

45th SESSION

CG(2023)45-19
2 October 2023

The plight of anti-war political activists and prisoners of conscience in Russia

Rapporteur¹: Leendert VERBEEK, Netherlands, (R, SOC/G/PD)

Draft resolution (for vote) 2

Summary

Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has been accompanied by an intensified crackdown on dissenters in Russia. The repression of opposition voices and of civil society voices has significantly escalated, and those who have spoken out against the war have been prosecuted using new legislation.

The Congress deplores this escalating repression of opposition activists, stands in solidarity with those who are unjustly imprisoned for expressing their opinions and fighting for Russia's democratic future, and calls, inter alia, for the repeal of all legislation incompatible with the right to freedom of expression.

¹ L: Chamber of Local Authorities / R: Chamber of Regions
EPP/CCE: European People's Party Group in the Congress
SOC: Socialist Group
ILDG: Independent Liberal and Democratic Group
ECR: European Conservatives and Reformists Group
NR: Members not belonging to a political group of the Congress

DRAFT RESOLUTION

1. Since Russia's large-scale military invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, which Russians are legally obliged to call a "Special Military Operation", the prevailing systematic repression of opposition voices and of civil society has significantly escalated.

2. Legislation was passed in March 2022 criminalising the so-called "discrediting" and dissemination of "knowingly false information" about the Russian armed forces. Alexei Gorinov, municipal councillor of the Krasnoselsky District, Moscow, who had spoken against the war during a council session, was the first to be sentenced to seven years' imprisonment under this new legislation. Ilya Yashin, another municipal councillor from the same council as Alexei Gorinov, was also sentenced for "disseminating false information" to eight and a half years in prison.

Councillors from other regions faced the same charges, including Oleg Nepein from Saratov region, who is currently in pre-trial detention, and Anatoly Arseev from Arkhangelsk regions who is currently under criminal prosecution. Many others have been persecuted or have left the country fearing imprisonment.

3. Further legislation has been enacted to restrict demonstrations and the activities of NGOs and civil society activists. Voicing criticism of the war and speaking out against human rights violations became "crimes" for which activists such as Vladimir Kara-Murza, sentenced to 25 years' imprisonment in April 2023, and numerous other human rights defenders, journalists, youth activists and political opponents may now be arrested, prosecuted and convicted.

4. Other critics of the war, while not arrested, have been branded as traitors, spies or foreign agents, with these labels leading in many cases to loss of employment and restrictions placed on their personal lives and those of their families.

5. It is almost impossible to know the true level of domestic support for or opposition to the war, given the prevailing suffocating and toxic atmosphere.

6. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities:

a. deplores and most emphatically condemns the escalating repression, by Russian authorities, of all those who express dissent and criticism;

b. stands in solidarity with all those who are unjustly imprisoned for expressing their opinions, with their families and all those who are currently silenced in Russia;

c. calls for the immediate and unconditional release of all peaceful civic and political activists deprived of liberty in Russia;

d. calls for the repeal of all legislation incompatible with the right to freedom of expression;

e. calls on European cities and regions, and in particular "refugee cities" to extend their protection also to pro-democracy activists fleeing Russia;

f. expresses its hope that democracy can prevail in Russia, thereby bringing peace in Ukraine and safeguarding stability in Europe;

g. instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Russian authorities.