



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

### **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<sup>1</sup> 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<sup>2</sup>. 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”<sup>3</sup> 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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<sup>1</sup> 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

<sup>2</sup> See <http://minjust.ru/ru/activity/nko/unwanted>

<sup>3</sup> 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>

