 other organisations that were included in the list earlier. While this decision is clearly aimed at preventing independent election observation in Russia by citizen election monitors from various countries and at disrupting international civil society cooperation, there is every reason to suspect that the primary target of the Russian authorities has been the GOLOS Movement, an EPDE partner.

Since GOLOS was listed by the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation as a “foreign agent” NGO in 2014, the movement has worked hard to continue with independent election observation in Russia and has been systematically harassed by the Russian authorities for its activities, including in the run-up to the current presidential elections. With regard to the presidential elections, GOLOS was actively promoting video observation from polling stations throughout Russia to enable reporting on potential violations and fraud as widely as possible, maintaining an online “Map of Violations”, and training and dispatching to the polling stations thousands of observers. As the law on “undesirable organisations” provides for administrative and even criminal liability (after repeated violations) for those Russian organisations and individuals ‘that engage in cooperation with undesirable organisations’ and as the notion of ‘engagement’ is very vague, the latest additions to the list pose a

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1 See https://rg.ru/2015/05/26/fz129-dok.html and the related statement by the Forum Steering Committee of 5 June 2015 at http://eu-russia-csf.org/fileadmin/Statements/StatementUndesirables05.06.2015.pdf for background information
2 See http://minjust.ru/ru/activity/nko/unwanted
3 To learn more on the so-called “foreign agents” law, please see, eg, the statement of the Forum Steering Committee of 20 January 2015: http://eu-russia-csf.org/fileadmin/Statements/StatementForeignAgents20.01.2015.pdf
real threat to Russian citizens who are involved in the monitoring of Russian elections as part of the activities of the GOLOS Movement.

The Board of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum fully concurs with the statement by the European Platform for Democratic Elections⁴, welcomes the support of the European External Action Service⁵ and the German Federal Foreign Office⁶ for the EPDE and the IESC, and calls on other organisations and institutions to add their voices to these opinions.

We urge the Central Election Commission of the Russian Federation to actively protect the rights of all citizen election observers in the elections and request the Prosecutor General’s Office, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation to reverse the decision of 13 March 2018.

We call on the Russian authorities to uphold the principles of the rule of law and the international obligations of the Russian Federation, as well as to guarantee fair elections and independent election observation in the country.

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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, 125 NGOs from Russia and European Union states are members of the Forum, other seven NGOs have a supporter status. The Forum 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 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.

⁶ See https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/Newsroom/european-platform/1786056