



The Russian Federation - Political opposition



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The review carried out by the mentioned departments, experts or organisations contributes to the overall quality of the report but does not necessarily imply their formal endorsement of the final report, which is the full responsibility of EUAA.





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Disclaimer

This report was written according to the EUAA COI Report Methodology (2019). The report is based on carefully selected sources of information. All sources used are referenced.

The information contained in this report has been researched, evaluated and analysed with utmost care. However, this document does not claim to be exhaustive. If a particular event, person or organisation is not mentioned in the report, this does not mean that the event has not taken place or that the person or organisation does not exist.

Furthermore, this report is not conclusive as to the determination or merit of any particular application for international protection. Terminology used should not be regarded as indicative of a particular legal position.

‘Refugee’, ‘risk’ and similar terminology are used as generic terminology and not in the legal sense as applied in the EU Asylum Acquis, the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees.

Neither the EUAA, nor any person acting on its behalf, may be held responsible for the use which may be made of the information contained in this report.

The drafting of this report was finalised on 16 November 2022. Additional information was added during the quality review process up until 10 December 2022. More information on the reference period for this report can be found in the [Methodology](#) section of the Introduction.





Glossary and abbreviations

Term	Definition
CoE	Council of Europe
FAS	Feminist Anti-War Resistance (<i>Feministskoye Antivoennoye Soprotivlenie</i>)
FBK	Anti-Corruption Foundation (<i>Fond borby s korrupsiey</i>)
FSB	Federal Security Service
MHRC	Memorial Human Rights Centre
Roskomnadzor	Federal Service for Supervision of Communications, Information Technology and Mass Media of the Russian Federation





Introduction

The purpose of this report is to provide information regarding political dissent and opposition in the Russian Federation for international protection status determination, including refugee status and subsidiary protection, and in particular for the drafting of the EUAA Country Guidance on the Russian Federation.

The report addresses topics related to the situation and treatment of individuals, who express disagreement or dissatisfaction with the current political situation in the Russian Federation and Russia's invasion in Ukraine, by the state authorities.

Methodology

The report was drafted and reviewed in line with the EUAA COI Report Methodology (2019)¹ and the EUAA COI Writing and Referencing Style Guide (2019)².

This report was drafted by the EUAA COI Sector and reviewed by national COI departments in EU+ countries³ mentioned in the [Acknowledgements](#) section.

Defining the terms of reference (ToR)

The terms of reference for this report were defined by EUAA based on discussions held and input received from country of origin information (COI) and policy experts in EU+ countries within the framework of a Country Guidance development on the Russian Federation. The terms of reference for this report can be found in [Annex 2: Terms of Reference](#).

The reference period of this report is 1 January 2022 – 16 November 2022. The drafting period finished on 16 November 2022, peer review occurred between 17 – 23 November 2022, and some additional information was added to the report as a result of the quality review process during the review implementation up until 10 December 2022.

Collecting information

This report is based on publicly available information in electronic and paper-based sources gathered through desk-based research. It also contains information from several oral sources with ground-level knowledge of the situation in the Russian Federation who were interviewed specifically for this report. For security reasons, oral sources are anonymised unless they have chosen to be named in relation to the organisation represented.

¹ EUAA, EASO Country of Origin Information (COI) Report Methodology, June 2019, [url](#)

² EUAA, EASO Writing and Referencing Guide for EASO Country of Origin Information (COI) Reports, June 2019, [url](#)

³ EU Member States plus Norway and Switzerland.





Quality control

The report was peer reviewed by COI specialists from EU+ countries mentioned in the [Acknowledgements](#) section, and internally by EUAA. All comments made by reviewers were taken into consideration and most of them were implemented in the final draft of this report. EUAA has performed the final quality review and editing of the text.

Sources

In accordance with EUAA COI methodology, a range of different published sources have been consulted on relevant topics covered by this report. These include COI reports by EU+ authorities, information from civil society and advocacy groups and NGOs, UN reports, academic publications, and media sources.

In addition to publicly available sources, EUAA interviewed two oral sources for this report. On 9 November 2022, EUAA conducted an interview with Alexander Pomazuev, a lawyer at the Anti-Corruption Foundation (*Fond borby s korrupsiey*, FBK). FBK was established in 2011 by Alexey Navalny and 'is the only non-profit organisation in Russia that investigates, reveals and prevents corruption among high-ranking Russian government officials.'⁴

On 11 November 2022, EUAA conducted an interview with a well-established human rights lawyer in Russia, who preferred anonymity for security reasons.

To reference legislation provided by the Code of Administrative Offences and the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation, EUAA used the latest versions of the codes translated into English, which were then compared with original legislation in Russian. Where the differences were found, original legislation was used and referenced respectively.

Due to the Russia's invasion in Ukraine on 24 February 2022, research limitations during the drafting of this report were faced, including: restricted media coverage, closing of local media outlets, and increased censorship. On the day of the invasion, the Russia's media regulator, Roskomnadzor, instructed Russian media outlets to use solely information from official Russian sources for their reporting, under the threat of fines and having their websites blocked.⁵ Media was banned from using the terms 'war', 'invasion', or 'assault' when describing the situation in Ukraine.⁶ In March 2022, new legislation was introduced in the Code of Administrative Offences and the Criminal Code to punish dissemination of 'false' information and discrediting of Russian military and state institutions.⁷ Moreover, along with hundreds of journalists, human

⁴ FBK, Anti-Corruption Foundation, n.d., [url](#)

⁵ OSCE, Media Freedom Representative strongly denounces Russian authorities' restriction on freedom of the media and freedom of information, 24 February 2022, [url](#); Russia, Roskomnadzor, *Вниманию средств массовой информации и иных информационных ресурсов* [To the attention of the media and other information resources], 24 February 2022, [url](#)

⁶ DW, Viral protests: Russians continue to denounce war, risking imprisonment, 16 March 2022, [url](#); Frontline Defenders, Escalating Crackdown on human rights defenders and organisations, 19 April 2022, [url](#)

⁷ Politico, Russia expands laws criminalizing 'fake news,' 22 March 2022, [url](#)





rights organisations and defenders were registered as ‘foreign agents’ and targeted and/or dissolved as a result.⁸

The sources that are used in this report are further described in the [Annex 1: Bibliography](#).

Structure and use of the report

The report is structured in line with the terms of reference. The first chapter presents an overview of the political and legal context important for the understanding of the current situation in the Russian Federation. The second chapter focuses on treatment of specific profiles by the authorities: political opponents, journalists, human rights defenders and activists, protesters, and other people opposing the authorities.

⁸ UN OHCHR, Human Rights Committee Considers Report of the Russian Federation in the Absence of a Delegation, Experts Raise Issues on the Persecution of Journalists and the Arrests of Protesters, 20 October 2022, [url](#)





1. Political and legal context

1.1. Political context

The Constitution of the Russian Federation establishes a ‘democratic federative law-governed state with a republican form of government’⁹, and divides state power into legislative, executive, and judicial branches.¹⁰ The highly centralised political system concentrated in President Vladimir Putin¹¹ was further strengthened by constitutional amendments of 2020 which reinforced the presidential powers over the legislature.¹² Such changes, as concluded the Council of Europe’s (CoE) Venice Commission, went ‘far beyond what is appropriate under the principle of separation of powers’.¹³ In practice, checks and balances within the state structure have ‘serious deficiencies’ deriving from the president and executive branch’s influence over the parliament and judiciary.¹⁴

The rule of law has in general been considered weak¹⁵ and sources have pointed out shortcomings such as a lack of predictability in law implementation,¹⁶ improper government influence, and a lack of due process in the criminal justice system.¹⁷ The rule of law is said to be affected by widespread and ‘systemic’ corruption, which became an integral part of institutional structures,¹⁸ with political and business elites highly depending on this system to maintain their positions.¹⁹

President Vladimir Putin has influenced Russian politics and the ‘economic and cultural landscape’ for almost two decades. Putin – who is serving his fourth term as president²⁰ – will be allowed to remain in office until 2036 due to the 2020 constitutional amendments.²¹ Throughout his presidency, Putin has enjoyed high approval ratings,²² and support far beyond 50 % of the electorate in re-elections²³. No genuine political competition has however

⁹ Russian Federation, Constitution of the Russian Federation (Amendment), 1 July 2020, [url](#), Article 1

¹⁰ Russian Federation, Constitution of the Russian Federation (Amendment), 1 July 2020, [url](#), Article 10

¹¹ USDOS, 2021 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Russia, 12 April 2022, [url](#)

¹² European Commission for Democracy through Law, Russian Federation, Interim Opinion on Constitutional Amendments and the Procedure for their Adoption, 23 March 2021, [url](#), para. 182; Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2022 – Russia, 24 February 2022, [url](#)

¹³ European Commission for Democracy through Law, Russian Federation, Interim Opinion on Constitutional Amendments and the Procedure for their Adoption, 23 March 2021, [url](#), para. 185

¹⁴ Bertelsmann Stiftung, Russia Country Report 2022, 23 February 2022, [url](#)

¹⁵ WJP, Russian Federation, 2022, [url](#); Bort, C., Why the Kremlin Treats Its Own Citizens With Contempt, 12 May 2022, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, [url](#)

¹⁶ Popova, M., Putin-Style “Rule of Law” & the Prospects for Change, *Dædalus*, 2017, [url](#); Bogush, G., Killing Russian Criminal Law, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 7 July 2016, [url](#)

¹⁷ WJP, Russian Federation, 2022, [url](#); Sweden, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, RYSSLAND - Mänskliga rättigheter, demokrati och rättsstatens principer: situationen per den 31 december 2019, 16 December 2020, [url](#), p. 4

¹⁸ GIS, How Russia can shed centuries of corruption, 10 May 2022, [url](#); Günther, G. and Zakharov, N., Corruption in Russia – Historic Legacy and Systemic Nature, CESifo, January 2018, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁹ Eurasianet, Perspectives, Assessing the threat of weaponized corruption, 12 July 2021, [url](#); New York Times (The), To Keep Putin and His Oligarchs Afloat, It Takes a System, 11 May 2022, [url](#)

²⁰ Bertelsmann Stiftung, Russia Country Report 2022, 23 February 2022, [url](#)

²¹ Guardian (The), Vladimir Putin passes law that may keep him in office until 2036, 5 April 2021, [url](#)

²² Levada-Center, Indicators, 2022, [url](#)

²³ Reuters, Timeline: Vladimir Putin – 20 tumultuous years as Russian President or PM, 9 August 2019, [url](#); Guardian (The), Vladimir Putin secures record win in Russian presidential election, 19 March 2018, [url](#)





existed,²⁴ which can be linked to the limited space for the opposition to voice its concerns,²⁵ and its limited resources.²⁶ Opposition candidates and parties have repeatedly been denied registration to elections,²⁷ including Alexei Navalny, trying to register his party unsuccessfully since 2012.²⁸ Navalny is also the founder of the Anti-Corruption Foundation (FBK), which has been placed on a list of ‘foreign agents’,²⁹ declared an ‘extremist organisation’,³⁰ and liquidated by Russian authorities.³¹ Election campaigns have also been influenced by restrictions on demonstrations³² and unbalanced coverage in state-controlled media favouring the ruling party.³³

Between 2011 and 2012, there were large public protests against Putin’s return to presidency.³⁴ After mass protests on the Bolotnaya square on the day of Putin’s inauguration (6 May 2012), state authorities initiated a series of arrests of protesters, while criminal procedures against participants continued for years³⁵ – and were often referred to as ‘the Bolotnaya square cases’³⁶. Over the following years, the state increased its repression of the political opposition³⁷ and adopted a set of restrictive laws which further shrank civic space.³⁸ Some examples are the expanded definition of high treason,³⁹ the criminalisation of libel, and a law requiring organisations receiving foreign funds to label themselves as ‘foreign agents’.⁴⁰ Many nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) and media outlets closed as the ‘foreign agents law’ made it too difficult for them to operate.⁴¹

Large demonstrations took place in the country in 2018 against the reform of the pension system,⁴² and over the summer of 2019 in Moscow, ahead of municipal elections, followed by

²⁴ Bertelsmann Stiftung, Russia Country Report 2022, 23 February 2022, [url](#); Bort, C., How the Kremlin Learned to Defeat Its Opposition, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 25 October 2021, [url](#)

²⁵ OSCE, Russia, Presidential Election, 18 March 2018: Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions, 19 March 2019, [url](#), p. 1; BBC News, Russia country profile, 1 March 2022, [url](#)

²⁶ Bertelsmann Stiftung, Russia Country Report 2022, 23 February 2022, [url](#); Gokarn, K., Political opposition in Russia in 2018: Composition, challenges and prospects, ORF, 22 June 2018, [url](#)

²⁷ RFE/RL, Moscow Canceling Registrations Of Opposition Candidates By The Dozens As Political Clampdown Intensifies, 14 August 2022, [url](#); HRW, Opposition Candidates Squeezed Out of Upcoming Moscow Election, 19 July 2019, [url](#)

²⁸ Meduza, Russia’s Justice Ministry again refuses to register Alexey Navalny’s opposition political party, 27 August 2018, [url](#)

²⁹ DW, Russia brands Navalny’s organization a ‘foreign agent’, 10 September 2019, [url](#)

³⁰ Moscow Times (The), Russia Blacklists Navalny’s Political and Activist Movements as ‘Extremist’, 9 June 2021, [url](#)

³¹ Euronews, Russian court orders Alexei Navalny’s anti-corruption foundation to suspend activities, 26 April 2021, [url](#)

³² HRW, Online and On All Fronts, Russia’s Assault on Freedom of Expression, 18 July 2018, [url](#)

³³ OSCE, Russia, Presidential Election, 18 March 2018: Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions, 19 March 2019, [url](#), p. 1; Bertelsmann Stiftung, Russia Country Report 2022, 23 February 2022, [url](#)

³⁴ CSIS, Repression Trap: The Mechanism of Escalating State Violence in Russia, 30 July 2022, [url](#); Sakwa, R., Whatever Happened to the Russian Opposition?, Chatham House, May 2014, [url](#), p. 12

³⁵ openDemocracy, Who are your comrades now?, 7 January 2016, [url](#)

³⁶ Moscow Times (The), 10 Years Since Bolotnaya, the Biggest Protests of the Putin Era, 9 December 2021, [url](#)

³⁷ HRW, Online and On All Fronts, 18 July 2017, [url](#); UI, Landguiden, Ryssland – Aktuell politik, [url](#)

³⁸ HRW, Online and On All Fronts, 18 July 2017, [url](#)

³⁹ Reuters, Russia’s parliament votes to expand definition of high treason, 23 October 2012, [url](#)

⁴⁰ HRW, Online and On All Fronts, 18 July 2017, [url](#); Civic Solidarity, Urgent appeal by Russian human rights organisations to the representatives of the Council of Europe, [url](#), pp. 4-5

⁴¹ EPRS, ‘Foreign agents’ and ‘undesirables’: Russian civil society in danger of extinction?, March 2022, [url](#); Euronews, ‘Another foreign agent’: Russian court orders closure of country’s oldest human rights NGO, Memorial, 29 December 2022, [url](#); PBS, Russians protest fabricated arrests after falsified case against journalist is dropped, 12 June 2019, [url](#)

⁴² Guardian (The), Thousands protest in Russia against plans to hike pension age, 2 September 2018, [url](#)





a new wave of arrests.⁴³ According to the 2022 report of Freedom House, ‘opposition politicians, activists and critical journalists were frequently charged by the authorities ‘with fabricated criminal cases and other forms of administrative harassment’ used to prevent their political activities, as it was the case with Alexey Navalny.⁴⁴ In August 2020, Navalny was allegedly poisoned by the Federal Security Service (FSB),⁴⁵ and later received a prison sentence for violating his probation during the period he was receiving life-saving treatment in Germany.⁴⁶ Several prominent critics have reportedly been killed or subjected to assassination attempts in the past years.⁴⁷ For more information, see chapter [2.1 Political opponents](#).

After the Russian military intervention in Ukraine in 2014, critical voices were increasingly limited by restrictions on media and opinions shared online.⁴⁸ Under the pretext of combating extremism, Russian authorities brought charges against individuals who made critical statements online, including on social media.⁴⁹ After the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the space for criticism decreased again with new laws criminalising the spread of ‘false information’ about the Russian armed forces,⁵⁰ including when referring to Russian military activities in Ukraine as a ‘war’ or ‘invasion’,⁵¹ and when calling for sanctions against Russian targets.⁵² Arrests, administrative, and criminal proceedings against war critics have followed.⁵³ More information on these laws is available in chapter [1.2 Legal context](#).

An investigation by the New York Times, published on 22 September 2022, revealed a complex tech apparatus of surveillance put in place by the Russian authorities to track down opponents, silence criticism, and suppress independent information even in the country’s most remote areas.⁵⁴

⁴³ Euronews, Thousand detained at Moscow free elections protest, 27 July, 2019, [url](#)

⁴⁴ Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2022 – Russia, 24 February 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁵ Bellingcat, Navalny Poison Squad Implicated in Murders of Three Russian Activists, 27 January 2021, [url](#);

Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2022 – Russia, 24 February 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁶ HRW, Russian Court Rules to Jail Navalny, 2 February 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁷ BBC News, Boris Nemtsov: Murdered Putin rival ‘tailed’ by agent linked to FSB hit squad, 28 March 2022, [url](#);

Washington Post (The), Here are 10 critics of Vladimir Putin who died violently or in suspicious ways, 23 March 2017, [url](#)

⁴⁸ HRW, Online and On All Fronts, 18 July 2017, [url](#); NED and Forum, Stifling the Public Sphere, Media and Civil Society in Russia, October 2015, [url](#), p. 3; AI, Russia: Media black-out ahead of disputed Crimea referendum, 14 March 2014, [url](#); Freedom House, Crackdown on Online Media Reflects New Status Quo for Russia’s Internet Freedom, 12 January 2015, [url](#)

⁴⁹ HRW, Online and On All Fronts, 18 July 2017, [url](#); AP, Dozens in Russia Imprisoned for social media likes, reposts, 31 May 2016, [url](#)

⁵⁰ HRW, Russia Criminalizes Independent War Reporting, Anti-War Protests, 7 March 2022, [url](#); Reuters, Explainer: How Russia is applying new laws to stifle dissent on Ukraine, 26 August 2022, [url](#)

⁵¹ HRW, Russia Criminalizes Independent War Reporting, Anti-War Protests, 7 March 2022, [url](#); NPR, Russian law bans journalists from calling Ukraine conflict a ‘war’ or an ‘invasion’, 5 March 2022, [url](#)

⁵² TASS, Russia’s upper house approves law on criminal liability for calls for sanctions, 4 March 2022, [url](#); HRW, Russia Criminalizes Independent War Reporting, Anti-War Protests, 7 March 2022, [url](#)

⁵³ HRW, Russia Criminalizes Independent War Reporting, Anti-War Protests, 7 March 2022, [url](#); Euronews, Russia makes first conviction for ‘fake news’ over Ukraine war posts, 2 June 2022, [url](#); New York Times (The), Thousands Swept Up as Kremlin Clamps Down on War Criticism, 3 June 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁴ New York Times (The), ‘They Are Watching’: Inside Russia’s Vast Surveillance State, 22 September 2022, [url](#)





1.2. Legal context

1.2.1. General legal framework on freedom of speech and assembly

The constitution of the Russian Federation guarantees ‘human and civil rights and freedoms’,⁵⁵ including freedom of speech, assembly, and association. It prohibits ‘propaganda or agitation, which arouses social, racial, national or religious hatred and hostility’ as well as ‘propaganda of social, racial, national, religious or linguistic supremacy’.⁵⁶

A set of legislative restrictions impact the constitutional freedoms of expression and peaceful assembly and association under the Code of Administrative Offences and the Criminal Code.⁵⁷ Several offences against public order under the Code of Administrative Offences, which were used against opposition activists were, *inter alia*, related to disrespect of the authorities and hooliganism (Article 20.1), and arousal of hatred or enmity (Article 20.3.1).⁵⁸ Another example of the usage of the Criminal Code to accuse protesters is Article 212 ‘Mass riots’. Article 212 criminalises the organisation of or participation in ‘mass riots attended by violence, pogroms, arson, the destruction of property, the use of firearms, explosives, or explosive devices, and also armed resistance to government representatives’ which is punishable by imprisonment⁵⁹ of 8–15 years.⁶⁰ The article was used against participants in the ‘Bolotnaya square protest’ in 2012,⁶¹ pro-Navalny protests in 2021⁶² and against anti-war activists in 2022.⁶³

Following extensive protests in 2011–2012, the legal framework governing the freedom of assembly was significantly amended. The Federal Law on Assemblies has been amended several times, and the changes introduced several restrictions on timings, places, purposes, and initiators of public events. According to Amnesty International (AI), the number of specified violations in the legal framework rose from 3 to 17 between 2011 and 2021, with up to 30 days administrative detention as a potential consequence. In the meantime, the maximum fines rose from 2 000 roubles [50 EUR] in 2012 to 300 000 roubles [3 700 EUR] in 2021.⁶⁴

In addition to increased fines and added duties of event organisers, the ability to organise so called ‘mass events’ was further restricted. Failure to receive prior permission to organise events was made punishable by fines or up to 15 days of administrative detention.⁶⁵ Three repetitive breaches are considered as a criminal offence leading to potential prison sentences

⁵⁵ Russian Federation, Constitution of the Russian Federation (Amendment), 1 July 2020, [url](#), Article 17

⁵⁶ Russian Federation, Constitution of the Russian Federation (Amendment), 1 July 2020, [url](#), Article 29–31

⁵⁷ Freedom House, Freedom on the Net 2022 – Russia, 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁸ Kiselyov, R., How Russia’s New Censorship Laws are being used to Stifle Free Expression, EHRAC, 10 October 2019, [url](#)

⁵⁹ Russian Federation, The Criminal Code of The Russian Federation, 13 June 1996, [url](#), Article 212

⁶⁰ Russia, Уголовный кодекс Российской Федерации от 13.06.1996 N 63-ФЗ (ред. от 24.09.2022) [Criminal Code of the Russian Federation of 13.06.1996 N 63-FZ (version 24.09.2022)], 24 September 2022, [url](#)

⁶¹ Gunko, M., On the anti-war movement in Russia: from street protests to guerrilla activism, COMPAS, 8 April 2022, [url](#)

⁶² HRW, Russia: Police Detain Thousands in Pro-Navalny Protests, 25 January 2021, [url](#)

⁶³ HRW, Russia: Arrests, Harassment of Ukraine War Dissidents, 24 March 2021, [url](#)

⁶⁴ AI, Russia: End of the road for those seeking to exercise their right to protest, 12 August 2021, [url](#). For the exchange rate, the exchange rate for respective years provided by the European Commission was used, see European Commission, Exchange rate (InforEuro), [url](#)

⁶⁵ AI, A Right, Not a Crime, Violations of the Right to Freedom of Assembly in Russia, 2014, [url](#), pp. 6, 29–30





of up to five years.⁶⁶ Participation in an unauthorised public event was also treated as an administrative offence, punishable by fines, community service or administrative detention of up to 15 days.⁶⁷ The requirement of notifying the authorities of an event did not apply to single-person pickets.⁶⁸ However, since March 2020, restrictions under the pretext of the Covid-19 pandemic have further limited freedom of assembly, including bans on all ‘public and other mass events’ in Moscow as well as single-person pickets.⁶⁹

Following the trial against Pussy Riot in 2012,⁷⁰ amendments to the Criminal Code were adopted, criminalising ‘public actions, clearly defying the society and committed with the express purpose of insulting religious beliefs’.⁷¹ Article 148 of the Criminal Code on ‘Violation of the right to freedom of conscience and religion’ gives a definition of the crime and stipulates that it is punishable with fines, community service, compulsory labour or up to one year’s imprisonment. If the offence is committed ‘in places specifically intended for holding worships, other religious rites, and ceremonies’, it brings stricter punishments, for instance up to three years imprisonment.⁷² According to independent news outlet Meduza, between 2013 and 2020, 32 persons were convicted for ‘insulting the feelings of religious believers’ under the Article 148 but no cases involved prison sentences.⁷³ Reported cases involved acts such as lighting a cigarette with a church candle, using a religious icon as a paintbrush, and posting certain content on Russia’s popular social-media site VKontakte.⁷⁴ On 2 November 2021, Meduza reported that prison sentences had been issued for the first time to two persons found guilty of violating Article 148⁷⁵ and SOVA – Center for Information and Analysis⁷⁶ reported that the number of sentences under the Article increased in 2021 – although it had been used ‘extremely reluctantly’ in recent years.⁷⁷

In 2013, a federal law was adopted enforcing amendments to federal laws on child protection and the Code of Administrative Offences to include Articles prohibiting the distribution of ‘propaganda on non-traditional sexual relationships among minors’. The offence was made punishable by fines, which increase depending on whether mass media or the Internet are used to spread the ‘propaganda’⁷⁸, or whether an individual or official committed it.⁷⁹ For foreign nationals the laws prescribe fines and administrative detention followed by

⁶⁶ AI, A Right, Not a Crime, Violations of the Right to Freedom of Assembly in Russia, 2014, [url](#), p. 30; HRW, Russia: New Attack on Freedom of Assembly, 1 April 2014, [url](#)

⁶⁷ CoE, Follow-up Memorandum of the Commissioner for Human Rights on Freedom of Assembly in the Russian Federation, 5 September 2017, [url](#), p. 7

⁶⁸ OVD-Info, Russia, n.d., [url](#)

⁶⁹ AI, Russia: No Place for Protest, 12 August 2021, [url](#), p. 11

⁷⁰ End Blasphemy Laws, Russia, 29 September 2020, [url](#)

⁷¹ Index on Censorship, Russia: Blasphemy law has aided the growth of religious censorship, 1 November 2015, [url](#); Religion Dispatches, in Russia it is Now a Crime to Insult Someone’s Religious Feelings, 25 September 2013, [url](#)

⁷² Meduza, In Russia today, ‘offending religious sentiment’ could land you in prison, 2 November 2021, [url](#); End Blasphemy Laws, Russia, 29 September 2020, [url](#)

⁷³ Meduza, In Russia today, ‘offending religious sentiment’ could land you in prison, 2 November 2021, [url](#)

⁷⁴ RFE/RL, Holy Slight: How Russia Prosecutes For ‘Insulting Religious Feelings’, 15 August 2017, [url](#)

⁷⁵ Meduza, In Russia today, ‘offending religious sentiment’ could land you in prison, 2 November 2021, [url](#)

⁷⁶ SOVA, [Homepage], 2022, [url](#)

⁷⁷ SOVA, Freedom of Conscience in Russia: Restrictions and Challenges in 2021, 11 April 2022, [url](#)

⁷⁸ Article 19, Russia: Federal laws introducing ban of propaganda of non-traditional sexual relationships, June 2013, [url](#), pp. 4, 11–12

⁷⁹ Ugolino, F., In Russia was passed the law prohibiting propaganda of ‘non-traditional relationships’ in the presence of minors, at the federal level, Carin.info, February 2013, [url](#)





expulsion.⁸⁰ According to the organisation Article 19 ‘Propaganda of non-traditional sexual relationships’ is defined as the spread of information aiming at ‘causing minors to form non-traditional sexual predispositions’ or ‘notions of attractiveness of non-traditional sexual relationships’, ‘distorted ideas about equal social value of traditional and non-traditional sexual relationships’, or ‘imposing information about non-traditional sexual relationships which raises interests in such relationships’.⁸¹ The first arrest following the amendments occurred the same day of their adoption.⁸² A single protesting activist was arrested in Kazan for holding a sign with the text ‘Being gay and loving gays is normal. Beating gays and killing gays is a crime’.⁸³ He was later fined 4 000 roubles [65 EUR].⁸⁴ Since then, the legal framework has been used to fine activists,⁸⁵ shut down websites,⁸⁶ and stop pride marches.⁸⁷ In October 2022, Russian lawmakers passed a proposal on expanding the prohibition of spreading information to include adults⁸⁸ and include materials about ‘non-traditional sexual relations and/or preferences’, ‘propaganda of paedophilia’, and information that might give minors a ‘desire to change [their] gender’.⁸⁹ The proposal sets out maximum fines ranging from 400 000 [65 500 EUR] to 5 million roubles [81 800 EUR] depending on the legal and official status of the offender (individual, official or legal entity). Legal entities could also face a suspension of their activity for up to 90 days.⁹⁰ The legislation was passed by the State Duma, the Russian lower parliament on 24 November 2022⁹¹ and signed by President Putin on 5 December 2022.⁹²

1.2.2. Anti-extremism legislation

Legal restrictions adopted on the pretext of national security and extremism limit the constitutional freedoms on freedom of speech, association and peaceful assembly and have been used to repress political opponents and unsanctioned activities.⁹³ The Russian Supreme Court has for instance used the anti-extremism legislation when classifying Jehovah’s

⁸⁰ Article 19, Russia: Federal laws introducing ban of propaganda of non-traditional sexual relationships, June 2013, [url](#), pp. 4, 11–12; Ugolino, F., In Russia was passed the law prohibiting propaganda of ‘non-traditional relationships’ in the presence of minors, at the federal level, Carin.info, February 2013, [url](#)

⁸¹ Article 19, Russia: Federal laws introducing ban of propaganda of non-traditional sexual relationships, June 2013, [url](#), p. 11

⁸² PinkNews, Russia: Putin signs anti-‘gay propaganda’ bill into law, 30 June 2013, [url](#); PinkNews, Russia: First person to be convicted under anti-gay ‘propaganda’ law arrested by his own parents, 2 September 2013, [url](#)

⁸³ PinkNews, Russia: First person to be convicted under anti-gay ‘propaganda’ law arrested by his own parents, 2 September 2013, [url](#); HRW, Dispatches: Shocked by Russia’s Intolerance, 23 December 2013, [url](#)

⁸⁴ AP, How Russia enforces its ban on gay ‘propaganda’, 6 February 2014, [url](#)

⁸⁵ AP, How Russia enforces its ban on gay ‘propaganda’, 6 February 2014, [url](#); Reuters, Russian LGBT activist fined for ‘gay propaganda’ family drawings, 10 July 2020, [url](#)

⁸⁶ HRW, No Support: Russia’s “Gay Propaganda” Law Imperils LGBT Youth, 11 December 2018, [url](#); Meduza, Russia bans ‘Gay.ru’, 30 March 2018, [url](#)

⁸⁷ Reuters, Russia moves to ban ‘LGBT propaganda’ among all ages, 27 October 2022, [url](#); Independent (The), Russian city allows gay pride parade then bans it ‘because children might see it’, 15 July 2019, [url](#)

⁸⁸ Reuters, Russia moves to ban ‘LGBT propaganda’ among all ages, 27 October 2022, [url](#); BBC News, Russia to ban sharing LGBT ‘propaganda’ with adults as well as children, 27 October 2022, [url](#)

⁸⁹ Sphere, How do MPs want to punish for “LGBT+ propaganda” among all ages in Russia?, 21 October 2022, [url](#)

⁹⁰ Sphere, How do MPs want to punish for “LGBT+ propaganda” among all ages in Russia?, 21 October 2022, [url](#); Russian Federation, State Duma, Приняты законопроекты о защите традиционных ценностей [Draft laws on the protection of traditional values adopted], 27 October 2022, [url](#)

⁹¹ DW, Russian lawmakers ban ‘LGBT propaganda’ among adults, 24 November 2022, [url](#)

⁹² Reuters, Putin signs law expanding Russia’s rules against ‘LGBT propaganda’, 5 December 2022, [url](#)

⁹³ Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2022 – Russia, 24 February 2022, [url](#); SOVA, Inappropriate Enforcement of Anti-Extremist Legislation in Russia in 2021, 27 April 2022, [url](#)





Witnesses as an extremist organisation and banning it in 2017.⁹⁴ In October 2022, the American company Meta, who owns Facebook and Instagram, was added to the list of terrorist and extremist organisations.⁹⁵

The Federal Law on Extremism (Federal Law No. 114 FZ on Combating Extremism Activity) introduced in 2002 'empowers prosecutors to take preventive and corrective measures aimed at combating the activities listed in the Law as being "extremist"'.⁹⁶ According to a 2015 translation by the Law Library of Congress, the Law listed the following acts:

- 'forcible change of the foundations of the constitutional system and violation of integrity of the Russian Federation;
- public justification of terrorism and other terrorist activity;
- incitement of social, racial, ethnic or religious hatred;
- propaganda of exclusiveness, superiority or inferiority of an individual based on his/her social, racial, ethnic, religious or linguistic identity, or his/her attitude to religion;
- violation of rights, liberties and legitimate interests of an individual because of his/her social, racial, ethnic, religious or linguistic identity or attitude to religion;
- preventing citizens from exercising their electoral rights and the right to participate in a referendum, or violating the secrecy of the vote, combined with violence or threats to use violence;
- preventing legitimate activities of government authorities, local self-government, election commissions, public and religious associations or other organisations, combined with violence or threats to use violence;
- committing crimes involving the aggravating factors listed in article 63(1) of the Criminal Code (e.g., repeated crimes, crimes committed by an organised group, or crimes with severe consequences);
- propaganda and public demonstration of Nazi attributes or symbols, or attributes and symbols similar to them or public demonstration of attributes or symbols of extremist organisations;
- mass distribution of materials known to be extremist, their production and possession for the purposes of distribution;
- dissemination of knowingly false accusations against federal or regional officials in their official capacity, alleging that they have committed illegal or criminal acts; [and]
- organisation and preparation of extremist acts, and calls to commit them; and
- financing the above-mentioned acts or providing any other material support to an extremist organisation, including assistance in printing their materials, offering educational or technical facilities, or providing communications or information services.'⁹⁷

⁹⁴ HRW, Russia: Court Bans Jehovah's Witnesses, 20 April 2017, [url](#)

⁹⁵ BBC News, Russia confirms Meta's designation as extremist, 11 October 2022, [url](#); Euronews, Russia bans Instagram and Facebook as court declares Meta an 'extremist organisation', 21 March 2022, [url](#)

⁹⁶ Venice Commission, Opinion on the Federal Law on Combating Extremist Activity of the Russian Federation, 20 June 2012, [url](#), para. 5

⁹⁷ Library of Congress, Legal Provisions on Fighting Extremism, September 2015, [url](#), pp. 30–31





The Federal Law on Extremism has to be read in conjunction with the Criminal Code, the Code of Administrative Offences, and the Law on the Federal Security Service (FSB) ‘as well as media and information-related legislation.’⁹⁸

Human rights defenders named a set of Articles of the Criminal Code as ‘legislation on anti-extremism’, including Article 280 ‘Public calls for extremist activity’, Article 282 ‘Inciting hatred and hostility’, Articles 282.1 and 282.2 ‘Organisation of extremist associations’ and ‘Participation in extremist associations’, as well as Article 205.2 ‘Public calls for terrorism or justification of terrorism’.⁹⁹ The anti-extremism legislation has been criticised for its vague formulations which allow for overtly broad interpretations and misuse.¹⁰⁰ Several examples of invoking anti-extremism legislation are as follows:

- **Public calls for extremist activities.** Article 280 stipulates a range of punishments from a fine up to 300 000 roubles [4 910 EUR] to imprisonment for up to four years. The punishments for public calls for extremist activities ‘committed with the use of mass media or information and telecommunication networks’, including the Internet, are stricter and stipulate imprisonment for up to five years.¹⁰¹

In April 2021, a camera operator at FBK was sentenced to two years in a penal colony under Article 280 because of his social Twitter posts related to the self-immolation of Irina Savina, editor-in-chief of news outlet Koza.Press, in front of the regional office of the Ministry of Interior in Nizhny Novgorod. In September 2021, the same person was charged under Article 282.1 ‘Participation in an extremist community’, in connection to his work at FBK.¹⁰²

- **Public calls for actions aimed at violating the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation.** Article 280.1 addresses public calls intending at harming the territorial integrity of the country and stipulates punishments in form of fines, forced labour, detention, imprisonment, and ban to hold certain positions. The maximum punishment under Article 280.1 is a five-year imprisonment, which can be applied if the public calls to violate territorial integrity of the RF were committed with the use of media sources, including the Internet.¹⁰³

⁹⁸ Venice Commission, Opinion on the Federal Law on Combating Extremist Activity of the Russian Federation, 20 June 2012, [url](#), para. 5

⁹⁹ Memorial, Natalya Kholmogorova’s Talk, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁰⁰ SOVA, Inappropriate Enforcement of Anti-Extremist Legislation in Russia in 2021, 27 April 2022, [url](#); Article 19 and SOVA, Russia’s overuse and misuse of anti-extremism laws - European Human Rights Advocacy Centre, 19 December 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰¹ Russia, Уголовный кодекс Российской Федерации от 13.06.1996 N 63-ФЗ (ред. от 24.09.2022) [Criminal Code of the Russian Federation of 13.06.1996 N 63-FZ (version 24.09.2022)], 24 September 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰² Coalition to free the Kremlin’s Political Prisoners, Prison time for the tweets: The case of Pavel Zelensky, 9 November 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰³ Rights in Russia, Law of the Week: Article 280.1 of the Russian Criminal Code (Public calls for actions aimed at violating the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation), [url](#); Russia, Уголовный кодекс Российской Федерации от 13.06.1996 N 63-ФЗ (ред. от 24.09.2022) [Criminal Code of the Russian Federation of 13.06.1996 N 63-FZ (version 24.09.2022)], 24 September 2022, [url](#)





In January 2020, Article 280.1 was used against an activist who allegedly called for separatist activities in Kuril Islands.¹⁰⁴ The activist, who had been sentenced to two years in prison in 2014 (partly for activism denouncing the annexation of the Crimea) was sentenced 'to six years of increased security prison' in May 2021. In both cases, the person was declared a political prisoner by the Memorial Human Rights Centre (MHRC).¹⁰⁵ In August 2020, a 'prominent' activist from Bashkortostan was sentenced 'to nine years in a high-security prison' because of a video statement in which he called for more autonomy to ethnic republics and regions.¹⁰⁶ The court has also found him guilty of other charges, including public calls for extremist activities (Article 280), public calls for terrorist activities (Article 205.2), and collection of funds intended for the financing of an extremist act (Article 282.3).¹⁰⁷ MHRC has recognised the person as a political prisoner.¹⁰⁸

1.2.3. The law on foreign agents

The law on foreign agents was adopted in 2012.¹⁰⁹ Initially, it concerned 'public organisations' receiving foreign funds and engaging in 'political activities'¹¹⁰, and it mainly targeted NGOs.¹¹¹ The first law of 2012 did not include a definition of 'political activity', but an amendment in 2016 reportedly included a definition encompassing all activities aimed at influencing government policies and decisions,¹¹² such as organising 'rallies and discussions, participating in pickets, monitoring elections, and spreading opinions about the current government in social media'.¹¹³

The scope of the law has been expanded several times to include foreign media outlets (2017),¹¹⁴ private persons (2019),¹¹⁵ and 'informal' organisations not registered as legal entities (2020).¹¹⁶ On 14 July 2022, the law was further amended to include anyone 'deemed to have fallen under "foreign influence"'.¹¹⁷ The amendments entered into force on 1 December 2022.

¹⁰⁴ Free Russia Foundation, Six years in prison for a Facebook post: The Case of Darya Polyudova, 22 July 2021, [url](#); Memorial, Left-wing activist Darya Polyudova, charged with inciting separatism and justifying terrorism, is a political prisoner, Memorial says, 21 September 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰⁵ Free Russia Foundation, Six years in prison for a Facebook post: The Case of Darya Polyudova, 22 July 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰⁶ RFE/RL, Prominent Bashkir Activist Sentenced to Nine Years in Russian Prison, 24 August 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰⁷ Memorial, Дильмухаметов Айрат Ахнафович [Dilmukhametov Ayrat Akhnafovich], n.d., [url](#)

¹⁰⁸ Rights in Russia, Law of the Week: Article 280.1 of the Russian Criminal Code (Public calls for actions aimed at violating the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation), [url](#); Memorial, Дильмухаметов Айрат Ахнафович [Dilmukhametov Ayrat Akhnafovich], n.d., [url](#)

¹⁰⁹ Russian Federation, Federal law No 121-Fz, 20 July 2012, [url](#)

¹¹⁰ Russian Federation, Federal law No 121-Fz, 20 July 2012, [url](#), art. 1; EPRS, 'Foreign agents' and 'undesirables', Russian civil society in danger of extinction?, March 2022, [url](#), p. 3

¹¹¹ BBC News, Russia to label individuals as 'foreign agents' under new law, 3 December 2019, [url](#); NHC, Russia's Foreign Agent law: Violating human rights and attacking civil society, 2014, [url](#), p. 1; EPRS, 'Foreign agents' and 'undesirables', Russian civil society in danger of extinction?, March 2022, [url](#), p. 3

¹¹² EPRS, 'Foreign agents' and 'undesirables', Russian civil society in danger of extinction?, March 2022, [url](#), p. 3

¹¹³ HRW, Russia: Sham Upgrade for 'Foreign Agents' Law, 27 May 2016, [url](#)

¹¹⁴ Inoteka, Inoteka, 1 October 2021, [url](#)

¹¹⁵ Reuters, Russia's Putin signs 'foreign agents' media law, 25 November 2017, [url](#)

¹¹⁶ BBC News, Russia to label individuals as 'foreign agents' under new law, 3 December 2019, [url](#); Reuters, Russia's Putin signs law to label people foreign agents, 2 December 2019, [url](#)

¹¹⁷ Meduza, What you need to know about Russia's updated 'foreign agent' laws, 28 December 2020, [url](#); EPRS, 'Foreign agents' and 'undesirables', Russian civil society in danger of extinction?, March 2022, [url](#), p. 3

¹¹⁸ Moscow Times (The), Putin Signs Expanded 'Foreign Agents' Law, 14 July 2022, [url](#); Warsaw Institute, Putin Signs Harsher 'Foreign Agent' Law, 21 July 2022, [url](#); RFE/RL, Putin Signs Off On Harsher 'Foreign Agent' Law, 14 July 2022, [url](#)





As explained by Human Rights Watch (HRW), the new legislation ‘expands the definition of foreign agent to a point at which almost any person or entity, regardless of nationality or location, who engages in civic activism or even expresses opinions about Russian policies or officials’ conduct could be designated a foreign agent, so long as the authorities claim they are under “foreign influence.”¹¹⁸ The amended law also broadened ‘the definition of political activities’ as it covers ‘any activities that “contradict the national interests of the Russian Federation.”’¹¹⁹

As was noted by European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS) in March 2022, the terms ‘political activity’ and ‘foreign funding’ were ‘vaguely defined and inconsistently interpreted’.¹²⁰ According to the October 2022 report of Landinfo, the Norwegian COI unit, someone can be registered as a foreign agent even if they do not receive foreign funding.¹²¹ At the end of October 2022, ‘to the register of individuals who perform the functions of a foreign agent’ were added two presenters of Dozhd TV and its director general, a political scientist, a journalist, and a lawyer,¹²² who defended members of the National Guard (Rosgvardia) fired for refusing to go to fight in Ukraine.¹²³

The law requires a ‘foreign agent’ to register as such with the Ministry of Justice¹²⁴ and label all their materials as belonging to a foreign agent.¹²⁵ Furthermore, foreign agents need to regularly report on their activities,¹²⁶ including their expenses and use of property to the Ministry of Justice.¹²⁷ Failure to comply with the obligations of a foreign agent range from fines up to 500 000 roubles [8 200 EUR],¹²⁸ depending on the legal and official status of the offender,¹²⁹ to imprisonment in certain situations.¹³⁰

The punishments differ according to whether the offender is a private person, official or a legal entity. Repeated violations may lead to criminal charges and imprisonment.¹³¹ The most severe punishment is five years’ imprisonment (under Article 330.1 of the Criminal Code), which is applicable if the offender (someone who has failed to register as a foreign agent) works in a field that involves collecting information about military and military-technical activities, which can be further used against Russia’s security.¹³² In September 2022, OVD-info reported that

¹¹⁸ HRW, Russia: New Restrictions for ‘Foreign Agents’, 1 December 2022, [url](#)

¹¹⁹ RFE/RL, New Law Broadens The Net for ‘Foreign Agents’ in Russia, 1 December 2022, [url](#)

¹²⁰ EPRS, ‘Foreign agents’ and ‘undesirables’, Russian civil society in danger of extinction?, March 2022, [url](#), p. 3

¹²¹ Norway, Landinfo, Russland, Ytringsfrihet og kritikk av krigen i Ukraina, 17 October 2022, [url](#), p. 7

¹²² TASS, Dozhd director general, presenters added to list of foreign agents – Justice Ministry, 28 October 2022, [url](#)

¹²³ FT, Russian guardsmen case reveals dissent in security force over invasion of Ukraine, 1 April 2022, [url](#)

¹²⁴ Russian Federation, Federal law No 121-Fz, 20 July 2012, [url](#), art. 1; EPRS, ‘Foreign agents’ and ‘undesirables’, Russian civil society in danger of extinction?, March 2022, [url](#), p. 3

¹²⁵ Inoteka, Inoteka, 1 October 2021, [url](#); BBC News, Russia to label individuals as ‘foreign agents’ under new law, 3 December 2019, [url](#)

¹²⁶ Inoteka, Inoteka, 1 October 2021, [url](#); DW, Russia’s sweeping foreign agent law, 2 March 2022, [url](#)

¹²⁷ OVD-Info, Created and (or) distributed, 29 November 2021, [url](#), p. 12

¹²⁸ OVD-Info, Created and (or) distributed, 29 November 2021, [url](#), p. 20

¹²⁹ VOA, Putin Signs Laws Imposing Fines for ‘Foreign Agent’ Law Violations, Protest-Related Offenses, 24 February 2021, [url](#)

¹³⁰ RFE/RL, ‘Sword Of Damocles’: With First Legal Charges, Russia’s ‘Foreign Agent’ Law Bares Its Teeth, 22 October 2022, [url](#)

¹³¹ RFE/RL, ‘Sword Of Damocles’: With First Legal Charges, Russia’s ‘Foreign Agent’ Law Bares Its Teeth, 22 October 2022, [url](#); OVD-Info, Created and (or) distributed, 29 November 2021, [url](#), p. 24

¹³² OVD-Info, Created and (or) distributed, 29 November 2021, [url](#), p. 20





99 individuals and organisations had been added to the register of foreign agents since the Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022.¹³³

1.2.4. The law on undesirable organisations

The law on undesirable organisations was adopted in 2015.¹³⁴ The law allows the prosecutor-general to declare foreign or international organisations as ‘undesirable’ if they are deemed as threatening the Russian Federation’s ‘constitutional order, defence capacity, or state security.’ Undesirable organisations must cease their activities.¹³⁵ Leading or participating in the activities of such organisations or making donations may lead to administrative or criminal liability. Possible punishments include fines and up to six years imprisonment.¹³⁶ However, the law does not define concepts such as ‘leading’ or ‘participating’,¹³⁷ which makes them vague and applicable to many organisations.¹³⁸ The law was amended in June 2021, applying the ‘undesirable’ label to foreign or international NGOs that provide services or transfer money to undesired organisations, and expanding the engagement with such organisations to Russian citizens abroad.¹³⁹

The amendments authorise criminal charges against previously unpunished persons accused of having an organising role in an undesirable organisation, which can lead to up to six years’ imprisonment. The amendments also allow criminal charges against a person for participating in the activities of an undesired organisation, even if they only have one previous administrative sentence. Anyone making donations, crowdfunding or other ‘financial services’ to undesirable organisations can face criminal charges and up to five year’s imprisonment.¹⁴⁰ According to HRW, referring to the Russian Ministry of Justice, 50 organisations were registered as ‘undesirable’ in January 2022.¹⁴¹ OVD-Info reported that 15 new organisations have been added between 24 February 2022 and September 2022.¹⁴²

1.2.5. Dissemination of ‘false information’

Under the Code for Administrative Offences, ‘public dissemination of knowingly false information’ is punishable under Article 13.15 ‘Abuse of freedom of mass information’,¹⁴³ which stipulates fines up to five million roubles [81 800 EUR] for media and other information resources that are ‘knowingly publishing false information’.¹⁴⁴ In April 2020, during the

¹³³ OVD-Info, Summary of anti-war repressions, Seven months of war, September 2022, [url](#)

¹³⁴ Dubrovsky, D., Undesirables, Free Russia Foundation, 22 May 2015, [url](#)

¹³⁵ EPRS, ‘Foreign agents’ and ‘undesirables’, Russian civil society in danger of extinction?, March 2022, [url](#), p. 7; HRW, Submission by Human Rights Watch on Russia to the Human Rights Committee, 15 February 2022, [url](#)

¹³⁶ Gnezdilova, O., Amendments to the Law on “Undesirable Organizations”, Highlights, Free Russia Foundation, 21 July 2022, [url](#)

¹³⁷ Dubrovsky, D., Undesirables, Free Russia Foundation, 22 May 2015, [url](#)

¹³⁸ EPRS, ‘Foreign agents’ and ‘undesirables’, Russian civil society in danger of extinction?, March 2022, [url](#), p. 7

¹³⁹ RFE/RL, Russian Bill Approved Expanding ‘Undesirable’ Organizations Law, 9 June 2021, [url](#); HRW, New ‘Undesirables’ Law Expands Activists’ Danger Zone, 17 June 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴⁰ HRW, New ‘Undesirables’ Law Expands Activists’ Danger Zone, 17 June 2021, [url](#); Gnezdilova, O., Amendments to the Law on “Undesirable Organizations”, Highlights, Free Russia Foundation, 21 July 2022, [url](#)

¹⁴¹ HRW, Submission by Human Rights Watch on Russia to the Human Rights Committee, 10 February 2022, [url](#)

¹⁴² OVD-Info, Summary of anti-war repressions, Seven months of war, September 2022, [url](#)

¹⁴³ AI, Russia: Ten Urgent Human Rights Tasks For The New Duma, 19 September 2021, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁴⁴ Interfax, Media outlets required to use info from official Russian sources in covering special operation in Donbas – Roskomnadzor, 24 February 2022, [url](#)





COVID-19 pandemic,¹⁴⁵ Article 207.1 ‘Public dissemination of knowingly false information about circumstances endangering the life and safety of citizens’ and 207.2 ‘Public dissemination of knowingly false information of public significance, resulting in grave consequences’ were introduced into the Criminal Code.¹⁴⁶ Commenting on the legislation, AI stated that the language used within the legislation leaves it open to ‘wide interpretation and abuse’.¹⁴⁷

On 5 April 2021, the Code of Administrative Offences (Article 13.15) was amended to introduce administrative liability for publicly disseminating ‘knowingly false information about the activities of the Soviet Union during World War II, or about the veterans of the Great Patriotic War’, which was made punishable with fines.¹⁴⁸

On 4 March 2022, the Criminal Code was amended with Article 207.3 on public dissemination of ‘knowingly false information’ about Russian Armed Forces and the State Institutions¹⁴⁹ to criminalise the spread of ‘false information’ about the use of the Russian military.¹⁵⁰ Individuals convicted for the offence may face up to 10 years’ imprisonment¹⁵¹, and dissemination of ‘false information’ which has brought ‘serious consequences’ may lead to 15 years’ imprisonment.¹⁵² The legislation was further amended on 25 March to punish dissemination of ‘false news’ on any activities of Russian authorities and institutions in the country and abroad,¹⁵³ such as the National Guard, Russian embassies, the Prosecutor’s office and other state, military law enforcement and judicial bodies.¹⁵⁴ According to the amended Article 207.3, ‘public dissemination of deliberately false information’ about ‘state bodies of the Russian Federation performing their duties outside the territory of the Russian Federation’ is punishable in the same way ‘as similar actions committed with regard to the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation’.¹⁵⁵

1.2.6. Discrediting of the Russian Armed Forces and state institutions

On 4 March 2022, Article 20.3.3 of the Code of Administrative Offences and Article 280.3 of the Criminal Code were introduced to punish “public actions aimed at discrediting’ the Russian Armed Forces”, such as, publicly advocating the withdrawal of Russian troops, or ending fighting in Ukraine.¹⁵⁶ On 25 March, both Articles were amended to include ‘liability for

¹⁴⁵ AI, Russia: Ten urgent human rights tasks for the new Duma, September 2021, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁴⁶ AI, Russia: Ten urgent human rights tasks for the new Duma, September 2021, [url](#), p. 2; Russia, Уголовный кодекс Российской Федерации от 13.06.1996 N 63-ФЗ (ред. от 24.09.2022)[Criminal Code of the Russian Federation of 13.06.1996 N 63-FZ (version 24.09.2022)], 24 September 2022, [url](#)

¹⁴⁷ AI, Russia: Ten urgent human rights tasks for the new Duma, September 2021, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁴⁸ Russian Federation, President of Russia, Legislative amendments concerning punishment for insulting war veterans, 5 April 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴⁹ Human Rights Watch, Russia Criminalizes Independent War Reporting, Anti-War Protests, 7 March 2022, [url](#)

¹⁵⁰ Reuters, Explainer: How Russia is applying new laws to stifle dissent on Ukraine, 26 August 2022, [url](#)

¹⁵¹ RFE/RL, Russian Lawmakers OK Bill On ‘False News’ About Military Operations, In Further Curb On Media, 4 March 2022, [url](#)

¹⁵² RFE/RL, Russian Lawmakers OK Bill On ‘False News’ About Military Operations, In Further Curb On Media, 4 March 2022, [url](#); Reuters, Russia fights back in information war with jail warning, 4 March 2022, [url](#)

¹⁵³ AI, Russia: Authorities launch witch-hunt to catch anyone sharing anti-war views, 30 March 2022, [url](#)

¹⁵⁴ Politico, Russia expands laws criminalizing ‘fake news’, 22 March 2022, [url](#)

¹⁵⁵ Russia, President of Russia, Federal law to protect Russia’s state bodies performing their duties abroad, 26 March 2022, [url](#)

¹⁵⁶ Human Rights Watch, Russia Criminalizes Independent War Reporting, Anti-War Protests, 7 March 2022, [url](#)





public actions aimed at discrediting' the actions of 'state bodies of the Russian Federation outside the Russian Federation.'¹⁵⁷

Article 20.3.3 of the Code of Administrative Offences prescribes punishments by fine ranging from 30 000 [490 EUR] to 1 million [16 400 EUR] roubles.¹⁵⁸ Article 280.3 of the Criminal Code becomes applicable if the public actions aimed at discrediting state institutions are 'committed by a person who was previously brought to account for a similar act within a period of one year.'¹⁵⁹ The term 'discrediting' is not defined, and punishments include fines up to 1 million roubles, depending on the legal and official status of the offender,¹⁶⁰ imprisonment for three to five years, or forced labour.¹⁶¹

Calls for sanctions against Russian targets can also lead to fines up to 500 000 roubles [8 200 EUR] depending on the legal and official status of the offender,¹⁶² and up to three years imprisonment for repeat offenders.¹⁶³ For more information on laws adopted after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, see [EUAA, COI Query, Russia, Treatment of protestors, journalists, and human rights defenders since the Ukraine invasion, June 2022](#).

¹⁵⁷ Russia, President of Russia, Vladimir Putin signed the Federal Law On Amendments to Articles 8.32 and 20.33 of the Code of Administrative Offences of the Russian Federation, 26 March 2022, [url](#); Russia, President of Russia, Federal law to protect Russia's state bodies performing their duties abroad, 26 March 2022, [url](#)

¹⁵⁸ Agora and Network Freedoms, Россия: права человека на военном положении [Russia: Human Rights under the Martial Law: The first month of the armed conflict in Ukraine], March 2022, [url](#), pp. 6-7

¹⁵⁹ Russia, President of Russia, Federal law to protect Russia's state bodies performing their duties abroad, 26 March 2022, [url](#)

¹⁶⁰ Forum 18, RUSSIA: First known criminal investigation for opposing Ukraine war on explicitly religious grounds, 5 May 2022, [url](#)

¹⁶¹ AI, Russian Federation: End censorship on voices against the war, 14 March 2022, [url](#), p. 1; Forum 18, RUSSIA: First known criminal investigation for opposing Ukraine war on explicitly religious grounds, 5 May 2022, [url](#)

¹⁶² AI, Russian Federation: End censorship on voices against the war, 14 March 2022, [url](#), p. 2; Russia Criminalizes Independent War Reporting, Anti-War Protests, 7 March 2022, [url](#)

¹⁶³ OVD-Info et al., Update on the Information on Russia to the 135th session from coalition of CSO, May 2022, [url](#), para. 28–29; HRW, Russia Criminalizes Independent War Reporting, Anti-War Protests, 7 March 2022, [url](#)





2. Treatment of specific profiles

2.1. Political opponents

Prior to Russia's invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022,¹⁶⁴ political opponents and dissidents faced various forms of repression by Russian authorities,¹⁶⁵ including fabricated criminal cases and administrative charges, arrest and detention, cases of opponents being prevented from participating in elections,¹⁶⁶ limited space for organising public assemblies.¹⁶⁷ There were also cases where Putin's critics, including politicians, were assassinated or died under suspicious circumstances.¹⁶⁸ Among those was Boris Nemtsov, a leading opposition politician, who was shot dead by an unknown assailant in 2015 near the Kremlin in Moscow.¹⁶⁹ In 2020, opposition leader, Alexander Navalny, was poisoned with a toxic nerve agent. Evidence emerging later indicated that the attack involved agents of the Federal Security Service (FSB).¹⁷⁰

In January 2021, following the arrest of Navalny upon his return to Russia,¹⁷¹ some of the largest demonstrations in years took place across the country, which were met with violent crackdowns by the Russian police.¹⁷² Since then, state repression has increased, aimed at silencing dissent and political opponents.¹⁷³ In general, the human rights situation in Russia has been described as having steadily worsened over the past years,¹⁷⁴ with 2021 seeing 'an unprecedented systematic crackdown on political opposition, civil society, human rights defenders, media outlets and journalists, as well as disinformation focusing on accusations of Western interference'.¹⁷⁵ In Chechnya, human rights observers have reported on widespread human rights violations by state actors, including abductions, torture and extrajudicial killings,¹⁷⁶ and the use of collective punishment to curb dissent.¹⁷⁷

¹⁶⁴ Reuters, Missiles rain down around Ukraine, 25 February 2022, [url](#)

¹⁶⁵ EEAS, EU Annual Report on Human Rights and Democracy in the World, 2021 Country Updates, 19 April 2022, [url](#), p. 59; AI, Amnesty International Report 2021/22, The state of the world's human rights, 29 March 2022, [url](#); HRW, World Report 2022, Russia – Events of 2021, [url](#), p. 310

¹⁶⁶ Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2022 – Russia, 24 February 2022, [url](#); Barents Observer (The), Violetta Grudina is banned from running in Murmansk elections, 6 August 2021, [url](#); Reuters, Navalny activist flees Russia as top aides report threatening letters, 27 January 2022, [url](#)

¹⁶⁷ AI, Amnesty International Report 2021/22, The state of the world's human rights, 29 March 2022, [url](#)

¹⁶⁸ Washington Post (The), Here are 10 critics of Vladimir Putin who died violently or in suspicious ways, 23 March 2017, [url](#); Britannica, Vladimir Putin - Silencing critics and actions in the West, 3 October 2022, [url](#); Euronews, Updated: A list of oligarchs and Putin critics found dead since Ukraine war, 22 September 2022, [url](#)

¹⁶⁹ BBC News, Russia opposition politician Boris Nemtsov shot dead, 28 February 2015, [url](#)

¹⁷⁰ Bellingcat, Navalny Poison Squad Implicated in Murders of Three Russian Activists, 27 January 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷¹ Guardian (The), Alexei Navalny detained at airport on return to Russia, 17 January 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷² HRW, Russia: Police Detain Thousands in Pro-Navalny Protests, 25 January 2021, [url](#); Economist (The), Russia: How Putin is silencing his opponents, 11 November 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷³ CSIS, Repression Trap: The Mechanism of Escalating State Violence in Russia, 30 July 2021, [url](#); Economist (The), Russia: How Putin is silencing his opponents, 11 November 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷⁴ EEAS, EU Annual Report on Human Rights and Democracy in the World, 2021 Country Updates, 19 April 2022, [url](#), p. 59; AI, Russia: Authorities launch witch-hunt to catch anyone sharing anti-war views, 30 March 2022, [url](#)

¹⁷⁵ EEAS, EU Annual Report on Human Rights and Democracy in the World, 2021 Country Updates, 19 April 2022, [url](#), p. 59

¹⁷⁶ Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2022 – Russia, 24 February 2022, [url](#)

¹⁷⁷ ISHR, HRW, AI, Human Rights House Foundation, FIDH, Human Rights Centre Memorial, Civic Assistance Committee, Russia: Human Rights Council should address dire human rights situation in country, 3 March 2022, [url](#)





A few days before Russia invaded Ukraine, Foreign Policy (FP) reported that US intelligence services had information about Russian authorities compiling lists of political opponents to possibly arrest or assassinate in the aftermath of the planned invasion of Ukraine.¹⁷⁸ No other sources could be found to corroborate this information within the timeframe of this report.

Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the repression against dissenting voices further hardened.¹⁷⁹ More than 130 potential candidates in the regional elections of September 2022 were prevented from standing for elections, being prosecuted for administrative or criminal offences. Around 60 of these candidates were charged under Russian anti-extremism legislation.¹⁸⁰

In March 2022, Alexander Navalny's prison sentence was extended by nine additional years,¹⁸¹ and in June, he was transferred to the maximum-security IK-6 prison in the Vladimir region's village of Melekhovo. The IK-6 prison has been mentioned in various accounts as a place where torture is used.¹⁸² By the time of finalising this report, Navalny was still held in confinement in a punishment cell in the IK-6 prison. On 10 November 2022, he lost his court case protesting his prison conditions.¹⁸³ More than half of Navalny's associates and staff are reported to have either left Russia or have been arrested. Some have been placed on wanted lists as 'terrorists' or 'extremists',¹⁸⁴ as the crackdown against them intensified.¹⁸⁵

Since the beginning of the war, other prominent political opposition figures were arrested and prosecuted by Russian authorities, including Vladimir Kara-Murza, Yevgeny Roizman, Ilya Yashin, and Leonid Gozman.¹⁸⁶ A journalist and politician close to assassinated opposition leader Boris Nemtsov,¹⁸⁷ Kara-Murza, survived two poisoning attempts in 2015 and 2017.¹⁸⁸ On 11 April 2022, he was arrested for a public speech criticising Vladimir Putin's policies, initially with charges of spreading 'false information' about Russian military and institutions.¹⁸⁹ In October 2022, Kara-Murza was additionally charged with high treason.¹⁹⁰ In an op-ed written from prison and published in the Washington Post on 18 October 2022, Kara-Murza stated that his case marked 'the first moment in post-Soviet Russia when public criticism of the authorities

¹⁷⁸ FP, Russia Planning Post-Invasion Arrest and Assassination Campaign in Ukraine, U.S. Officials Say, 18 February 2022, [url](#)

¹⁷⁹ EP, European Parliament resolution of 7 April 2022 on the increasing repression in Russia, including the case of Alexei Navalny (2022/2622(RSP)), [url](#); AI, Russia: Authorities launch witch-hunt to catch anyone sharing anti-war views, 30 March 2022, [url](#)

¹⁸⁰ UN OHCHR, Human Rights Committee Considers Report of the Russian Federation in the Absence of a Delegation, Experts Raise Issues on the Persecution of Journalists and the Arrests of Protesters, 20 October 2022, [url](#)

¹⁸¹ Reuters, Russia sentences Kremlin critic Navalny to nine years in prison, 22 March 2022, [url](#)

¹⁸² Meduza, At Alexey Navalny's new prison, torture is rampant. At least two past inmates died after being beaten, 16 June 2022, [url](#)

¹⁸³ AP, Russia's top opposition figure loses fight over prison terms, 10 November 2022, [url](#)

¹⁸⁴ RFE/RL, Russia Adds Two More Navalny Associates To Wanted List, 27 April 2022, [url](#); RFE/RL, Russian Court Issues Arrest Warrant For Another Navalny Associate, 10 June 2022, [url](#)

¹⁸⁵ DW, Germany shelters persecuted Russian, 2 September 2022, [url](#)

¹⁸⁶ Europe Elects, Politicians Arrested Since the 24th of February Invasion, 21 September 2022, [url](#)

¹⁸⁷ AFP, Russian activist Kara-Murza charged with treason: agencies, 6 October 2022

¹⁸⁸ Europe Elects, Russia: Notable Politicians Arrested Since the 24th of February Invasion, 21 September 2022, [url](#)

¹⁸⁹ AI, Russia: Political activist Vladimir Kara-Murza is a prisoner of conscience who must be released immediately and unconditionally, 10 May 2022, [url](#), pp. 1-2

¹⁹⁰ AFP, Russian activist Kara-Murza charged with treason: agencies, 6 October 2022; HRW, Russia: First Treason Charges for Criticizing Kremlin, 7 October 2022, [url](#)





is officially clarified as “treason.”¹⁹¹ In July 2022, opposition politician Leonid Gozman was detained with the criminal charge of failing to inform the authorities swiftly enough about his Israeli citizenship.¹⁹² Gozman had already served 15 days in prison twice in a row over articles written in 2013 and 2020, in which he equated the Soviet regime to Nazi Germany. In September 2022, he announced he was leaving Russia together with his family.¹⁹³

Several opposition politicians have been arrested and prosecuted under new amended Articles of the Criminal Code on disseminating of ‘false information’ and discrediting Russian Armed Forces.¹⁹⁴ These include former mayor of the city of Yekaterinburg, Yevgeny Roizman,¹⁹⁵ the chair of the regional branch of the liberal party Yabloko in the city of Pskov, Lev Shlosberg,¹⁹⁶ and one of the most politically active opponents, Ilya Yashin,¹⁹⁷ whose pretrial detention was extended until 26 November 2022.¹⁹⁸ On 9 December, Yashin was sentenced to eight and a half years in prison under Article 207.3 of the Criminal Code on public dissemination of ‘knowingly false Information’ about Russian military because of speaking on his YouTube channel about killings of civilians in Bucha, Ukraine.¹⁹⁹

On 9 November, Pavel Chikov, the head of the Agora International Human Rights Group,²⁰⁰ stated via his Telegram channel that 132 persons had been criminally prosecuted under Article 207.3 of the Criminal Code since March 2022. Among these, 22 were civil activists and 12 journalists, while in most cases the defendants were ordinary people charged because of their posts on social media. He also added that half of all cases were investigated as motivated by political hatred, under part 2 of the mentioned Article, which is punishable by 5 to 10 years in prison.²⁰¹ For more information on the legal framework see chapter [1.2 Legal context](#).

Interviewed by the EUAA for this report, a human rights lawyer who wished to remain anonymous noted that the reasons for political repression in Russia since the war started are mainly threefold. The first reason is linked to the strategy by the Kremlin to keep the population in fear. Authorities do so, the source explained, by targeting high-profile personalities who are either inside or outside of the country. There are currently between 20 and 25 among well-known journalists, activists, political opponents who are being criminally investigated and prosecuted mostly in Moscow. The source added that although most of them have left the country, the Kremlin’s intention ‘is to send a message to the elite and the whole

¹⁹¹ Washington Post (The), Vladimir Kara-Murza from prison: In Putin’s Russia, dissent is now ‘treason’, 18 October 2022, [url](#)

¹⁹² Reuters, Russian police detain opposition politician Gozman in Moscow, 25 July 2022, [url](#)

¹⁹³ RFE/RL, Russian Opposition Politician Leaves Country After Serving 30 Days In Jail, 29 September 2022, [url](#); Europe Elects, Russia: Notable Politicians Arrested Since the 24th of February Invasion, 21 September 2022, [url](#)

¹⁹⁴ HRW, Russia Criminalizes Independent War Reporting, Anti-War Protests, 7 March 2022, [url](#)

¹⁹⁵ New York Times (The), A prominent Russian critic of the war is detained after speaking out, 24 August 2022, [url](#); Europe Elects, Russia: Notable Politicians Arrested Since the 24th of February Invasion, 21 September 2022, [url](#)

¹⁹⁶ Moscow Times (The), Opposition Politician Accused of ‘Discrediting’ Russian Military, 15 April 2022, [url](#)

¹⁹⁷ Europe Elects, Russia: Notable Politicians Arrested Since the 24th of February Invasion, 21 September 2022, [url](#)

¹⁹⁸ Meduza, Opposition politician Ilya Yashin’s arrest extended to November 26, 7 November 2022, [url](#)

¹⁹⁹ AI, Russia: Opposition politician Ilya Yashin sentenced to eight and half years in jail for denouncing Russia’s war crimes in Ukraine, 9 December 2022, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/12/russia-opposition-politician-ilya-yashin-sentenced-to-eight-and-half-years-in-jail-for-denouncing-russias-war-crimes-in-ukraine/>

²⁰⁰ Rights in Russia, Pavel Chikov, n.d., [url](#)

²⁰¹ Pavel Chikov (Telegram Channel), В России расследуется 161 уголовное дело о военных фейках [161 criminal cases of military fakes are being investigated in Russia], 9 November 2022, [url](#)





population.²⁰² Instilling fear with the aim of curbing dissent is a strategy used by the Russian state also prior to the war,²⁰³ with reports of Government's critics being targeted both within and outside Russia.²⁰⁴

As explained by the human rights defender, the second reason for the crackdown is explained by the fact that regional authorities are taking the opportunity to use the federal framework 'to attack the local "troublemakers"'.²⁰⁵ According to the source, this explains targeting by local journalists and activists across the country, as it was, for instance, in the cases of Mikhail Afanasyev²⁰⁶ and Sergey Mihaylov.²⁰⁷ This practice was also already reported in previous years.²⁰⁸ The third reason for the crackdown, as told by the source, is connected to personal career interests of 'many law enforcement officials, investigative committees' officers, prosecuting officers, etc.,' who use number of cases to get a career advancement, which creates a situation in which 'even common people are targeted.'²⁰⁹

As explained by Alexander Pomazuev, a lawyer at FBK²¹⁰ interviewed by EUAA on 9 November 2022, Russian authorities do not have the resources for mass prosecution as during the Soviet era, which is why they prefer that dissidents leave the country. Nevertheless, as noted by the source, authorities 'will still bring every single case to court' since their main strategy is to threaten the population.²¹¹ As noted by human rights lawyer in the interview with EUAA on 11 November, there was neither standardised practice nor case law that would be based on the newly adopted criminal legislation and an increase of criminal cases is expected once the case law is established.²¹²

As noted by Alexander Pomazuev, both administrative and criminal cases, courts were facing pressure from the authorities, and there was a form of self-censorship among judges. The source noted that for political activists the possibility to get a fair treatment at a court was small, including in cases when administrative charges were filed against those 'who had used the word 'war', etc.'²¹³ The source pointed out that 'less than 1%' of people charged under the criminal proceedings were proven non-guilty by a court, and this chance was practically non-existent if political activists and journalists were charged. According to the source, the percentage was slightly higher for some categories of people, for instance for former government officials. In the best-case scenario, when judges were convinced of the innocence

²⁰² Human rights lawyer, Online interview with EUAA, 11 November 2022

²⁰³ OSCE, The Nemtsov Murder and Rule of Law in Russia, 30 July 2020, [url](#), p. 23; Freeman S., Fear and a pattern of political killing in Russia, MIT Center for International Studies, 15 September 2021, [url](#)

²⁰⁴ UN OHCHR, UN experts say Navalny poisoning sends clear, sinister warning to critics, 1 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁰⁵ Human rights lawyer, Online interview with EUAA, 11 November 2022

²⁰⁶ Mikhail Afanasyev is the editor-in-chief of the online journal Novy Fokus, in Abakan, Republic of Khakassia. On 13 April 2022, he was arrested by the security forces for an article about National Guard (Rosgravidia) officers, allegedly refusing to go to war to Ukraine. See: Guardian (The), Russia: journalist arrested for 'fake news' about armed forces, 14 April 2022, [url](#); AI, Russia: Release journalists detained over critical coverage of Ukraine invasion, 14 April 2022, [url](#)

²⁰⁷ Sergey Mihaylov is the founder and the editor-in-chief of a newspaper LIStok in Gorno-Altaysk, Republic of Altay. On 14 April 2022, he was arrested over his critical reporting of the war against Ukraine. See: AI, Russia: Release journalists detained over critical coverage of Ukraine invasion, 14 April 2022, [url](#)

²⁰⁸ EHRAC, How Russia's new Censorship laws are being used to stifle expression, 10 October 2019, [url](#)

²⁰⁹ Human rights lawyer, Online interview with EUAA, 11 November 2022

²¹⁰ FBK, Homepage, n.d., [url](#)

²¹¹ Alexander Pomazuev, Online interview with EUAA, 9 November 2022

²¹² Human rights lawyer, Online interview with EUAA, 11 November 2022

²¹³ Alexander Pomazuev, Online interview with EUAA, 9 November 2022





of the persons prosecuted, they would still convict them but opt for a suspended sentence. In administrative procedures, there might be a slight chance to close the case due to the inefficiency of the police. Finally, the source noted that, for most of the population – the people who are not politically active – ‘there is more fairness in Russian courts, especially if these are not criminal cases, but simple civil cases, such as divorce.’²¹⁴

2.2. Journalists

Prior to the war, Russia passed ‘increasingly severe restrictions under arbitrary laws’ against the media,²¹⁵ which have been used to target what Russian authorities deem as ‘fake news’ and to curb critical voices towards the government and its policies.²¹⁶ Since the adoption of the so-called ‘anti-fake news laws’ in 2019,²¹⁷ there have been numerous cases of journalists fined for ‘fake news’ offences in 2020²¹⁸ and 2021,²¹⁹ and journalists and media organisations have curtailed their coverage or left Russia as a result of the laws and the risks connected to their provisions.²²⁰

In the past years, there were cases of journalists critical of Putin who were killed or died in suspicious circumstances, such as Yuri Shchekochikhin, Anna Politkovskaya, Stanislav Markelov, Anastasia Baburova, and Natalia Estemirova.²²¹ As noted by an expert of the UN Human Rights Committee in October 2022, there were ‘dozens of murders and attempted murders’ of journalists as well as instances when journalists were abducted and tortured, which were not followed by a proper investigation. According to the same source, the number of instances when journalists – as well as lawyers and dissidents – were ‘targeted, murdered, or detained’ by the Russian authorities was growing.²²² In September 2022, a former journalist Ivan Safronov, arrested in July 2020, was sentenced to 22 years in prison for ‘high treason’ allegedly committed during his employment with the Russian Space Agency (Roskosmos).²²³

In 2021, the situation of independent media and journalists significantly deteriorated.²²⁴ Many journalists and media professionals left the country, as they have been ‘a target of systematic and intentional pressure from Russian authorities and were declared “foreign agents”’.²²⁵ In

²¹⁴ Alexander Pomazuev, Online interview with EUAA, 9 November 2022

²¹⁵ CoE, Partner organisations to the Council of Europe Platform to Promote the Protection of Journalism and Safety of Journalists, Annual Report 2022, Defending Press Freedom in Times of Tension and Conflict, April 2022, [url](#), p. 5

²¹⁶ IPI, Russia: IPI condemns move to criminalize “false information” on armed forces”, 2 March 2022, [url](#)

²¹⁷ Library of Congress, Russia: Russian President Signs Anti-fake News Laws, 11 April 2019, [url](#)

²¹⁸ IPI, Russian journalists face fines and probes amid creeping censorship, 25 June 2020, [url](#); IPI, New ‘fake news’ law stifles independent reporting in Russia on COVID-19, 8 May 2020, [url](#)

²¹⁹ IPI, With new foreign agent labels, Russia steps up attack on independent media, 24 August 2021, [url](#)

²²⁰ New York Times (The), Several Western news organizations suspend operations in Russia, 5 March 2022, [url](#)

²²¹ Washington Post (The), Here are 10 critics of Vladimir Putin who died violently or in suspicious ways, 23 March 2017, [url](#)

²²² UN OHCHR, Human Rights Committee Considers Report of the Russian Federation in the Absence of a Delegation, Experts Raise Issues on the Persecution of Journalists and the Arrests of Protesters, 20 October 2022, [url](#)

²²³ BBC News, Ivan Safronov Russian reporter who rejected deal gets 22-year jail sentence, 5 September 2022, [url](#)

²²⁴ EP, European Parliament resolution of 7 April 2022 on the increasing repression in Russia, including the case of Alexei Navalny (2022/2622(RSP)), [url](#); AI, Russia: Authorities launch witch-hunt to catch anyone sharing anti-war views, 30 March 2022, [url](#)

²²⁵ EEAS, EU Annual Report on Human Rights and Democracy in the World, 2021 Country Updates, 19 April 2022, [url](#), p. 59





Chechnya, Ramzan Kadyrov has directly threatened an investigative journalist of the independent news outlet Novaya Gazeta in January 2022,²²⁶ calling Novaya Gazeta and the independent TV channel Dozhd TV ‘enemy media’ and journalists working there ‘terrorists’.²²⁷

In the wake of Russia’s war against Ukraine, the government passed a new set of laws (see chapter [1.2 Legal context](#)), aiming at silencing dissent and independent media,²²⁸ while the federal media regulator, Roskomnadzor (Federal Service for Supervision of Communications, Information Technology and Mass Media)²²⁹ demanded that media outlets would use solely information from official sources for their reporting, under the threat of fines and having their websites blocked.²³⁰ In practice, the media has been banned from using the terms ‘war’, ‘invasion’, or ‘assault’ when describing the situation in Ukraine.²³¹ According to HRW, the new legislation can also be seen as a *de facto* ban of independent war reporting and protesting the war, as media outlets may be fined for reporting against the official narrative about Russia’s military actions in Ukraine.²³² On 21 September 2022, following the announcement of the ‘partial’ mobilisation, Roskomnadzor issued a statement warning the media on ‘the need to use information and data obtained exclusively from federal and regional executive authorities’ when reporting mobilisation activities, adding that ‘the dissemination of false information entails liability under Article 13.15 of the Code of Administrative Offences’. Furthermore, Roskomnadzor stated that the dissemination of false information on the Internet entails the immediate blocking of such materials.²³³

In August 2022, it was reported that more than 500 journalists had left Russia, most of them since the beginning of the Russia’s invasion in Ukraine,²³⁴ while almost all of Russia’s leading independent media outlets have based themselves abroad.²³⁵ After first revoking its print media licence,²³⁶ on 15 September 2022, the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation revoked the online media licence of Novaya Gazeta, one of the most reputable Russian independent media outlets. The paper had already suspended all its activities within the country in March 2022 and some of the paper’s journalists have set up an online outlet in Europe, which is also blocked in Russia.²³⁷ Research by Top10VPN.com, an independent

²²⁶ AI, Stand with the Russian journalist Elena Milashina, n.d., [url](#)

²²⁷ CPJ, Investigative reporter Elena Milashina flees Russia after threats from Chechen leader, 8 February 2022, [url](#)

²²⁸ IPI, Russia: War censorship laws continue to suffocate independent media, 21 June 2022, [url](#)

²²⁹ Russian Federation, Federal Service for Supervision of Communications, Information Technology and Mass Media, n.d., [url](#)

²³⁰ OSCE, Media Freedom Representative strongly denounces Russian authorities’ restriction on freedom of the media and freedom of information, 24 February 2022, [url](#); Russia, Roskomnadzor, Вниманию средств массовой информации и иных информационных ресурсов [To the attention of the media and other information resources], 24 February 2022, [url](#); Meduza, The long arm of Roskomnadzor. How Russia’s federal censor extends its power into Central Asia, 11 October 2022 [url](#)

²³¹ Moscow Times (The), Russia Bans Media Outlets From Using Words ‘War,’ ‘Invasion’, 26 February 2022, [url](#); DW, Viral protests: Russians continue to denounce war, risking imprisonment, 16 March 2022, [url](#); Frontline Defenders, Escalating Crackdown on human rights defenders and organisations, 19 April 2022, [url](#)

²³² HRW, Russia Criminalizes Independent War Reporting, Anti-War Protests, 7 March 2022, [url](#)

²³³ Russian Federation, Roskomnadzor, To the attention of the media and other information resources, 21 September 2022, [url](#)

²³⁴ Proekt, A Guide to Russian Media in the Times of Total Censorship, 15 August 2022, [url](#)

²³⁵ BBC News, Exiled Russian journalists challenge Kremlin censorship, 10 October 2022, [url](#)

²³⁶ AFP, Russia revokes print licence of independent paper, jails ex-reporter for treason, 5 September 2022

²³⁷ Reuters, Russia revokes independent Novaya Gazeta’s last media licence, 15 September 2022, [url](#)





Virtual Private Network (VPN) review website,²³⁸ showed that since the beginning of the war and as of 11 October 2022, 3 470 websites have been blocked in Russia due to having reported or hosted content related to the Russia's invasion in Ukraine. The most known among these include Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Google News, BBC News, NPR, Die Welt, AOL, Meduza, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Voice of America, Amnesty International and Chess.com. Out of the 3 470 blocked websites, 2 783 were news sites.²³⁹

During the reference period, there were reports on cases of journalists being prevented from reporting on protests,²⁴⁰ including anti-mobilisation protests,²⁴¹ police visits to their homes, journalists being forcibly sent to psychiatric hospitals,²⁴² and arrests and detentions while covering protests and gatherings.²⁴³ At least 27 journalists were reportedly arrested while covering anti-mobilisation protests between 21 and 24 September 2022, the majority of them were wearing press vests and had professional press cards.²⁴⁴ RFE/RL freelance correspondent was sentenced to five days in jail in Makhachkala (Dagestan) on charges of participation in an unsanctioned rally,²⁴⁵ another journalist was reportedly charged with participation in a protest and disobeying police in Korolyov in the Moscow region and imprisoned for seven days.²⁴⁶ On 2 November 2022, Dagestan Supreme Court overturned the sentence of a Meduza journalist to a five days in jail after the journalist was 'arrested on administrative charges of disorderly conduct' during covering protests in Makhachkala in September.²⁴⁷

Journalists working for independent media reported that their properties were vandalised, including painting of the letter 'Z' (a reference to the Russian armed forces in Ukraine) on the doors of their homes, as well as threatening messages.²⁴⁸ There were also reports of journalists being attacked by unidentified people, such as Dmitry Muratov, the editor-in-chief of Novaya Gazeta,²⁴⁹ and a journalist of the news site Caucasian Knot, Badma Byurchiev.²⁵⁰

²³⁸ Top10VPN.com is an independent VPN review website founded in 2016 and dedicated to internet privacy, security and freedom through testing, research and investigations. See: Top10VPN.com, About us, n.d., [url](#)

²³⁹ Top10VPN.com, Websites Blocked in Russia Since Ukraine Invasion, 11 October 2022, [url](#)

²⁴⁰ HRW, Russia: Brutal Arrests and Torture, Ill-Treatment of Anti-War Protesters, 9 March 2022, [url](#); HRW, Russia: Arrests, Harassment of Ukraine War Dissidents, 24 March 2022, [url](#)

²⁴¹ RSF, At least eight Russian journalists arrested while covering anti-mobilisation protests, 23 September 2022, [url](#)

²⁴² RFE/RL, Russian Journalist Accused Of Discrediting Army Sent To Psychiatric Hospital, 3 July 2022, [url](#)

²⁴³ HRW, Russia: Arrests, Harassment of Ukraine War Dissidents, 24 March 2022, [url](#); Agora and Network Freedoms, Россия: права человека на военном положении [Russia: Human Rights under the Martial Law: The first month of the armed conflict in Ukraine], March 2022, [url](#), p. 5; CPJ, Russian journalist Gleb Sokolov briefly detained while covering 1-man protest in Moscow, 29 March 2022, [url](#); OVD-Info, Cracked Heads and Tasers: Results of the March 6th Anti-War Protests, 7 March 2022, [url](#); HRW, Russia: Arrests, Harassment of Ukraine War Dissidents, 24 March 2022, [url](#)

²⁴⁴ IPI, Russia: Over two dozen journalists detained while reporting on anti-mobilization protests, 27 September 2022, [url](#)

²⁴⁵ RFE/RL, RFE/RL Freelance Correspondent Jailed For Five Days In Russia's Daghestan, Says Lawyer, 28 September 2022, [url](#)

²⁴⁶ CPJ, Russian journalists arrested, detained, charged, summonsed during anti-mobilization protests, 26 September 2022, [url](#)

²⁴⁷ Meduza, Dagestan Supreme Court overturns arrest of Meduza journalist Vladimir Sevrinovsky, 2 November 2022, [url](#)

²⁴⁸ HRW, Russia: Arrests, Harassment of Ukraine War Dissidents, 24 March 2022, [url](#)

²⁴⁹ RFE/RL, Russian Nobel Laureate Muratov Doused With Red Paint by Unknown Attacker, 7 April 2022, [url](#)

²⁵⁰ OVD-info, Хроника политических преследований в сентябре 2022 года: главное [Chronicle of Political Persecution in September 2022: Essentials], 8 October 2022, [url](#)





Since the start of the war, there has been a significant number of criminal and administrative charges brought against journalists and media professionals,²⁵¹ including bloggers.²⁵² Such was the case of Marina Ovsyannikova, who protested against the war by holding an anti-war placard on live TV in March 2022.²⁵³ Ovsyannikova had to pay several fines, after being found guilty for ‘discrediting’ the Russian military forces, charged with organising an ‘unauthorised public event’ as well as for supporting the jailed opposition politician Ilya Yashin via Facebook.²⁵⁴ Additionally, she was accused of spreading ‘fake news’ about Russian army, facing up to 10 years in prison. In October 2022, Ovsyannikova announced she fled house arrest and left the country.²⁵⁵

Alexander Pomazuev, in his interview with EUAA, noted that the Russian authorities did not make any distinction between political opponents and journalists and treated them in the same way.²⁵⁶ He added that high profile journalists and political activists were systematically overwatched by the special police forces, called Centre E²⁵⁷ (Centre for Combating Extremism²⁵⁸), which was used to pressure political opposition. According to the source, the most prominent political figures were overwatched by FSB, while for local and not well-known journalists, bloggers, and activists there was no systematic monitoring. However, the source noted that if they express their criticism publicly and regularly, even on social media, they might be reported to the authorities by members of the community, ‘which is enough for prosecution.’ The next actions by the authorities in these cases, according to the source, ‘depend on how busy public prosecutors are and how relevant a particular case is for their internal statistics.’²⁵⁹

After the mobilisation order, there were reports of journalists being summoned at military registration offices to provide documents for possible conscription.²⁶⁰ For information on mobilisation and conscription, see [EUAA COI Report, Russian Federation, Military service, December 2022](#).

2.3. Human rights defenders and activists

Reprisals against human rights defenders and activists in Russia were already ‘widespread’ before 24 February 2022²⁶¹, with reports of authorities harassing, smearing and penalising this

²⁵¹ OSCE, OSCE Media Freedom Representative strongly deplores the continued practice of judicial persecution of journalists in Russia, 15 August 2022, [url](#)

²⁵² Caucasian Knot, Novorossiysk blogger Alibekov recognized as a political prisoner, 3 November 2022, [url](#)

²⁵³ Guardian (The), ‘They’re lying to you’: Russian TV employee interrupts news broadcast, 14 March 2022, [url](#)

²⁵⁴ Euronews (with AFP), Marina Ovsyannikova: Russian journalist who held TV protest over Ukraine war given new fine, 16 August 2022, [url](#), accessed 22 November 2022

²⁵⁵ Reuters, Ex-journalist accused of “fake news” on Ukraine war has fled Russia – lawyer, 17 October 2022, [url](#)

²⁵⁶ Alexander Pomazuev, Online interview with EUAA, 9 November 2022

²⁵⁷ Alexander Pomazuev, Online interview with EUAA, 9 November 2022

²⁵⁸ For more information on Centre E and its activities, see: Open Democracy, The dark doings of Russia’s Centre E, 28 August 2012, [url](#); Meduza, What is Center E? A former agent for Russia’s secretive Anti-Extremism Center explains how ‘eshniki’ crack down on protesters and prosecute online activity, 29 August 2019, [url](#)

²⁵⁹ Alexander Pomazuev, Online interview with EUAA, 9 November 2022

²⁶⁰ CPJ, Russian journalists arrested, detained, charged, summonsed during anti-mobilization protests, 26 September 2022, [url](#); Reuters, Russian women pay the price in protests against Putin’s war, 17 October 2022, [url](#)

²⁶¹ AI, Amnesty International Report 2021/22, The state of the world’s human rights, 29 March 2022, [url](#)





group and other critics.²⁶² Along with hundreds of journalists, human rights organisations and defenders were registered as ‘foreign agents’, and targeted and/or dissolved as a result.²⁶³ Human rights defenders were also targeted in the North Caucasus, particularly in Chechnya and Ingushetia, amid a climate of impunity.²⁶⁴ In Chechnya, there were reports of fabrication of evidence, enforced disappearances and torture of human rights defenders and their relatives.²⁶⁵

After Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, the crackdown on civil society groups, human rights defenders and activists ‘dramatically’ worsened.²⁶⁶ Various sources reported on increased targeting from the state authorities,²⁶⁷ including reports of police raids and searches,²⁶⁸ cases of anti-war and human rights activists being forcibly sent to psychiatric hospitals,²⁶⁹ death threats,²⁷⁰ arrests and detention.²⁷¹

In April 2022, Russian authorities revoked the registration for 15 foreign human rights organisations, including AI and HRW.²⁷² Memorial, a prominent Russian Human Rights NGO and winner of the 2022 Nobel Peace Prize, was eventually dissolved by the authorities in April 2022,²⁷³ after already being targeted in the past for violating the ‘foreign agent’ legislation and

²⁶² EEAS, EU Annual Report on Human Rights and Democracy in the World, 2021 Country Updates, 19 April 2022, [url](#), p. 59; HRW, World Report 2022, Russia – Events of 2021, 13 January 2022, [url](#)

²⁶³ UN OHCHR, Human Rights Committee Considers Report of the Russian Federation in the Absence of a Delegation, Experts Raise Issues on the Persecution of Journalists and the Arrests of Protesters, 20 October 2022, [url](#)

²⁶⁴ UN OHCHR, Human Rights Committee Considers Report of the Russian Federation in the Absence of a Delegation, Experts Raise Issues on the Persecution of Journalists and the Arrests of Protesters, 20 October 2022, [url](#)

²⁶⁵ EEAS, EU Annual Report on Human Rights and Democracy in the World, 2021 Country Updates, 19 April 2022, [url](#), p. 59

²⁶⁶ UN OHCHR, Russia: Human rights experts condemn civil society shutdown, 13 July 2022, [url](#)

²⁶⁷ UN OHCHR, Human Rights Committee Considers Report of the Russian Federation in the Absence of a Delegation, Experts Raise Issues on the Persecution of Journalists and the Arrests of Protesters, 20 October 2022, [url](#); CoE, Russian authorities should stop the unprecedented crackdown on freedoms of expression, assembly and association in the country, 7 March 2022, [url](#); HRW, Russia: Arrests, Harassment of Ukraine War Dissidents, 24 March 2022, [url](#); OVD-info, Хроника политических преследований в сентябре 2022 года: главное [Chronicle of Political Persecution in September 2022: Essentials], 8 October 2022, [url](#)

²⁶⁸ CoE, Russian authorities should stop the unprecedented crackdown on freedoms of expression, assembly and association in the country, 7 March 2022, [url](#); OVD-Info, В нескольких регионах силовики пришли с обысками к правозащитникам, активистам и журналистам [In several regions, law enforcement officers searched the homes of human rights defenders, activists, and journalists], 5 March 2022, updated 8 March 2022, [url](#); HRW, Russia: Arrests, Harassment of Ukraine War Dissidents, 24 March 2022, [url](#)

²⁶⁹ RFE/RL, Russian Court Cancels Ruling Extending Forced Psychiatric Care For Anti-Putin Shaman, 0 September 2022, [url](#); OVD-Info, В Карелии суд отправил в психиатрическую больницу женщину, преследуемую из-за антивоенных постов [In Karelia, a court sent a woman persecuted because of anti-war posts to a psychiatric hospital], 10 June 202, [url](#)

²⁷⁰ AI, Russia: Politician threatens to decapitate family members of Chechen activist, 2 February 2022, [url](#)

²⁷¹ OVD-Info, Cracked Heads and Tasers: Results of the March 6th Anti-War Protests, 7 March 2022, [url](#); HRW, Russia: Arrests, Harassment of Ukraine War Dissidents, 24 March 2022, [url](#); OMCT, Russia: Judicial harassment against prominent rights defenders Oleg Orlov and Svetlana Gannushkina, 8 March 2022, [url](#)

²⁷² RFE/RL, Russia Revokes Registrations Of Pro-Democracy, Human Rights Groups, 9 April 2022, [url](#)

²⁷³ UN OHCHR, Human Rights Committee Considers Report of the Russian Federation in the Absence of a Delegation, Experts Raise Issues on the Persecution of Journalists and the Arrests of Protesters, 20 October 2022, [url](#); OMCT, Russia: Dissolution of Human Rights Center “Memorial”, 5 April 2022, [url](#); RFE/RL, Memorial Human Rights Group Says Court Rejected Appeal Against Forced Closure, 5 April 2022, [url](#)





for 'justifying terrorism and extremism'.²⁷⁴ In March 2022, the offices of Memorial were vandalised.²⁷⁵

In May 2022, Yury Dmitriev, a human rights activist, historian, and head of the local branch of Memorial in the Russian region of Karelia,²⁷⁶ who was arrested in 2016 on pornography charges,²⁷⁷ was sent to Correctional Colony No. 18 in the town of Potma in Mordovia, to serve his 15-year prison term. This place is historically known for harbouring some of the most brutal prison conditions in Russia.²⁷⁸

Lawyers

Lawyers were reportedly increasingly targeted since the beginning of Russia's invasion in Ukraine including by being denied access to clients detained at police stations in relation to anti-war activities, and by being denied representing their clients at court hearings.²⁷⁹ Some human rights lawyers were stripped of their professional licence, without being given the opportunity to object. Some of them were well-known lawyers representing Crimean Tatar activists and Ukrainian political prisoners.²⁸⁰

Additionally, there were reports of lawyers being arrested for assisting alleged victims of political repression, including in Crimea.²⁸¹ Among these was the case of Dmitry Talantov, the chairman of the Attorneys' Chamber in Russia's Udmurtia region and also the lawyer for Ivan Safronov, sentenced to 22 years for high treason. Arrested and sent in pre-trial detention in Moscow in June 2022 for criticising Russian government and military forces, Talantov faces up to 15 years in prison if convicted.²⁸² Aggravated charges have been brought against him in the meantime.²⁸³ By the time of finalising this report, Dmitry Talantov remained in pre-trial detention,²⁸⁴ and his trial was planned to be held in his native Udmurtia.²⁸⁵

Following the mobilisation order in September 2022, Russian media reported on a letter circulating online, from the Military Commissioner of Moscow and addressed to the president

²⁷⁴ AI, Russia: Closure of human rights group highlights accelerating attacks on civil society, 29 December 2021, [url](#)

²⁷⁵ HRW, Russia: Arrests, Harassment of Ukraine War Dissidents, 24 March 2022, [url](#)

²⁷⁶ Pen America, Yury Dmitriev, n.d., [url](#)

²⁷⁷ Memorial, The case of Yuri Dmitriev. Timeline 2016-2021, n.d., [url](#)

²⁷⁸ RFE/RL, Noted Russian Historian Arrives At Penal Colony In Mordovia To Serve 15-Year Sentence, 10 May 2022, [url](#); OVD-info, Хроника политических преследований в сентябре 2022 года: главное [Chronicle of Political Persecution in September 2022: Essentials], 8 October 2022, [url](#)

²⁷⁹ UN OHCHR, Human Rights Committee Considers Report of the Russian Federation in the Absence of a Delegation, Experts Raise Issues on the Persecution of Journalists and the Arrests of Protesters, 20 October 2022, [url](#)

²⁸⁰ FIDH, Occupied Crimea: Human rights lawyers stripped of professional licences, 19 August 2022, [url](#)

²⁸¹ UN OHCHR, Human Rights Committee Considers Report of the Russian Federation in the Absence of a Delegation, Experts Raise Issues on the Persecution of Journalists and the Arrests of Protesters, 20 October 2022, [url](#); FIDH, Occupied Crimea: Human rights lawyers stripped of professional licences, 19 August 2022, [url](#)

²⁸² RFE/RL, Noted Lawyer Charged Over His Stance On Russia's Invasion Of Ukraine, 15 September 2022, [url](#)

²⁸³ Frontline Defenders, Aggravated Charges against human rights lawyer Dmitry Talantov, 22 September 2022, [url](#)

²⁸⁴ Kommersant, Защитнику Ивана Сафронова собрали коллекцию фейков [The defender of Ivan Safronov collected a collection of fakes], 16 November 2022, [url](#)

²⁸⁵ BBC Monitoring, Summary of Russian press for Wednesday 16 November 2022, 16 November 2022





of the Moscow Bar Association, Igor Polyakov, warning that providing legal assistance for the purpose of draft evasion would lead to criminal prosecution of lawyers.²⁸⁶

LGBTIQ rights activists

Laws and policies towards LGBTIQ²⁸⁷ persons in Russia were described as discriminatory²⁸⁸ and in breach of human rights standards before the beginning of the Russia's invasion in Ukraine.²⁸⁹ The associate director of Human Rights Watch's Europe and Asia Division, Tanya Lokshina, explained that 'it's ok', being gay 'as long as you hide it, as long as you do not speak' however, 'if you speak up...it becomes a very serious problem'.²⁹⁰ Discriminatory laws²⁹¹ (i.e. laws against the spread of so called 'gay propaganda'²⁹²) have impacted the possibilities for individuals and organisations to advocate for LGBTIQ persons' rights. Moreover, there have been cases in which the authorities tried to dissolve human rights groups advocating for LGBTIQ rights, arguing that their activities were against 'traditional values' and breaching the 'gay propaganda' law.²⁹³ In Chechnya, there were allegations of verbal and physical violence, mass abductions, arbitrary arrests, detentions and torture by the authorities towards members of the LGBTIQ community.²⁹⁴

In April 2022, a court dissolved the NGO Charitable Foundation Sphere, a LGBTIQ rights group, linked to the Russian LGBT Network,²⁹⁵ the largest LGBT+ human rights organisation in the country.²⁹⁶ After a failed attempt to disband both NGOs in February 2022, Charitable Foundation Sphere was shut down for 'illegally carrying out political activities' under the guise of a charity.²⁹⁷

On 24 November 2022, a new bill imposing further restrictions on activities aimed at promoting LGBTIQ rights²⁹⁸ was passed by Russia's lower house of parliament²⁹⁹ (see chapter

²⁸⁶ Novaya Gazeta Europe, «Как военкоматы будут определять ненадлежащее использование призывниками их жизни» [“How will military registration and enlistment offices determine the improper use of their lives by conscripts”], 25 September 2022, [url](#); Moscow News Agency [Telegram], 23 September 2022, [url](#)

²⁸⁷ This term is used in accordance with the EU policy strategy, available at [url](#), which refers to sexual and gender minorities as: lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, non-binary, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ) persons. In line with EASO COI Research Guide on LGBTIQ, available at [url](#), other acronyms (GBT, LGBT, LGBT+, etc.) are used when referencing sources that use these acronyms.

²⁸⁸ EEAS, EU Annual Report on Human Rights and Democracy in the World, 2021 Country Updates, 19 April 2022, [url](#), p. 59

²⁸⁹ AI, Russia: European Court of Human Rights rules ban on same-sex unions violates human rights, 13 July 2021, [url](#)

²⁹⁰ NBC news, Russia makes failed attempt to shut down prominent LGBTQ rights group, 11 February 2022, [url](#)

²⁹¹ EEAS, EU Annual Report on Human Rights and Democracy in the World, 2021 Country Updates, 19 April 2022, [url](#), p. 59

²⁹² ILGA-Europe, Annual Review 2022, 14 February 2022, [url](#), pp. 122-123

²⁹³ AI, Russia: Frontline group LGBT-Network and human rights lawyers branded “foreign agents”, 9 November 2021, [url](#); HRW, Russian Government Seeks Closure of LGBT Rights Group, 9 February 2022 [url](#)

²⁹⁴ UN OHCHR, Human Rights Committee Considers Report of the Russian Federation in the Absence of a Delegation, Experts Raise Issues on the Persecution of Journalists and the Arrests of Protesters, 20 October 2022, [url](#)

²⁹⁵ Open Democracy, Russia's biggest LGBT+ group has been shut down. But we're going nowhere, 22 April 2022, [url](#)

²⁹⁶ Russian LGBT Network, webpage, [url](#)

²⁹⁷ PinkNews, Russian courts liquidate and dissolve life-saving LGBT+ rights charity in yet another sinister move, 21 April 2022, [url](#); NBCNews, Russian court dissolves country's main LGBTQ rights organization, 26 April 2022, [url](#)

²⁹⁸ AP, Russian lawmakers vet new bill against LGBTQ 'propaganda', 27 October 2022, [url](#)

²⁹⁹ DW, Russian lawmakers ban 'LGBT propaganda' among adults, 24 November 2022, [url](#)





1.2 Legal context). No information could be found among all sources consulted within the timeframe of this report regarding the impact that such bill has had on LGBTIQ persons and LGBTIQ rights' groups.

2.4. Protesters

Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine anti-war protests broke out in many Russian cities and towns.³⁰⁰ A new round of protests took place across the country following Putin's 'partial mobilisation' order on 21 September 2022.³⁰¹ Anti-mobilisation protests were reported in various federal subjects, including in Dagestan,³⁰² Siberia,³⁰³ Kabardino-Balkarian Republic (KBR), and Chechnya³⁰⁴. Most anti-mobilisation demonstrators were staged by women who took the streets, blocking roads, scuffling with police to protest the drafting of their husbands or sons.³⁰⁵ For information regarding the treatment of protesters during the period 24 February 2022 to 2 June 2022, please see [EUAA COI Query Response, Treatment of protesters, journalists, and human rights defenders since the Ukraine invasion, 2 June 2022](#).

In Chechnya, Ramzan Kadyrov issued a statement declaring anti-mobilisation protesters as 'people's enemies', warning that protesters' husbands would be sent to fight in Ukraine.³⁰⁶ However, he later announced that there would be no partial mobilisation in Chechnya.³⁰⁷ Interviewed for this report, a human rights lawyer who wished to remain anonymous stated that, due to the 'absolute dictatorship' in Chechnya, there is scarce information regarding the treatment of dissidents and protesters.³⁰⁸

Dagestan saw some of the largest and most persistent protests.³⁰⁹ The largest rallies were held on 25 and 26 September 2022 in Makhachkala and were suppressed by authorities, resulting in mass detentions.³¹⁰

³⁰⁰ RFE/RL, Police Break Up Anti-War Protests in Russia, 24 February 2022, [url](#); Guardian (The), Anti-war protests across Russia – in pictures, 25 February 2022, [url](#); HRW, Russia Criminalizes Independent War Reporting, Anti-War Protests, 7 March 2022, [url](#); OVD-info, Протест против войны с Украиной: истории задержанных [Protest Against the War with Ukraine: Stories of Detainees], 2 March 2022, [url](#)

³⁰¹ Reuters, Russia calls up 300,000 reservists, says 6,000 soldiers killed in Ukraine 21 September 2022, [url](#); Guardian (The), Kremlin attempts to calm Russian fury over chaotic mobilization, 1 September 2022, [url](#); OVD-Info, Списки задержанных в связи с акциями против мобилизации 21 сентября [Lists of detainees in connection with actions against mobilization on September 21], 21 September 2022, [url](#); RFE/RL, More Than 1,300 Detained In Russia After Putin's Partial Military Mobilization Sparks Protest, 22 September 2022, [url](#)

³⁰² New York Times (The), At least 745 people are detained in protests across Russia, 24 September 2022, [url](#); Caucasian Knot, Dagestan chooses violence against mobilization opponents, 29 September 2022, [url](#)

³⁰³ New York Times (The), At least 745 people are detained in protests across Russia, 24 September 2022, [url](#)

³⁰⁴ Caucasian Knot, Dagestan chooses violence against mobilization opponents, 29 September 2022, [url](#); Caucasian Knot, Eyewitnesses report details of suppressing rally against mobilization in Grozny, 22 September 2022, [url](#)

³⁰⁵ RFE/RL, Join, Flee, Or Resist: Russia Pushed To The Brink Amid Putin's Chaotic Mobilization Order, 2 October 2022, [url](#)

³⁰⁶ Caucasian Knot, After rally, Kadyrov declares opponents of mobilization enemies of people, 22 September 2022, [url](#); Caucasian Knot, Dagestan chooses violence against mobilization opponents, 29 September 2022, [url](#)

³⁰⁷ Caucasian Knot, Kadyrov cancels mobilization in Chechnya, 23 September 2022, [url](#); Caucasian Knot, Dagestan chooses violence against mobilization opponents, 29 September 2022, [url](#)

³⁰⁸ Human rights lawyer, Online interview with EUAA, 11 November 2022

³⁰⁹ RFE/RL, 'Inevitable' Conflict: In Dagestan, Kremlin's Mobilization Inflames Ethnic Tensions, 2 October 2022, [url](#)

³¹⁰ Caucasian Knot, Dagestan chooses violence against mobilization opponents, 29 September 2022, [url](#)





Anti-war protests since the Ukraine invasion have taken the forms of solitary pickets, demonstrations, spontaneously organised rallies, or individual actions, such as wearing anti-war symbols or putting anti-war slogans on clothing and bags,³¹¹ or posting anti-war stickers in grocery stores.³¹² Although the majority of protests were peaceful, there were also reports of military and administrative buildings, including registration and enlistment offices being attacked and set on fire in several regions.³¹³ After the mobilisation order, such incidents were reported to occur more frequently.³¹⁴

These anti-war and anti-mobilisation protests were regularly met with police violence,³¹⁵ mass³¹⁶ and arbitrary detentions of protesters, activists,³¹⁷ and journalists.³¹⁸ There were also reports of home searches of people taking part in protests,³¹⁹ as well as reports of harassment by unknown perpetrators,³²⁰ including receiving insults and seeing paintings of the letter 'Z', a rallying symbol in support of Russian armed forces in Ukraine, on their apartment doors.³²¹

Arrests and detentions of anti-war protesters were reported in various cities across Russia³²² for reasons such as, wearing clothing in colours of the Ukrainian flag,³²³ wearing green ribbons

³¹¹ Agora and Network Freedoms, Россия: права человека на военном положении [Russia: Human Rights under the Martial Law: The first month of the armed conflict in Ukraine], March 2022, [url](#), p. 4

³¹² PBS, She Posted Anti-War Stickers in A Russian Grocery Store. She Now Faces Up to 10 Years in Prison, 1 November 2022, [url](#)

³¹³ UN OHCHR, Arrests in Russia at protests over troop mobilization, 27 September 2022, [url](#); RFE/RL, More Russian Military Enlistment Buildings Targeted In Possible Sign Of War Protest, 15 May 2022, [url](#); Kyiv Post, Russian Military Registration and Enlistment Offices on Fire, 22 September 2022, [url](#)

³¹⁴ OVD-info, Хроника политических преследований в сентябре 2022 года: главное [Chronicle of Political Persecution in September 2022: Essentials], 8 October 2022, [url](#)

³¹⁵ Civil Rights Defenders, "Human rights are practically seen as an "enemy's value.", 23 March 2022, [url](#); RFE/RL, Police Break Up Anti-War Protests in Russia, 24 February 2022, [url](#); DW, Cracking down on peace: How Russian anti-war protesters face persecution, 20 April 2022, [url](#); OVD-info, Хроника политических преследований в сентябре 2022 года: главное [Chronicle of Political Persecution in September 2022: Essentials], 8 October 2022, [url](#)

³¹⁶ OVD-Info, Хроника политических преследований в сентябре 2022 года: главное [Chronicle of Political Persecution in September 2022: Essentials], 8 October 2022 [url](#)

³¹⁷ HRW, Russia Criminalizes Independent War Reporting, Anti-War Protests, 7 March 2022, [url](#); HRW, Russia: Arrests, Harassment of Ukraine War Dissidents, 24 March 2022, [url](#)

³¹⁸ HRW, Russia: Arrests, Harassment of Ukraine War Dissidents, 24 March 2022, [url](#)

³¹⁹ New York Times (The), At least 745 people are detained in protests across Russia, 24 September 2022, [url](#); OVD-Info, В Москве проходят массовые обыски по делу о «фейках» про армию [In Moscow mass searches are conducted related to army fake news], 2 June 2022, [url](#)

³²⁰ Washington Post (The), Putin's purge of 'traitors' scoops up pensioners, foodies, and peaceniks, 26 March 2022, [url](#)

³²¹ Economist (The), Russian propagandists turn on pro-Western "traitors", 19 March 2022, [url](#); BBC News, War in Ukraine: Anti-war Russians intimidated on their doorsteps, 28 March 2022, [url](#); New York Times (The), Shaken at First, Many Russians Now Rally Behind Putin's Invasion, 1 April 2022, [url](#)

³²² OVD-Info, Cracked Heads and Tasers: Results of the March 6th Anti-War Protests, 7 March 2022, [url](#); OVD-Info, 18-й день войны и протестов: задержания 13 марта [The 18th Day of War and Protests: Detentions on 13 March], 13 March 2022, [url](#);

³²³ DW, Cracking down on peace: How Russian anti-war protesters face persecution, 20 August 2022, [url](#); Agora and Network Freedoms, Россия: права человека на военном положении [Russia: Human Rights under the Martial Law: The first month of the armed conflict in Ukraine], March 2022, [url](#), p. 7; HRW, Russia: Brutal Arrests and Torture, Ill-Treatment of Anti-War Protesters, 9 March 2022, [url](#)





as anti-war symbols,³²⁴ distributing anti-war flyers, drawing graffiti,³²⁵ holding blank signs,³²⁶ and simply passing by anti-war gatherings.³²⁷

After the announcement of the ‘partial’ mobilisation, security forces continued to suppress civil protest with arrests and criminal charges against individuals who expressed dissent.³²⁸ Various sources reported on numerous arrests and detentions during anti-war and anti-mobilisation protests.³²⁹ For instance, on 21 September 2022, in the Siberian city of Novosibirsk, riot police suppressed the protest of a group of people holding hands in a circle and singing an anti-war song. About 70 people were detained. In Tomsk, also in Siberia, a man was arrested for stopping the traffic and screaming ‘A peaceful life for our children’ and ‘Don’t watch television’.³³⁰ At least 27 women were detained during an anti-mobilisation rally on 29 September, which was dispersed by the police in Kyzyl, the capital of Siberian Tyva region.³³¹

On 21 September 2022, the day the ‘partial mobilisation’ order was announced,³³² at least 1 388 people were detained for protests in 43 cities, according to OVD-Info data. The same source noted, however, that the number of detainees in each police department could be higher than the one issued in published lists.³³³ The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN OHCHR) reported that since the mobilisation order and as of 26 September 2022, some 2 377 people were arrested during demonstrations in various areas of the country, although noting that it was unclear how many of those remained in detention.³³⁴ According to data collected by Russian human rights group ODV-Info, 19 403 people have been detained at protests against the war and the mobilisation since 24 February 2022,³³⁵ as of 10 November 2023.³³⁶ Arrests were recorded in 226 locations across Russia and in the Russia-occupied Crimea.³³⁷

Sources reported on excessive use of force by police against protesters during arrests and detention. Some of the accounts of ill-treatment included beating, use of electric shocks,

³²⁴ DW, Cracking down on peace: How Russian anti-war protesters face persecution, 20 August 2022, [url](#)

³²⁵ Agora and Network Freedoms, Россия: права человека на военном положении [Russia: Human Rights under the Martial Law: The first month of the armed conflict in Ukraine], March 2022, [url](#), p. 7; DW, Cracking down on peace: How Russian anti-war protesters face persecution, 20 August 2022, [url](#)

³²⁶ DW, Viral protests: Russians continue to denounce war, risking imprisonment, 16 March 2022, [url](#)

³²⁷ HRW, Russia: Brutal Arrests and Torture, Ill-Treatment of Anti-War Protesters, 9 March 2022, [url](#)

³²⁸ OVD-Info, Хроника политических преследований в сентябре 2022 года: главное [Chronicle of Political Persecution in September 2022: Essentials], 8 October 2022 [url](#)

³²⁹ HRW, Russia: Arrests, Harassment of Ukraine War Dissidents, 24 March 2022, [url](#); Agora and Network Freedoms, Россия: права человека на военном положении [Russia: Human Rights under the Martial Law: The first month of the armed conflict in Ukraine], March 2022, [url](#), p. 7; Washington Post (The), Putin’s purge of ‘traitors’ scoops up pensioners, foodies, and peaceniks, 26 March 2022, [url](#);

³³⁰ New York Times (The), At least 745 people are detained in protests across Russia, 24 September 2022, [url](#)

³³¹ RFE/RL, Police In Russia’s Tyva Disperse Anti-Mobilization Rally, Detain Women, 29 September 2022, [url](#)

³³² Reuters, Russia calls up 300,000 reservists, says 6,000 soldiers killed in Ukraine 21 September 2022, [url](#)

³³³ OVD-Info, Протест против войны с Украиной: истории задержанных [Protest Against the War with Ukraine: Stories of Detainees], 2 March 2022, [url](#)

³³⁴ UN OHCHR, Arrests in Russia at protests over troop mobilization, 27 September 2022, [url](#)

³³⁵ OVD-Info, Homepage, n.d, [url](#)

³³⁶ OVD-Info, Методология подсчета количества задержаний за антивоенную позицию [Methodology for counting the number of arrests for anti-war stance], n.d., Last accessed by EUAA on 16 November 2022, [url](#)

³³⁷ OVD-Info, Сводка антивоенных репрессий. Восемь месяцев войны [Summary of anti-war repressions. eight months of war], October 2022, [url](#). OVD-Info publishes also the lists of detained people by date.





waterboarding, and threats of sexual assault against female detainees.³³⁸ OVD-Info lawyer Daria Korolenko told Reuters that female protesters have been especially vulnerable to the threat of sexual violence, noting that the group documented about 200 cases of women being mistreated in detention, including by depriving them of food or sleep and being threatened with sexual assault.³³⁹ Ill-treatment of detained protesters were also reported in Dagestan, including cases of people being beaten or being refused water after being taken to a police department at Lenin district in the city of Makhachkala (Dagestan).³⁴⁰ According to a UN Human Rights Committee expert, 20 women were detained and beaten by law enforcement officers during protests against the conscription of Chechens in September 2022.³⁴¹

In addition to street protests, other forms of anti-war resistance emerged in Russia, such as hundreds of online groups and communities, which according to research by the Washington Post, currently represent the core of Russia's anti-war movement. Some of these groups include youth movement Vesna, declared as extremist by authorities in September 2022, and Feminist Anti-War Resistance³⁴² (*Feministskoye Antivoennoye Soprotivlenie*, FAS)³⁴³ which operates both inside and outside the country.³⁴⁴ The FAS coordinator was arrested twice before leaving the country in March 2022.³⁴⁵ In April 2022, the non-governmental initiative Teplitsa - Technologies for Social Good (*Teplitsa Sotsial'nyh Tehnologiy*)³⁴⁶ published a list of anti-war movements and initiatives which carry out their anti-war activities online, mainly via Telegram.³⁴⁷

Since the mobilisation order was issued on 21 September 2022, there have been reports of protesters having been handed draft notices after being arrested.³⁴⁸ For information on mobilisation and conscription, see [EUAA COI Report, Russian Federation, Military service, December 2022](#).

³³⁸ HRW, Russia: Brutal Arrests and Torture, Ill-Treatment of Anti-War Protesters, 9 March 2022, [url](#); HRW, Russian Police are Torturing Anti-War Activists, 20 October 2022, [url](#); Civil Rights Defenders, "Human rights are practically seen as an "enemy's value.", 23 March 2022, [url](#);

³³⁹ Reuters, Russian women pay the price in protests against Putin's war, 17 October 2022, [url](#)

³⁴⁰ RFE/RL, Russia Continues Crackdown On Spreading Anti-Mobilization Protests As Draft Criticism Grows, 26 September 2022, [url](#)

³⁴¹ UN OHCHR, Human Rights Committee Considers Report of the Russian Federation in the Absence of a Delegation, Experts Raise Issues on the Persecution of Journalists and the Arrests of Protesters, 20 October 2022, [url](#)

³⁴² Washington Post, Russia's antiwar movement goes far beyond street protests, 18 October 2022, [url](#)

³⁴³ Le Monde, The Russian feminists opposing the war in Ukraine, 25 October 2022, [url](#)

³⁴⁴ Global Voices, 'We were born in a situation of hellish urgency': How the Russian Feminist Anti-War Resistance Movement works, 16 November 2022, [url](#)

³⁴⁵ DW, Russian feminists help men avoid draft, 20 October 2022, [url](#)

³⁴⁶ Teplitsa - Technologies for Social Good (*Teplitsa Sotsial'nyh Tehnologiy*) defines itself as 'an independent project' whose 'mission is to strengthen Russian civil society with smart use of technology through connection with civic activists. See Teplitsa - Technologies for Social Good (*Teplitsa Sotsial'nyh Tehnologiy*), About Teplitsa (O теплице), n.d. [url](#)

³⁴⁷ Teplitsa - Technologies for Social Good (*Teplitsa Sotsial'nyh Tehnologiy*), Telegram-каналы антивоенных движений и инициатив (Telegram channels of anti-war movements and initiatives), 8 April 2022, [url](#);

³⁴⁸ Guardian (The), 'It's a 100% mobilisation': day one of Russia's drive to build its army, 22 September 2022, [url](#); New York Times (The), At least 745 people are detained in protests across Russia, 24 September 2022, [url](#)





2.5. Other voices opposing or criticising the war

In the aftermath of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, various members of civil society, including academics,³⁴⁹ scientists,³⁵⁰ teachers, architects among others, wrote open letters and petitions expressing their disagreement towards the war and actions of the Russian armed forces, or turned to social media to express their dissent.³⁵¹ Russian high-level officials labelled people expressing anti-war opinions as ‘traitors’,³⁵² and authorities immediately responded by tightening repression and censorship. People who expressed dissent are reported to have faced dismissals from their jobs,³⁵³ threats, official warnings, and visits by security forces.³⁵⁴

From 24 February until 24 October 2022, OVD-Info recorded 154 arrests for anti-war posts, 126 arrests for anti-war symbols and 229 arrests related to some other forms of anti-war actions.³⁵⁵

Immediately after the war started, Russian authorities introduced guidelines for teachers to deliver ‘patriotic’ lessons.³⁵⁶ There have been reports of teachers and university professors facing consequences for refusing to follow the guidelines and for expressing their anti-war opinions, including being fired, receiving fines, or being arrested under administrative charges.³⁵⁷ The Guardian reported on the case of a teacher also being criminally prosecuted under the new law related to spreading ‘fake news’ and ‘discrediting the Russian armed forces’.³⁵⁸

A human rights lawyer who wished to remain anonymous told the EUAA that some members of civil society who work with an audience, such as teachers and priests, face more pressure

³⁴⁹ New York Times (The), Russian Academics Aim to Punish Colleagues Who Backed Ukraine Invasion, 27 May 2022, [url](#)

³⁵⁰ Royal Society of Chemistry, More than 600 Russian scientists sign open letter against war with Ukraine, 25 February 2022, [url](#)

³⁵¹ Politico, ‘NO TO WAR’: Russian fury bursts open as Putin bombards Ukraine, 27 February 2022, [url](#);
OVD-Info, Неформальный запрет. Как людей увольняют за антивоенную позицию и как они борются за свои права [Informal ban. How people get fired for being anti-war and how they fight for their rights], 12 July 2022, [url](#)

³⁵² Reuters, Kremlin: many people in Russia are behaving like traitors, 17 March 2022, [url](#); HRW, Russia: Arrests, Harassment of Ukraine War Dissidents, 24 March 2022, [url](#)

³⁵³ OVD-Info, Нет войне – Как российские власти борются с антивоенными протестами [No to war – How Russian authorities are dealing with anti-war protests], Latest updated 14 April 2014 [url](#); OVD-Info, Неформальный запрет. Как людей увольняют за антивоенную позицию и как они борются за свои права [Informal ban. How people get fired for being anti-war and how they fight for their rights], 12 July 2022, [url](#)

³⁵⁴ SWP, Russia on the Road to Dictatorship, 30 April 2022, [url](#), pp. 4-5 ; OVD-Info, Нет войне – Как российские власти борются с антивоенными протестами [No to war – How Russian authorities are dealing with anti-war protests], 14 April 2014, [url](#)

³⁵⁵ OVD-Info, Сводка антивоенных репрессий. Восемь месяцев войны [Summary of anti-war repressions. eight months of war], October 2022, [url](#)

³⁵⁶ Washington Post (The), The invasion of Ukraine has upended Russian education, 14 September 2022, [url](#); OVD-Info, Нет войне - Как российские власти борются с антивоенными протестами [No to war – How Russian authorities are dealing with anti-war protests], Latest updated 14 April 2014 [url](#); Mathers, J. and Edwards, A., Russia: programme of ‘patriotic education’ aims to create next generation of Putin faithful, The Conversation, 21 April 2022, [url](#)

³⁵⁷ AI, Russia: Educators fired, students indoctrinated — academia is the latest victim of the ongoing crackdown, 12 May 2022, [url](#); Business Insider, Russian teachers are being punished for making anti-war comments after their own students reported them, 7 April 2022, [url](#); OVD-Info, Неформальный запрет. Как людей увольняют за антивоенную позицию и как они борются за свои права [Informal ban. How people get fired for being anti-war and how they fight for their rights], 12 July 2022, [url](#)

³⁵⁸ Guardian (The), Russian teacher ‘shocked’ as she faces jail over anti-war speech pupils taped, 6 April 2022, [url](#)





than others. The same source added that teachers are particularly under pressure as they are being supervised by school directors and expected to channel government propaganda to their students. 'If they refuse to do so, they might face disciplinary actions, like being fired or administrative charges, but not criminal charges.'³⁵⁹

As noted by FBK lawyer Alexander Pomazuev, interviewed by EUAA, some of the main educational and cultural institutions in Russia as well as all some of the main social support institutions and legal entities (such as industrial plants etc.) 'may belong to the state directly or to persons formally or informally associated with the state, for example, oligarchs.' Except for a few cultural associations, the same source explained, there is no independence within these bodies and individuals who express opinions contrary to the government's narrative are seen to be against government policy itself. The authorities may also monitor the social media accounts of people working in educational institutions. The main consequence as a result of voicing dissenting opinion 'is to be fired; a more serious consequence could be being prosecuted under administrative procedure', the same source told EUAA.³⁶⁰

In addition to some teachers and professors being reported to the police by their own students or colleagues,³⁶¹ there were reports of passers-by denouncing small business owners who put up anti-war messages in their shop windows.³⁶²

In June 2022, BBC News revealed that employees of the special police unit Centre E,³⁶³ visited the Yeltsin Centre,³⁶⁴ an institution founded in 2015 in Yekaterinburg, with the aim to support educational, research, charitable, and cultural projects.³⁶⁵ According to BBC News, since the beginning of the war, there were many attempts to report the Yeltsin Centre to the authorities.³⁶⁶ Labelled as a hub of 'vile liberalism' by some 'propagandists', the Yeltsin Centre had been accused by local Communist Party members of 'anti-Russian activities'.³⁶⁷

³⁵⁹ Human rights lawyer, Online interview with EUAA, 11 November 2022

³⁶⁰ Alexander Pomazuev, Online interview with EUAA, 9 November 2022

³⁶¹ AI, Russia: Educators fired, students indoctrinated — academia is the latest victim of the ongoing crackdown, 12 May 2022, [url](#)

³⁶² Guardian (The), Russian teacher 'shocked' as she faces jail over anti-war speech pupils taped, 6 April 2022, [url](#)

³⁶³ For more information on Centre E and its activities, see: Open Democracy, The dark doings of Russia's Centre E, 28 August 2012, [url](#); Meduza, What is Center E? A former agent for Russia's secretive Anti-Extremism Center explains how 'eshniki' crack down on protesters and prosecute online activity, 29 August 2019, [url](#)

³⁶⁴ BBC News, Зачем сотрудники центра "Э" пришли в "Ельцин-центр"? [Why did the employees of the "E" center come to the "Yeltsin Center"?], 24 June 2022, [url](#)

³⁶⁵ Raan, Yeltsin Center, n.d [url](#); For the official website of the Yeltsin Centre, see [url](#)

³⁶⁶ BBC News, Зачем сотрудники центра "Э" пришли в "Ельцин-центр"? [Why did the employees of the "E" center come to the "Yeltsin Center"?], 24 June 2022, [url](#)

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Human rights lawyer, online interview with EUAA, 11 November 2022. The source is based in Russia and has first-hand information on implementation of Russian legislation. The contact wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

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Annex 2: Terms of Reference

This report is to focus on the reference period January – November 2022.

1. Political context, including perception of political dissent and opposition

2. Legislation and its implementation

- Freedom of expression
- Freedom of assembly

3. Treatment of specific profiles (country-wide, including in the North Caucasus)

- Political opponents
- Journalists
- Human rights activists (e.g., LGBTIQ activists)
- Protesters
- Others expressing opposition/criticism to the war





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