



Members of the European Parliament

Herman van Rompuy

President of the European Council

José Manuel Barroso

President of the European Commission

Catherine Ashton

Vice-President of the European Commission/High Representative of the EU

Subject: Intolerable degradation of human rights and the rule of law in Russia

Brussels, 4th September 2013

Honourable President of the European Council Mr Van Rompuy,

Honourable President of the European Commission Mr Barroso,

Honourable Vice-President of the European Commission/High Representative of the European Union Baroness Ashton,

We are extremely concerned that human rights and the rule of law have increasingly come under attack in Russia, to the point that new severe laws now lead directly and at alarming rates to state-sanctioned NGO closures and violence against minorities.

Since the adoption of several laws restricting freedom of expression, assembly and association, notably the 'Foreign Agents' law and bans on the discussion of sexual orientation or gender identity (the federal and regional 'anti-propaganda' laws), numerous organisations reported an increase in violent xenophobic and homophobic attacks.

Several hundred videos have emerged online, showing ultra-nationalist groups beating up and torturing LGBT persons—including teenagers—, migrants and ethnic minorities. Several groups have uploaded disturbing videos of intense humiliation, beatings and torture to Russian social network VKontakte. The videos are senselessly violent¹.

¹ See <http://paper-bird.net/2013/08/11/truths-behind-the-gay-torture-images-from-russia/> for a comprehensive and researched report of these videos.

Russian organisations monitoring those grave violations also face a steady and proactive closing-down campaign. Non-governmental organisations, civil and political activists defending the human rights of women, young people, ethnic minorities, migrants and LGBT people are finding themselves intimidated and threatened by both vigilante groups and the police.

There is ample evidence of unfair trials in which organisations, like *Side-by-Side LGBT Film Festival*, were fined and forced to shut down. *Coming Out Saint Petersburg* was fined the maximum amount under the 'Foreign Agents' law before seeing the sentence annulled by a higher court, but they remain under the threat of a police visit. Remaining organisations are left unable to operate if they don't declare themselves 'foreign agents', subjecting themselves to disabling legal obligations.

These events bear witness to Russia's increasing disrespect for human rights and the rule of law, two pillars of European peace and stability. A genuine political and economic dialogue with Russia can only take place in the context of a shared commitment to the strict observance of the rule of law, and to the universality and indivisibility of human rights.

We hope the seriousness of these concerns and the extreme urgency to quell these grave human rights violations will convince you to raise these concerns firmly during the upcoming G20 summit in Saint Petersburg.

We hope to be informed as to how the issue was raised on this occasion, and trust you will lend this important matter the high attention it deserves.

Yours sincerely,

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