Resolution on the listing of German NGOs as ‘undesirable organisations’ by Russia and the detention of Andrei Pivovarov

2021/2749(RSP) - 10/06/2021 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 564 votes to 61, with 37 abstentions, a resolution on the listing of German NGOs as ‘undesirable organisations’ by Russia and the detention of Andrei Pivovarov.

The text adopted in plenary was tabled as a joint resolution by the EPP, S&D, Renew, Greens/EFA and ECR groups.

Members recalled that Russian federal law allows the activities of foreign and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to be considered undesirable on Russian territory. NGOs designated as undesirable by the Russian authorities are subject to restrictions on their freedom of association, including the prohibition of their activities and the introduction of criminal and administrative sanctions related to these activities.

‘Foreign agents’ and ‘undesirable NGOs’

Russia has designated numerous international and foreign NGOs as ‘undesirable’. On the 26 May 2021, the Russian Prosecutor General decided to list three German NGOs as ‘undesirable’, which include the Forum Russischsprachiger Europäer e.V., Zentrum für die Liberale Moderne GmbH and Deutsch-Russischer Austausch e.V..

The State Duma, by adopting these bills which include an immediate application of criminal liability, has been targeting the Open Russia civic movement, a networked pro-democracy and human rights structure, which was thereby forced to dissolve in order to protect its activists and supporters from further prosecutions.

On 31 May 2021, at St Petersburg airport, law enforcement officials removed Andrei Pivovarov, former leader of Open Russia, from a Polish LOT plane about to take off, arbitrarily arrested him and two days later remanded him in custody for two months on charges of ‘participation in the activities of an undesirable organisation’, for which he faces up to six years in prison.

Parliament urged the Russian authorities to **release Andrei Pivovarov** immediately and unconditionally, and to drop all charges against him and all other persons prosecuted under the law on ‘undesirable organisations’ or who have been arbitrarily arrested.

The Russian authorities are called upon to:

- stop the criminal prosecution of human rights activists and defenders under the Law on ‘Foreign Agents’;

- repeal the Law on ‘Foreign Agents’ and the Law on ‘Undesirable Organisations’ and to annul the decision of the Russian Prosecutor General to include three German NGOs on the list of ‘Undesirable Organisations’, as well as other foreign NGOs, a total of 34;

- stop creating new special laws introducing new restrictions on independent civil society, the rights and freedoms of peaceful assembly and association, and access to online information;

- review legislative acts used to restrict freedom of expression, including Russian legislation on disinformation campaigns, countering extremism and combating terrorism, and bring these legislative acts into line with international human rights law;

- immediately and unconditionally release all peaceful protesters and other civil society activists and political figures, including Alexei Navalny and those facing spurious criminal charges for simply peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly.

Comprehensive EU strategy towards Russia

In response to the deterioration of the rule of law, fundamental freedoms and human rights in Russia, Members called on the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the institutions to focus on the following points when developing the EU's comprehensive strategy on Russia:

- introduce **new conditionality** in EU-Russia relations aimed at ending Russia's internal repression of political and civil society activists and human rights defenders and, if the situation is not resolved, introducing **new EU sanctions**, for example by ensuring that Russian oligarchs and dignitaries responsible for human rights abuses are no longer able to acquire property, obtain visas, access financial products, etc., in the EU;

- take steps in EU-Russia relations to address the issue of human rights and to maintain unity of action, with a view to coordinating their positions vis-à-vis Russia

- stop strategic projects such as Nord Stream 2 and complement the EU's global human rights sanctions regime with a similar regime to tackle corruption;

- support human rights defenders, independent NGOs and the media, civil society and those defending civil and political liberties in Russia, and consider hosting NGOs threatened or banned in Russia and allowing them to work from EU territory if necessary;

- urgently address the issue of Russia's recent adoption of authoritarian legislation, to be examined in the light of its international obligations to the Council of Europe

- undertake regular human rights impact assessments to ensure that engagement with the Russian authorities does not undermine human rights objectives;

- avoid lending legitimacy to officials who are responsible for human rights violations and repression.

Parliament reminded all EU businesses operating in Russia to be particularly vigilant and to assume their responsibility to respect human rights. It expressed concern that senior European politicians are accepting lucrative contracts with companies owned by or linked to the Kremlin, such as Gazprom or Rosnieft.