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Russian Federation: Political protests and dissidence in the context of the Ukraine invasion

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ACCORD - Austrian Centre for Country of
Origin & Asylum Research and Documentation

Russian Federation: Political protests and dissidence in the context of the Ukraine invasion

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This publication serves the specific purpose of collating legally relevant information on conditions in countries of origin pertinent to the assessment of claims for asylum. It is not intended to be a general report on human rights conditions. The publication is prepared within a specified time frame on the basis of publicly available documents as well as information provided by experts. All sources are cited and fully referenced.

This publication is not, and does not purport to be, either exhaustive with regard to conditions in the country surveyed, or conclusive as to the merits of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Every effort has been made to compile information from reliable sources; users should refer to the full text of documents cited and assess the credibility, relevance and timeliness of source material with reference to the specific research concerns arising from individual applications.

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Austrian Red Cross/ACCORD
Wiedner Hauptstraße 32
A- 1040 Vienna, Austria

Phone: +43 1 58 900 – 582
E-Mail: accord@redcross.at
Web: <http://www.redcross.at/accord>

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List of Abbreviations

AS KOV	Office of operational interaction
CCTV	Closed-circuit television
CoE	Council of Europe
CoE-CommDH	The Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights
ECHR	European Convention of Human Rights
FSB	Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation
NCO	Non-commercial organisation
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NPO	Non-profit organisation
SORM	System for operative investigative activities
VPN	Virtual private network

1 Legal framework for freedom of assembly and expression

For links leading to laws of the Russian Federation mentioned in section 1 of this publication, as published in Russian on the official portal of legal information (pravo.gov.ru), please refer to [section 1.3](#) of this report.

On 5 May 1998 the Russian Federation ratified the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). The Convention protects freedom of expression under Article 10 (European Convention of Human Rights, 4 November 1950, as amended on 1 August 2021, Article 10), and encompasses political speech as well as government criticism (Beschastna, 2013, pp. 1111-1112). Article 11 of the ECHR guarantees the right to freedom of peaceful assembly (European Convention of Human Rights, 4 November 1950, as amended on 1 August 2021, Article 11). However, on 25 February 2022 the Council of Europe (CoE) suspended Russia's rights of representation in the Committee of Ministers (CoE, 25 February 2022) and on 15 March 2022 the government of the Russian Federation informed the CoE of its withdrawal from the CoE and its intention to denounce the ECHR (CoE, 16 March 2022). On 16 September 2022 the Russian Federation will cease to be a party to the ECHR (CoE, 23 March 2022) and Russian citizens won't be able to apply to the European Court of Human Rights anymore. In April 2022 around 18,000 Russian cases were pending at the European Court of Human Rights (SWP, April 2022, p. 3).

The Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights (CoE-CommDH), an independent, non-judicial institution for the promotion of human rights in Council of Europe member states, in a September 2017 publication explains that the rights to freedom of assembly and freedom of expression are enshrined in the Constitution of the Russian Federation (CoE-CommDH, 5 September 2017, p. 3).

1.1 Freedom of assembly

Article 31 of the Russian Constitution (see [section 1.3.1](#)) proclaims the right to peaceful assembly:

“Citizens of the Russian Federation shall have the right to assemble peacefully, without weapons, hold rallies, mass meetings and demonstrations, marches and pickets.”
(Constitution of the Russian Federation, 12 December 1993, as amended on 1 July 2020, Article 31)

The constitutional right to peaceful assembly is implemented by the Federal Law No. 54 on assemblies, rallies, demonstrations, marches and pickets of 19 June 2004 (see [section 1.3.4](#)) CoE-CommDH, 5 September 2017, p. 4). Federal Law No. 54 rules, among other things, who can and who cannot organise a public event as well as the organiser's duties and liabilities (Federal Law No. 54, 19 June 2004, as amended on 30 December 2020, Article 5). It defines notification requirements (Federal Law No. 54, 19 June 2004, as amended on 30 December 2020, Article 7) and provides general information on the suitability and disqualification of venues for public events. The law also determines the legal applicability for federal laws concerning assemblies, for example conditions for prohibiting or restricting the holding of a public event in specific places can be ruled by federal laws (Federal Law No. 54, 19 June 2004, as amended on 30 December 2020, Article 8).

The international human rights organisation Amnesty International (AI) in a 2021 report on protests in the Russian Federation states that since the introduction of Federal Law. No. 54 in 2004, it has been amended 13 times. According to the publication, the introduced amendments lead to the gradual tightening of restrictions and effectively undermine the Constitutional right to freedom of peaceful assembly (AI, 12 August 2021, p. 5). Imposed restrictions concern “who can organize a protest, where people can protest and when” (AI, 12 August 2021, p. 4). On the Federal Law on meetings, rallies, demonstrations, marches and pickets", the CoE-CommDH notes in 2017:

“An important feature of the 2004 law is that it provides for a notification (uvedomleniye) procedure, rather than requiring the organisers to seek authorisation from the authorities. [...] notification is not required for holding a single-person picket. However, no specific provisions are made in the law for spontaneous assemblies. [...] The 2004 Law on Assemblies does not foresee the possibility for the authorities to refuse a planned event, although it provides that the authorities may suggest a well-founded (obosnovannoye) proposal for an alternative venue or time for the event.” (CoE-CommDH, 5 September 2017, p. 4)

The 2021 AI report concerning the notification requirements observes:

“Requirements for notification of protests or for their relocation have been implemented in such a way as to effectively require people to obtain permission to exercise their right to freedom of peaceful assembly and to give the local authorities wide discretion for refusing the permission, including on vague and arbitrary grounds.” (AI, 12 August 2021, p. 4)

The US Department of State (USDOS), responsible for the foreign affairs of the United States, in its Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2021 with regard to freedom of assembly in the Russian Federation notes:

“The law provides for freedom of assembly, but local authorities restricted this right. [...] Failure to obtain official permission to hold a protest resulted in the demonstration being viewed as unlawful by law enforcement officials, who routinely dispersed such protests. While some public demonstrations took place, on many occasions local officials selectively denied groups permission to assemble or offered alternate venues that were inconveniently or remotely located. Many public demonstrations were restricted or banned due to COVID-19 measures. Each region enforced its own restrictions. Although they do not require official approval, authorities restricted single-person pickets and required that there be at least 164 feet separating protesters from each other. By law police officers may stop a single-person picket to protect the health and safety of the picketer.” (USDOS, 12 April 2022, section 2b)

Freedom House, a US-based non-governmental organisation that conducts research and advocacy on democracy, political freedom and human rights, in its Freedom in the World 2022 report describes the situation concerning freedom of assembly as follows:

“The government restricts freedom of assembly. Overwhelming police responses, the excessive use of force, routine arrests, and harsh fines and prison sentences have

discouraged unsanctioned protests, while pro-Kremlin groups are able to demonstrate freely. Despite the risks, thousands of people have turned out for a series of antigovernment demonstrations in recent years.

It is extremely difficult for groups opposing the Kremlin to obtain permission to hold a protest or rally. At the regional level, extensive location-based restrictions prohibit assemblies in as much as 70 percent of public space. While some of these restrictions have been invalidated over the years, authorities can ban rallies on vaguely defined 'public interest' grounds. Since 2014, nine major legislative amendments have been introduced to curtail freedom of assembly. Some protesters have resorted to single-person pickets to circumvent limits on mass gatherings, but authorities have used a variety of laws and tactics to crack down on the practice in recent years.

The government has invoked public health concerns to tighten restrictions on assembly during the COVID-19 pandemic, but the rules are selectively applied to target critics of the regime." (Freedom House, 28 February 2022, section E1)

The USDOS report on Human Rights Practices 2021 further states:

"The law requires that 'motor rallies' and 'tent city' gatherings in public places receive official permission. It requires gatherings that would interfere with pedestrian or vehicle traffic to receive official agreement 10 days prior to the event; those that do not affect traffic require three days' notice. The law prohibits 'mass rioting,' which includes teaching and learning about the organization of and participation in 'mass riots.' The law allows authorities to prohibit nighttime demonstrations and meetings and to levy fines for violating protest regulations and rules on holding public events." (USDOS, 12 April 2022, section 2b)

In 2020 new laws were adopted that, according to a submission to the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe by the NGOs Human Rights Center Memorial, OVD-Info, Committee against Torture and the Public Verdict Foundation, "additionally restrict freedom of assembly" (Human Rights Center Memorial/OVD-Info/Committee against Torture et al., 26 April 2021, p. 5). Among other things, amendments to Article 267 of the Criminal Code (see [section 1.3.2](#)) were introduced:

"Amendments to Article 267 of the Criminal Code ('Interfering with Transport Vehicles or Communications') have been made. Due to changes in this article, criminal liability is now possible even for formal violations without the occurrence of negative consequences. Moreover, this Article may be applied not only in cases of blocking roads for cars, but also for pedestrians. The authorities have already enforced this Article in numerous cases." (Human Rights Center Memorial/OVD-Info/Committee against Torture et al., 26 April 2021, p. 6)

Concerning the amendments to Article 267, USDOS in its April 2022 publication reports:

"Following an amendment to the criminal code signed by President Putin in December [2020], the law imposes a fine for destroying infrastructure facilities and blocking roads and a 10-year prison sentence in the case of death of more than one person. During

demonstrations early in the year, authorities charged dozens of individuals countrywide under the new law penalizing the blocking of roads. For example, on January 24, the Ministry of Interior opened a criminal case for 'blocking roads and sidewalks' during a rally on Pushkin Square in central Moscow. Under the pretext of its investigation, the Ministry of Interior raided the homes of 30 individuals suspected of involvement and seized their equipment and files, purportedly as evidence.

The law provides heavy penalties for engaging in unsanctioned protests and other violations of public assembly law. Protesters convicted of multiple violations within six months may be fined substantially or imprisoned for up to five years. The law prohibits 'involving a minor in participation in an unsanctioned gathering,' which is punishable by fines, 100 hours of community service, or arrest for up to 15 days." (USDOS, 12 April 2022, section 2b)

The above-mentioned AI 2021 report provides more detailed information on various restrictions in the context of protesting:

- AI – Amnesty International: Russia: No place for protest, 2021
<https://www.amnesty.at/media/8668/russia-no-place-for-protest.pdf>

1.2 Freedom of expression

Article 29 of the Russian Constitution (see [section 1.3.1](#)) guarantees freedom of expression:

"1. Everyone shall be guaranteed freedom of thought and speech. 2. Propaganda or agitation, which arouses social, racial, national or religious hatred and hostility, shall be prohibited. Propaganda of social, racial, national, religious or linguistic supremacy shall also be prohibited. 3. Nobody shall be forced to express his thoughts and convictions or to deny them. 4. Everyone shall have the right freely to seek, receive, transmit, produce and disseminate information by any legal means. The list of types of information, which constitute State secrets, shall be determined by federal law. 5. The freedom of the mass media shall be guaranteed. Censorship shall be prohibited." (Constitution of the Russian Federation, 12 December 1993, as amended on 1 July 2020, Article 29)

Elena Sherstoboeva, assistant professor at the School of Law at the City University of Hong Kong, in a December 2020 article for the Journal of International Media & Entertainment Law, notes the following on the constitutional right to freedom of expression in the Russian Federation:

"Article 29 of the 1993 Russian Constitution provides a strong and detailed protection to freedom of speech by guaranteeing freedom of thought and speech, freedom of opinion, the right to access information, freedom of mass communication, and a total ban on censorship. The 1991 Statute 'On Mass Media' defines freedom of mass communication as including not only freedom of the press but also media-like content. It also bans preemptive and punitive censorship. The Russian constitutional provisions on free speech are almost completely in line with the international standards. Like the main international treaties, the Russian Constitution does not view freedom of speech as absolute." (Sherstoboeva, December 2020, pp. 74-75)

Although the Constitution guarantees freedom of expression, in fact, this right is constrained by several other legal provisions, as Tatyana Beschastna wrote already in 2013, in an article on freedom of expression and government criticism in Russia for the Emory International Law Review:

“Not only did Putin’s thirteenth year in office [2012] and third presidential term begin with the prosecution and conviction of Pussy Riot and the Bolotnaya Square protestors, but also four new bills effectively limiting free speech were passed. One such law allows a government agency to block a long list of internet websites from within Russia. The second bill returns the ‘slander’ provision into the Criminal Code, after it was recently removed by former President Dmitry Medvedev. The third provision imposes heavy fines on individuals who organize or participate in demonstrations not sanctioned by the government, which practically encompasses all anti-government street protests. Fourth is the ‘foreign agents’ bill that brands the externally funded non-governmental organizations as ‘foreign agents’ with significant limitations on their rights and functions. [...] The analysis of the most recent legislative proposals demonstrates that under Putin’s regime, Russia is experiencing the decline, or practically the end, of freedom of expression, particularly in the area of government criticism.” (Beschastna, 2013, pp. 1133-1134)

Nine years later, Freedom House in its Freedom in the World report 2022, covering the year 2021, observes the following for the situation of the right to freedom of expression in the Russian Federation:

“Although the constitution provides for freedom of speech, vague laws on extremism grant the authorities great discretion to crack down on any speech, organization, or activity that lacks official support. The government controls, directly or through state-owned companies and friendly business magnates, all of the national television networks and many radio and print outlets, as well as most of the media advertising market. A handful of independent outlets still operate, most of them online and some headquartered abroad. The few still based in the country struggle to maintain their independence from state interests. Television remains the most popular source of news, but its influence is declining, particularly among young people who rely more on social media.

Laws on extremism, foreign agents, and undesirable organizations have been used to harass media outlets, curtailing their access to funding and forcing many to cease operations in Russia. In late 2020, legislators expanded the foreign agents law to apply to individuals and informal organizations. Authorities cracked down on journalists who reported on protest events in 2021, for example by arresting editors at the student-led newspaper Doxa. Also during the year, a number of prominent independent media outlets were declared foreign agents, including Meduza, VTimes, Dozhd, OVD-Info, Mediazona, and iStories. Roskomnadzor, the federal media and telecommunications agency, required several media outlets to delete reports by the investigative news outlet Proekt, which was declared an undesirable organization in July.

A series of new laws that have gone into effect since 2020 require social media networks to take down ‘illegal’ content, fine websites that fail to block illegal content, and enforce prison sentences for online ‘libel’, among other provisions. In the weeks following the

introduction of these laws, Roskomnadzor issued warnings and fines to TikTok, VKontakte, Odnoklassniki, YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram for failing to block posts that allegedly encouraged minors to participate in protests. In December, a court fined Google \$100 million for failure to delete banned content. Activists have also been fined and jailed for allegedly promoting extremist content on social media.” (Freedom House, 28 February 2022, section D1)

“Pervasive, hyperpatriotic propaganda and political repression - particularly since Russian forces’ invasion of Ukraine in 2014 - have had a cumulative impact on open and free private discussion, and the chilling effect is exacerbated by growing state efforts to control expression on the internet. In recent years, authorities have adopted a series of laws that impose fines or prison sentences for insulting the state, spreading false news, committing libel, and using social media to discuss the personal information of judges and law enforcement officials or to share information on corruption. These and other laws are actively enforced to punish and deter expressions of dissent.” (Freedom House, 28 February 2022, section D4)

1.2.1 Foreign agent law

The law on “foreign agents” or “foreign agent law” was introduced in 2012 (Venice Commission, 27 June 2014, p. 4) as an amendment to Russia’s Federal Law No. 7 on non-commercial organisations (see [section 1.3.4](#)) (LOC, 14 May 2021).

On the introduction of this legislation the Paris-based international NGO Reporters Without Borders (Reporters Sans Frontières, RSF), an organisation devoted to protecting freedom of expression, in an August 2021 publication states:

“The mass protests of 2011/2012 against electoral fraud and Vladimir Putin’s third term as president not only marked the birth of internet censorship in Russia, but also saw the introduction of the legislation on ‘foreign agents’. The scope of these laws has been continually expanded ever since. The cornerstone is Federal Law No. 121-FZ [on amendments to certain legislative acts of the Russian Federation, see [section 1.3.4](#)], signed by Putin on 20 July 2012 – just a few months after the mass demonstrations on Moscow’s Bolotnaya Square.” (RSF, August 2021, p. 10)

Reuters news agency in March 2022 writes that the foreign agent law was aimed at NGOs that were politically active, including NGOs active in legal and human rights work, and funded from abroad (Reuters, 31 March 2022). Initially only aimed at NGOs (DW, 3 February 2022) the law was 2017 extended to media, in 2019 to individual journalists and bloggers and in December 2020 the scope was again extended to include individuals and unregistered organisations (RSF, August 2021, pp. 10-11). Today legislation addresses, “any private individual or group who receives any amount of foreign funding, whether from foreign governments, organizations or even citizens and publishes ‘printed, audio, audio visual or other reports or materials’” as the German international broadcaster Deutsche Welle (DW) explains in a February 2022 article (DW, 3 February 2022). The USDOS 2021 Country report on Human Rights Practises adds that not only Russians but foreign citizens can be labelled foreign agents as well (USDOS, 12 April 2022, section 2a).

On the foreign agent legislation Inoteka, a legal help programme of experts and lawyers for people affected by the foreign agents' law, in a December 2021 online article states:

"At the moment, the complex of legislation regulating and restricting the activities of persons 'performing the functions of a foreign agent' includes more than 50 legislative acts at the federal level. In the course of numerous amendments and new legislative initiatives, the relevant concept was included in 8 articles of the Code of Administrative Offenses [see [section 1.3.3](#)], 2 articles of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation [see [section 1.3.2](#)]." (Inoteka, 8 December 2021)

The Library of Congress (LOC), the main research arm of the U.S. Congress, summarises the content of the law on foreign agents briefly in a May 2021 article:

"The Law provides that any nongovernment organization involved in political activities, or individual or media outlet that receives financing from abroad is considered to be a foreign agent and is subject to special registration and monitoring rules. The Russian Ministry of Justice can place such organizations on the list of foreign agents." (LOC, 14 May 2021)

Inoteka in an October 2021 article provides a more detailed summary of the law:

"The law on 'foreign agent' NPOs [Non-profit Organisations] appeared in Russia in July 2012. It allowed the Ministry of Justice to recognize non-profit organizations as 'foreign agents' provided that they receive funding from abroad and engage in 'political activity'. Simultaneously, 'political activity' is interpreted really broadly. It includes organizing rallies and discussions, participating in pickets, monitoring elections, and even spreading opinions about the current government on social media. Such organizations should apply to the Ministry of Justice in person with a request to include them in the register of 'foreign agent' NPOs, and then accompany all their materials with an appropriate note." (Inoteka, 1 October 2021, presumably updated 2022, accessed on 23 May 2022)

The same source in a December 2021 article outlines that there are four lists, or registers, for the registration of foreign agents:

"Currently, Russian legislation provides for four registers of persons 'performing the function of a foreign agent': the register of non-profit organizations, the media (which can include both legal entities and individuals), unregistered public associations and individuals. Persons are entered into the registers without prior notice, extrajudicially." (Inoteka, 8 December 2021)

The LOC outlines the requirements that come along with the registration as foreign agent, e.g., extensive reporting obligations, and on the punishment in case of failing to comply with those:

"Registration as a foreign agent does not directly prohibit the organization from working in Russia but imposes additional requirements. Most of these requirements are related to financial reporting. An organization that receives financial or any other assistance from abroad must report quarterly to the government registration authority about the purpose and actual expenditure of foreign funds, and is subject to mandatory annual audits. [...] General accounting should be done separately for domestic and foreign funds received by

the organization. (Federal Law No 121-FZ, art. 2.5(a).) Government agencies are allowed to conduct unscheduled emergency reviews of an organization's financial documents if they suspect or have been informed of the organization's wrongdoing. Additionally, reports on foreign agents' senior staff must be provided every six months. If the government finds that an organization has not fully complied with the registration procedure, it may suspend the activities of the organization for up to six months. (Art. 2.5(zh).) Violations of the registration rules are punishable by fines up to the equivalent of about US\$6,000 or a two-year term of imprisonment. (Art. 3.2.) Amendments to the Code of Administrative Violations and Criminal Code of Russia adopted in December 2019 and December 2020 provided for increased fines of up to the equivalent of US\$100,000 for multiple violations of requirements associated with the foreign agent designation. Depending on the circumstances, individuals recognized as foreign agents and officials of foreign-agent judicial persons are subject to imprisonment for a term of up to five years.

[...] All organizations registered as foreign agents are obligated to mark all their publications and other materials, including online content, with a reference that 'these materials were produced and/or distributed by a noncommercial organization performing functions of a foreign agent.' (Federal Law No 121-FZ, art. 2.4.) According to Roskomnadzor, the government oversight body in the sphere of mass communications, the size of fonts for these markings must be twice as large as the size of fonts used for the text of the publication. Moreover, the markings must be placed in the center of the page or image and take up no less than 20% of the space allotted for the publication. For audio and visual productions, the announcement that materials have been produced by a foreign agent must be no shorter than 15 seconds and be broadcast at the beginning of the presentation and at the beginning of each new broadcast segment after commercial breaks. Access to a media outlet's content can be restricted by Roskomnadzor if a court finds that the outlet has violated the foreign agent requirements." (LOC, 14 May 2021)

In addition, foreign agent registration for a non-profit organisation leads to numerous other disadvantages, such as exclusion from funding by regional and municipal grants, inability to nominate candidates for certain supervisory and advisory bodies, or prohibition from holding offices in state bodies (Inoteka, 8 December 2021). Apart from that, the inclusion in the foreign agent register

"[...] is associated with the restriction of professional activities, state support and funding, the creation of additional financial oppression, violation of privacy and for individuals it also leads to a reduction in social contacts up to the forced emigration. Since 2012, after being included in the register of NPOs performing the functions of a foreign agent, at least 98 organizations have been terminated." (Inoteka, 8 December 2021)

In the December 2021 article Inoteka refers to the kind of NPOs which are affected by this law:

"During the period of the legislation on 'foreign agents', the registries of 'foreign agents' included human rights organizations, social and educational initiatives, educational and research projects, organizations aimed at protecting the environment, at protecting electoral rights, at protecting women's rights, at supporting indigenous peoples, at helping convicted prisoners, at helping migrants and refugees, conscripts and military personnel,

at the fight against corruption, at HIV and drug addiction prevention, and others.” (Inoteka, 8 December 2021)

Inoteka provides an interactive infographic that shows foreign agent registrations by year, activity type and by state (NGO, individual media, undesirable organisation, media, public associations and individuals) up to 2022. It further provides information on names and description of activities of the affected NGOs, media, organisations and individuals:

- Inoteka: Who’s on the list of foreign agents and undesirable organizations?, 1 October 2021, presumably updated 2022
<https://inoteka.io/ino/foreign-agents-en>

According to the Inoteka infographic, 225 NGOs were registered as foreign agents since 2012. Currently, as of 23 May 2022, 80 NGOs remain on the list. 145 were excluded from the register over time, mostly because of termination or liquidation of the organisation.

Since 2017, when the legal scope was extended to include media, 51 media were recognised by the Russian Ministry of Justice as legal entities receiving money or property from foreign sources.

106 persons were registered as individual media foreign agents since 2019, among them media correspondents, journalists, editors, founders of NGOs and activists. (Inoteka, 1 October 2021, presumably updated 2022, accessed on 23 May 2022)

Eight public associations foreign agents were registered in 2021 (Inoteka, 8 December 2021). Six of the eight organisations are engaged in activities concerned with matters of LGBTQ+. From December 2020 onwards

“[A]ny individual, regardless of their citizenship, can be recognised as a ‘foreign agent’ if in the opinion of the Russian government they: a) do political activities in the interest of ‘foreign sources’, which include foreign governments, foreign organizations, and foreign citizens, b) do a purposeful collection of the information in fields of military and military-technical activities of the Russian Federation, c) are under the ‘influence’ of a foreign source” (Inoteka, 1 October 2021, presumably updated 2022, accessed on 23 May 2022).

Seven people are registered in this list as of 23 May 2022: Evgeny Kiselev (Anchorman of the Ukraine 24 TV channel), Matvey Ganapolsky (Anchorman of the Ukrainian Priamyi TV channel), Leonid Volkov (former coordinator of Alexey Navalny's headquarters), Vladimir Kara-Murza (opposition politician), Morgenshtern (rapper), Mikhail Khodorkovsky (Businessman, former head of Yukos oil company) and Garry Kasparov (politician and former world chess champion) (Inoteka, 1 October 2021, presumably updated 2022, accessed on 23 May 2022).

The August 2021 report by RSF calls the foreign agent legislation “the Kremlin’s sharpest weapon in its fight against independent media” (RSF, August 2021, p. 6). USDOS observes that journalists are strongly affected by this legislation. Several of the designated foreign agents tried to reverse this designation, but without success (USDOS, 12 April 2022, section 2a).

Freedom House explains that the designation as foreign agent “is interpreted by much of the Russian population as denoting a foreign spying operation” (Freedom House, 28 February 2022, section E2). According to RSF “[t]hose affected face constant harassment by the authorities as well as stigmatisation” (RSF, August 2021, p. 9).

Meduza, an internet portal headquartered in Latvia and publishing news in Russian and English, in April 2022 reports that new legislation concerning foreign agents is being prepared:

“The bill is necessary because of the ‘large and growing amount of attention being paid to this institution [that of ‘foreign agents’] by countries that are unfriendly to Russia and that want to influence our citizens and our country’s policies,’ State Duma Security and Anti-Corruption Committee first Deputy Chairman and bill co-author Andrey Lugovoi [...] [said]. Previous ‘foreign agent’ legislation has consisted solely of amendments made to various other laws. The new bill would combine them in a single piece of legislation [...]. Under the new bill, ‘foreign agents’ can include anyone who receives financial support from abroad or is ‘under foreign influence of any kind’ and who engages in at least one of the following activities: political activity, collecting information about the Russian military and military logistics, distributing messages and materials to an unlimited number of people or participating in the creation of these messages and materials. ‘Foreign influence’ is defined in the new legislation as support from a foreign source (for example, foreign governments, foreign government agencies, or international organizations) or other forms of influence from that source, ‘including coercion and persuasion.’ [...] under the new definition of ‘foreign agent,’ the Russian authorities will be able to add somebody to the ‘foreign agent’ registry simply for being under ‘foreign influence’; the person won’t necessarily have to be receiving money or any other kind of material support from abroad, as is currently the case. [...] The bill:

- bans ‘foreign agents’ from organizing public events; leading educational events or creating informational products for children; receiving government grants; and investing in Russian strategic enterprises.
- combines the four existing ‘foreign agent’ registries into a single one.
- changes the label ‘foreign agents’ are required to include on media they produce, and does not require the label be included on posts of a ‘personal nature.’
- allows the websites of ‘foreign agents’ to be blocked at the Justice Ministry’s request, including when the mandatory label is not included on published materials.
- does not require government bodies or state companies, registered political parties, or religious organizations to be registered as ‘foreign agents.’
- introduces a uniform procedure for getting off of the ‘foreign agents’ registry. The list of possible ways includes death, liquidation of a legal entity, and a check performed by the Justice Ministry that shows the ‘foreign agent’ has not received foreign support for at least a year.” (Meduza, 25 April 2022)

On 29 November 2021 OVD-Info, a Moscow-based NGO that monitors politically motivated arrests and prosecutions in Russia, published a report on the foreign agent law and the discriminatory aspects of its application:

- OVD-Info: Created and (or) distributed. Discriminatory aspects of the application of legislation on ‘foreign agents’, 29 November 2021
https://inoteka.io/sites/default/files/foreign_agents_discrimination_report_oi_2021_0.pdf

The International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL) in its Civic Freedom Monitor on Russia provides an overview of current legislation affecting NGOs and non-profit organisations (NPO)/non-commercial organisations (NCO) including the foreign agent legislation:

- ICNL – International Center for Not-for-Profit Law: Civic Freedom Monitor: Russia, updated 19 April 2022
<https://www.icnl.org/resources/civic-freedom-monitor/russia>

The European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission) in July 2021 published an opinion paper on legal amendments between 10 and 23 November 2020 affecting foreign agents. The publication also analyses the foreign agent legislation prior to the 2020 amendments:

- Venice Commission – European Commission for Democracy through Law: Russian Federation. Opinion on the compatibility with international human rights standards of a series of bills introduced by the Russian state Duma between 10 and 23 November 2020 to amend laws affecting “foreign agents”, 6 July 2021
[https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD\(2021\)027-e](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD(2021)027-e)

A Reuters special report describes how people are affected by the designation as foreign agent:

- Reuters: Putin targets enemies at home as his missiles strike Ukraine, 31 March 2022
<https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/ukraine-crisis-russia-repression/>

1.2.2 Fake information legislation

In March 2019 the fake news legislation was introduced through amendments to the Code of Administrative Offenses on the one hand and to the Federal Law No. 149 on information, informational technologies and the protection of information (see [section 1.3.4](#)) on the other (LOC, 11 April 2019).

The LOC summarises the 2019 fake news legislation as follows:

“On March 18, 2019, Russian president Vladimir Putin signed two laws passed by the Russian parliament aimed at countering the creation and dissemination of fake news. The Laws establish fines for knowingly spreading fake news and procedures for internet service providers to block access to websites disseminating fake news.

The Law on Amending Article 15-3 in particular defines fake news as ‘socially significant false information distributed under the guise of truthful messages if they create a threat that endangers people’s lives, health, or property; create possibilities for mass violations of public order or public security; or possibly hinder the work of transportation and social infrastructure, credit institutions, lines of communications, industry, and energy enterprises.’

This Law further states that Roskomnadzor, the Kremlin’s media watchdog and censorship agency, is to inform the editorial body of an online publication of fake news that must be removed from its website. Upon receipt of a notice from Roskomnadzor, the editorial body must immediately take steps to remove such information and, if it fails to do so,

Roskomnadzor must take steps to limit access to the online publication. In such cases the internet service provider must also immediately block access to the sites where the fake news is published. These provisions do not apply to information disseminated through a news aggregator.” (LOC, 11 April 2019)

The Moscow Times in March 2019 reported on the introduction of the fake news legislation:

“Russian President Vladimir Putin has signed a controversial set of bills that make it a crime to ‘disrespect’ the state and spread ‘fake news’ online [...]. The bills amending existing information laws overwhelmingly passed both chambers of Russian parliament in less than two months. Observers and some lawmakers have criticized the legislation for its vague language and potential to stifle free speech. The legislation will establish punishments for spreading information that ‘exhibits blatant disrespect for the society, government, official government symbols, constitution or governmental bodies of Russia.’ Online news outlets and users that spread ‘fake news’ will face fines of up to 1.5 million rubles (\$22,900) for repeat offenses. Insulting state symbols and the authorities, including Putin, will carry a fine of up to 300,000 rubles and 15 days in jail for repeat offenses. As is the case with other Russian laws, the fines are calculated based on whether the offender is a citizen, an official or a legal entity.” (The Moscow Times, 18 March 2019)

According to a Freedom House 2021 report on freedom on the net this legislation has been “actively employed to intimidate users and outlets into taking down content” (Freedom House, 21 September 2021, section B2). Freedom House continues:

“In April 2020, Roskomnadzor reported that after the introduction of the article on fake news in March 2019, the agency had removed 233 items through the end of 2019 and 172 items since the beginning of 2020. Roskomnadzor actively began to block allegedly false news about COVID-19; in some cases the agency targeted genuine misinformation, but in others it blocked independent reporting about the epidemiological situation in the country. [...] The COVID-19 pandemic spurred Russian authorities to actively enforce legislation meant to counter ‘fake news.’ The courts fined media outlets, their editors in chief, and ordinary users for publications on social media [...]. In addition, Roskomnadzor ordered the blocking of over 1,000 websites.” (Freedom House, 21 September 2021, section B2; section C2)

On 4 March 2022 amendments to the Criminal Code and the Code of Administrative Offenses were introduced (AI, 14 March 2022; Reuters, 4 March 2022). By Federal Law No. 32 of 4 March 2022, the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation and two articles of the Code of Criminal Procedure have been amended (Federal Law No. 32, 4 March 2022). The amendments comprise the addition of Article 207.3 and 280.3 to the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation. Article 207.3 deals with the public dissemination of deliberately false information about the use of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation and Article 280.3 is concerned with public actions aimed at discrediting the Russian armed forces (Federal Law No. 32, 4 March 2022).

On these amendments Amnesty International on 14 March 2022 writes:

“The legislation introduces Article 207.3 into the Criminal Code, which widens the scope of Russia’s already existing ‘fake news’ legislation and establishes heavy penalties for ‘public dissemination of knowingly false information about the use of the Russian armed forces with the aim to protect interests of the Russian Federation, its citizens and in support of international peace and security’. Penalties include heavy fines that range from RUB 700,000 to RUB 5,000,000 (US\$ 5,220 to US\$ 37,283) and imprisonment from three to 15 years if the dissemination of information has caused ‘grave consequences’.

The law does not contain a definition of what constitutes ‘knowingly false information’ or any criteria for its assessment. However, Russian mass media and the communications regulator Roskomnadzor issued a statement whereby all media outlets are obliged to use only information received from official sources. It is therefore understood that any information published that does not come from official sources or that contradicts information distributed by Russian authorities would be considered ‘false’. [...]

The law also introduced Article 280.3 into the Criminal Code, which establishes criminal liability for ‘public actions aimed at discrediting of the use of Russian armed forces’. There is no explanation of what could constitute ‘discrediting’ and the vague wording of the article could lead to politically motivated prosecutions. The law expressly prohibits carrying out ‘public calls to oppose the use of the armed forces of the Russian Federation’, further criminalising anti-war protests and other initiatives calling for the end of the armed conflict in a way that suppresses the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. [...]

While public actions ‘aimed at discreditation of the use of armed forces’ and ‘public calls to prevent the use of armed forces’ already constitute an administrative offence, the new law provides for heavier penalties if these are accompanied by ‘calls to conduct unsanctioned public events’ or constitute a ‘threat to life and/or health of citizens, property, threat of mass violation of the public order and/or public security, or a threat to create obstacles to functioning or preventing from functioning’ of various facilities. There is no clarity in the law as to how such ‘threats’ will be ascertained.

The new law also introduced a new criminal and administrative offence of ‘calling for restrictive measures in relation to the Russian Federation, its citizens or legal entities’, which is understood to criminalize any calls for sanctions.” (AI, 14 March 2022, pp. 1-2)

Meduza in a March 2022 article reports that the fake news legislation as adopted on 4 March 2022 essentially amounts to military censorship and Russian authorities started to enforce it on 6 March 2022. As of 25 March, Meduza reports that “around 60 administrative protocols have been drawn up countrywide” and “the authorities have launched at least ten criminal cases under this law, four of which are against journalists” (Meduza, 25 March 2022).

Referring to the Duma website and several media reports, the Committee to protect Journalists (CPJ) informs about another bill that has been adopted by the State Duma on 22 March 2022 including amendments to the criminal and administrative codes. This bill involves fines of “up to 5 million rubles (US\$48,245) and prison terms of up to 15 years for those convicted of disseminating ‘fakes,’ or information that authorities deem to be false, about the actions of

Russia's government bodies abroad" (CPJ, 22 March 2022). Government bodies comprise Russian embassies, the prosecutor's office, the Ministry of Emergency Situations, and others (CPJ, 22 March 2022). According to a March 2022 article by the New York-based news company Bloomberg, through the expansion of the scope on 22 March 2022 the legislation now covers all state agencies by "criminalizing the public dissemination of 'knowingly false information' about the activities of government bodies abroad in pursuing Russia's national interests" (Bloomberg, 22 March 2022).

1.2.3 Defamation, libel, and slander

The Criminal Code of the Russian Federation criminalises libel as well as slander. The concerning legal provision is found in Article 128.1 of the Criminal Code (Criminal Code of the Russian Federation, 13 June 1996, as amended on 25 March 2022, Article 128.1; see also Sherstoboeva, December 2020, p. 93) (see [section 1.3.2](#)). The International Press Institute (IPI) on its Media Laws database publishes (presumably in 2016) undated information about the content of Article 128.1 of the Russian Criminal Code but the article was since amended in December 2020, according to the official portal of legal information (pravo.gov.ru):

- IPI – International Press Institute: Media Laws Database, Russia, undated
<http://legaldb.freemedia.at/legal-database/russia/?target=criminal-defamation>

On the reintroduction of the "slander-provision" a 2012 article of the LOC explains:

"On July 28, 2012, President Vladimir Putin of the Russian Federation signed into law amendments to the country's Criminal Code [...] which would reintroduce defamation as a felony [...]. The Law defines defamation as 'knowing dissemination of false information hurting one's dignity and reputation' and lists four situations in which the crime is considered more serious: defamation contained in public speech, defamation conducted by an official who used his/her position, false information about one's health, and false accusations of committing a serious crime. [...] Responding to concerns of the media community that the amendment can be used to restrict freedom of speech and critiques of the government, President Putin stated that provisions on criminal liability for defamation are not 'overwhelming.'" (LOC, 20 August 2012)

According to Article 128.1 defamation (slander, libel) shall be punishable by a fine up to 500,000 roubles or in the amount of salary, wages or other income of the convicted person for a period up to six months, or by forced labour of up to 160 hours. The sentence is higher for the more serious slander offenses, e.g. defamation contained in public speech (Criminal Code of the Russian Federation, 13 June 1996, as amended on 25 March 2022, Article 128.1).

On the re-introduction of the slander-provision Human Rights Watch, an international non-governmental organisation, headquartered in New York City, wrote in 2012:

"The re-introduction of criminal libel to Russia's domestic laws is yet another serious blow to freedom of expression [...]. On July 13, 2012, after a third and final reading, the State Duma, the lower chamber of Russia's parliament, adopted a new law criminalizing certain types of libel. Only seven months earlier, legislation initiated by Dmitry Medvedev, president at the time, had ensured that libel would be treated as an administrative offense. [...] Re-criminalization of libel was part of a raft of laws rammed through the Russian

parliament from June through mid-July, setting out new, severe restrictions on the rights to free expression, assembly, and association, and laying the legal groundwork to reinforce authoritarianism in Russia. Unlike the criminal libel law eliminated under Medvedev, the new law does not provide prison terms for violations. However, it provides harsh financial penalties even in comparison with the previous legislation.” (HRW, 16 July 2012)

The Russian state news agency Tass wrote in December 2020 about the amendment of Article 128.1 of the Criminal Code:

“Russian President Vladimir Putin has signed a bill criminalizing online slander into law. The document has been published on the official website containing legal information. The document amends Article 128.1 of the Russian Criminal Code, which initially carried penalties for slanderous statements made publicly and in the media. The amendment criminalizes slander on the Internet. According to the amended law, those convicted of slander in public speech, on the Internet and in the media face a fine of up to one mln rubles (\$13,400), a prison term of up to two years or community service of up to 240 hours.” (Tass, 30 December 2020)

On the December 2020 amendment of Article 128.1 Reuters adds: “The bill [...] has drawn criticism from opponents of the Kremlin who say the authorities could use it to jail critics and stifle dissent” (Reuters, 23 December 2020).

Furthermore, in addition to Article 128.1, “[i]n the Criminal Code there are several articles that foresee criminal liability for defamation of public officials: 1) insult of a representative of the authority (Art. 319), 2) contempt of court (Art. 297), 3) slander against a judge, juror, public prosecutor, investigator, person conducting inquests, bailiff (Art. 298.1)” (IPI, undated, Criminal Defamation of Public Officials). For example, the punishment for the insult of a representative of the authority is “[...] a fine of up to 140,000 roubles [40,000 roubles according to the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation, 13 June 1996, as amended on 25 March 2022, Article 319] or in the amount of the wages or other income of the perpetrator for a period of up to three months or by compulsory community service for up to 360 hours or by correctional labour for a period of up to one year” (IPI, undated, Criminal Defamation of Public Officials).

Elena Sherstoboeva, in the December 2020 article observes the following on the relationship between freedom of expression and the Russian defamation legislation:

“Being a legitimate aim for limiting freedom of expression, the right to protect one’s reputation has been sometimes used by national governments to shield politicians and civil servants against criticism. Excessively protective defamation laws have a ‘chilling effect’ on freedom of expression and public discussion. The development of the internet has instigated considerable new challenges for protecting one’s reputation, which often becomes the pretext for adopting harsh legal measures that threaten online freedom of expression and defamation. In Russia, there is a consistently high count of annual defamation cases. Every year, the Russian courts consider 5,800 civil lawsuits on defamation. More than half of these lawsuits are against journalists as well as media editorial offices, and the defendants are typically not the victors. Russia is among a few

European countries keeping criminal liability for libel and insult of public officials. Furthermore, the Russian parliament outlawed 'blatant disrespect' of the Russian state, state bodies, society, the Constitution, and national symbols in 2019. This sweeping ban is unique for European law, and it has considerably stifled public debate in Russia. In the year of the ban's adoption, administrative proceedings were brought against fifty-one publications, most of which concerned criticism of the Russian president. [...] From the ECtHR's [European Court of Human Rights] perspective and in contrast with international standards, the Russian national authorities tend to provide stronger protection for public officials and pro-governmental candidates or parties than for private individuals." (Sherstoboeva, December 2020, pp. 69-70; p. 77)

1.2.4 *Anti-extremism law*

Peter Roudik, a Director for the Global Legal Research Center in the Library of Congress, the main research arm of the U.S. Congress, explains in an April 2014 article how anti-extremism legislation, which was introduced in the Russian Federation in July 2002 by Federal Law No. 114 on combating extremist activity (see [section 1.3.4](#)), is organised:

"The anti-extremist legislation of Russia consists of the Federal Law on Countering Extremist Activity (Extremism Law), specific provisions of the Russian Federation Criminal Code, the Code of Administrative Violations of the Russian Federation (Administrative Code), and relevant norms included in more than twenty other laws regulating public associations, religious activities, public gatherings, mass media publications, the investigative work of law enforcement authorities, and other matters." (Roudik, April 2014, pp. 27-28)

The April 2014 article by Roudik continues with what qualifies as "extremist" according to Russian law:

"The determining factor in qualifying an activity as extremist is the suspect's motivation. Crimes motivated by prejudice or, as stated in Russian law, 'ideological, political, racial, national or religious enmity, as well as hatred or enmity towards a social group,' are classified as extremist crimes under the Criminal Code. An additional list of activities deemed to be extremist is stipulated by the Extremism Law. This list does not coincide with the list of extremist crimes defined by the Criminal Code. Extremist activities as they are listed in the Extremism Law are subject to prosecution regardless of their consequences and the level of public danger. This allows for the application of restrictive measures to relatively insignificant offenses." (Roudik, April 2014, p. 28)

Roudik further states that while Federal Law No. 114 provides a list of violent and nonviolent activities considered to be extremist, it does not contain a clear definition of extremism (Roudik, April 2014, p. 30). An April 2021 article by Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) reports on the same issue and provides some examples of extremist activities:

"[...] the law itself, while stipulating what qualifies as extremism, does not concisely define what it is in the first place. Instead, it merely lists a series of offenses that would fall under the law -- for example, distribution of extremist materials, preparation of extremist acts, and incitement of hatred against religious or ethnic groups. The list also includes criticism

of government officials and politicians, and, more recently, public questioning of Russia's territorial integrity.” (RFE/RL, 29 April 2021)

On sanctions under the extremism law Roudik explains:

“The main sanction provided by the Extremism Law is the liquidation of a public association, organization, or mass media outlet, which may be preceded by one or more warnings issued by the Federal Registration Service against a nongovernment organization or the Federal Supervision Agency for Information Technologies and Communications (Roskomnadzor) against media institutions.” (Roudik, April 2014, p. 32)

In July 2020 an amendment was added to the law on countering extremist activity, that classifies the violation of the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation as extremist activity (Federal Law No. 114, 25 July 2002, as amended on 1 July 2021, Article 1). According to RFE/RL, “[t]hat provision appeared to be linked specifically to Russia's annexation of Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula in 2014” (RFE/RL, 29 April 2021).

On 4 June 2021 the New York-based Institute of Modern Russia (IMR) publishes a brief analysis on how anti-extremism laws are used by Russian authorities to fight opponents and reports that regime critics have long been persecuted as extremists (IMR, 4 June 2021). Freedom House in February 2022 reports that “[l]egislation enacted in June 2021 banned individuals associated with extremist organizations from running for election. The Central Election Commission subsequently disqualified a number of candidates who were accused of extremism or association with undesirable organizations” (Freedom House, 28 February 2022, section B2). The SOVA Center for Information and Analysis is a Moscow-based Russian non-profit organisation that since the mid-2000s monitors the misuse of anti-extremism legislation and provides annual and monthly reports. In the SOVA report on Inappropriate Enforcement of Anti-Extremist Legislation in Russia 2021, misuse of the legislation against political opponents is observed:

“In 2021, preceding the parliamentary elections, Russian authorities used the repressive potential inherent in the broad language and various legal instruments of the current anti-extremist legislation and its associated norms against their opponents.” (SOVA, 29 April 2022)

HRW in January 2022 also writes on the abuse of the anti-extremism legislation:

“The authorities also abuse Russia’s overbroad counterterrorism and counterextremism laws to retaliate against opponents, dissenting voices, and religious minorities. Three organizations associated with Navalny were banned as ‘extremist’ despite lack of any credible evidence that they were involved in, planned, or incited violence, and several of Navalny’s associates were arrested.” (HRW, 13 January 2022)

SOVA in the 2022 report mentions that “105 inappropriate verdicts against 160 people were issued under anti-extremist criminal articles in 2021” (SOVA, 29 April 2022).

The April 2022 USDOS report on Human Rights Practices states on the misuse of the anti-extremism legislation:

“Authorities continued to misuse the country’s expansive definition of extremism, under which citizens may be punished for certain types of peaceful protests, affiliation with certain religious denominations, and even certain social media posts, as a tool to stifle dissent.” (USDOS, 12 April 2022, section 2a)

The same source mentions credible reports of “severe suppression of freedom of expression and media, including violence against journalists and the use of ‘antiextremism’ and other laws to prosecute peaceful dissent and religious minorities” (USDOS, 12 April 2022, executive summary).

On 21 March 2022 there was wide media coverage (DW, 21 March 2022; The Guardian, 21 March 2022; Al Jazeera, 21 March 2022) of the designation of Meta, parent company to Facebook and Instagram, as extremist due to tolerating Russophobia and “hate speech towards Russian soldiers and Vladimir Putin in relation to the country’s war in Ukraine”. (The Guardian, 21 March 2022).

1.2.5 Undesirable organisations law

On 19 May 2015 Federal Law No. 129 on amending certain legislative acts of the Russian Federation, which is also known as law on undesirable foreign and international organisations (see [section 1.3.4](#)) was adopted by Russia’s State Duma and entered into force on 3 June 2015 (Federal Law No. 129, 23 May 2015). The Venice Commission in a 2016 publication on the legislation on undesirable organisations explains:

“This Federal Law amended five laws – the Criminal Code, the Criminal Procedure Code, the Code on Administrative Offences, the Law No. 272-FZ on Sanctions for Individuals Violating Fundamental Human Rights and Freedoms of the Citizens of the Russian Federation, and Law No. 114-FZ on the Procedure of Exit from the Russian Federation and Entry into the Russian Federation.” (Venice Commission, 13 June 2016, p. 6)

For a detailed overview on the amendments that followed the law’s introduction in 2015 please refer to:

- ICNL – International Center for Not-for Profit Law: Civic Freedom Monitor: Russia, updated 19 April 2022
<https://www.icnl.org/resources/civic-freedom-monitor/russia>

According to the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL) international or foreign non-commercial organisations (NCOs) can be classified as “undesirable” by the decision of the Prosecutor General or the Prosecutor General’s deputies that the NCO poses a threat to national security (ICNL, updated 19 April 2022). Inoteka briefly describes the consequences of a designation as undesirable organisation:

“Recognition of an organization as ‘undesirable’ entails a complete ban on its activities in Russia. Russian citizens and Russian legal entities are not allowed to cooperate with it

either on or off the territory of Russia. A website that distributes information materials of an ‘undesirable organization’ may be blocked. Formally, there is no administrative or criminal responsibility for this, but law enforcement authorities may interpret it as participation in the activities of an ‘undesirable organization’.

Participation in the activities of an ‘undesirable organization’, [can lead to] a fine of up to 100 thousand rubles (Art. 20.33 of the Code of Administrative Offences). Participation in the activities of an ‘undesirable organization’, if the person has previously been held administratively liable, a fine of up to 500 thousand rubles or imprisonment for up to four years with deprivation of the right to hold certain positions or engage in certain activities. The organization of such activities faces imprisonment for up to six years. Providing funds or raising funds for an ‘undesirable organization’ can carry a prison sentence of up to five years.” (Inoteka, 1 October 2021, presumably updated 2022, accessed on 23 May 2022)

HRW in a February 2022 submission to the UN Human Rights Committee reports that “[i]n recent years, authorities have used the law on ‘undesirable foreign organizations’ to block websites of independent media and human rights organizations” (HRW, 15 February 2022). Inoteka’s infographic shows that as of 23 May 2022 55 organisations were designated undesirable since 2015 (Inoteka, 1 October 2021, presumably updated 2022, accessed on 23 May 2022).

For information on the designated undesirable organisations and reasons for their inclusion please refer to:

- Inoteka: Who’s on the list of foreign agents and undesirable organizations?, 1 October 2021, presumably updated 2022
<https://inoteka.io/ino/foreign-agents-en>

1.2.6 Other legislation

Legislation restricting freedom of expression could not be dealt with exhaustively in the previous sections 1.2.1 – 1.2.5 of this publication. Sources point to numerous other legal provisions that have a negative impact on freedom of expression.

For example, at the time of passing the fake information law in March 2019, another law entered into force banning “‘blatant disrespect’ of the state, its officials and Russian society [...] repeat offenders face up to 15 days in jail” (BBC News, 7 March 2019; see also Freedom House, 21 September 2021, section C2).

An April 2021 Country of origin information report for the Russian Federation by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs summarises problematic legislation regarding the right to freedom of expression as follows:

“[F]reedom of expression was also restricted on certain topics by means of a number of specific laws during the reporting period [December 2018 up to and including March 2021]. For example, sharing information about defence or associated technologies may be subject to treason charges, and statements that allegedly promote homosexuality among young people may be subject to administrative penalties under the anti-propaganda law. There is also an extensive list of prohibited publications that reportedly incite terrorism and extremism. [...] Freedom of expression online can be restricted by sanctions laid down in a

number of criminal and administrative laws. [...] Criminal law criminalises libel (Article 128.1), libel against judges, prosecutors, or other members of the judicial system (Article 298.1), insults to representatives of the authorities (Article 319) or the dissemination of false information about the activities of the Soviet Union during the Second World War (Article 354.1). Administrative law violations include promoting non-traditional sexual relations among young people (Article 6.21), insulting religious feelings (Article 148), displaying and propagating extremist symbols (Article 20.3) and disseminating extremist material (Article 20.29).” (Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, April 2021, p. 82)

OVD-Info in an April 2022 update of a report on Russia’s suppression of anti-war protests writes on recent legal introductions and draft legislation:

“The suppression of anti-war protests and civil society in Russia is accompanied by the constant adoption of new restrictive laws. Thus [...] in early April [2022] administrative responsibility was introduced for publicly assimilating the role of the USSR and Germany during World War II. The State Duma has introduced draft legislation on additional opportunities to invalidate the registration of any media outlet, deprive journalists of accreditation, ban foreign media from working in Russia; draft legislation on criminal liability for heads of commercial and other organizations for the implementation of sanctions against Russia, as well as on expanding the list of grounds for termination of Russian citizenship are being discussed.” (OVD-Info, updated 14 April 2022)

The RSF August 2021 report on internet censorship and surveillance in Russia provides a good overview of restrictions on freedom of expression:

- RSF – Reporters Sans Frontières: Taking Control? Internet Censorship and Surveillance in Russia. Update, August 2021
<https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2059452/russiareport-update.pdf>

1.3 Links to important laws mentioned in section 1

1.3.1 *Constitution of the Russian Federation*

- Constitution of the Russian Federation [Конституция Российской Федерации], 12 December 1993, as amended on 1 July 2020 (available in Russian language at [pravo.gov.ru](http://publication.pravo.gov.ru))
<http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001202007040001?index=0&rangeSize=1>

An English translation of the 12 December 1993 Constitution of the Russian Federation, as amended on 1 July 2020, is published by the European Commission for Democracy through law (Venice Commission):

- Constitution of the Russian Federation, 12 December 1993, as amended on 1 July 2020 (published by the European Commission for Democracy through law (Venice Commission), 4 February 2021)
<https://rm.coe.int/constitution-of-the-russian-federation-en/1680a1a237>

1.3.2 Criminal Code of the Russian Federation

- Federal Law No. 63 Criminal Code of the Russian Federation [Кодекс Российской Федерации от 13.06.1996 № 63-ФЗ “Уголовный кодекс Российской Федерации”], 13 June 1996, as amended on 25 March 2022 (available in Russian language at [pravo.gov.ru](http://pravo.gov.ru/proxy/ips/?docbody&nd=102041891))
<http://pravo.gov.ru/proxy/ips/?docbody&nd=102041891>

An English language version of the updated Criminal Code with all amendments up to March 2022 was not available among the sources consulted. The OSCE legislative database legislation online provides an English version including amendments up to 1 March 2012:

- Federal Law No. 63 Criminal Code of the Russian Federation, 13 June 1996, as amended on 1 March 2012
https://www.legislationline.org/download/id/4247/file/RF_CC_1996_am03.2012_en.pdf

1.3.3 Code of Administrative Offenses of the Russian Federation

- Federal Law No. 195 Code of the Russian Federation on Administrative Offenses [Кодекс Российской Федерации от 30.12.2001 № 195-ФЗ “Кодекс Российской Федерации об административных правонарушениях”], 30 December 2001, as amended on 16 April 2022 (available in Russian language at pravo.gov.ru)
<http://pravo.gov.ru/proxy/ips/?docbody=&nd=102074277&rdk=>

An English language version of the updated Code of Administrative Offenses with all amendments up to 16 April 2022 was not available among the sources consulted. The OSCE legislative database legislation online provides an English version including amendments up to 2 April 2012:

- Federal Law No. 195 Code of Administrative Offences of the Russian Federation, 30 December 2001, as amended 2 April 2012
<https://www.legislationline.org/documents/id/7312>

1.3.4 Others

- Federal Law No. 7 on non-commercial organisations [Федеральный закон от 12.01.1996 № 7-ФЗ “О некоммерческих организациях”], 12 January 1996, as amended on 2 July 2021 (available in Russian language at pravo.gov.ru)
<http://pravo.gov.ru/proxy/ips/?docbody=&nd=102039064>
- Federal Law No. 54 on meetings, rallies, demonstrations, marches and pickets [Федеральный закон от 19.06.2004 № 54-ФЗ “О собраниях, митингах, демонстрациях, шествиях и пикетированиях”], 19 June 2004, as amended on 30 December 2020 (available in Russian language at pravo.gov.ru)
<http://pravo.gov.ru/proxy/ips/?docbody=&nd=102087370>
- Federal Law No. 114 on combating extremist activity [Федеральный закон от 25.07.2002 № 114-ФЗ “О противодействии экстремистской деятельности”], 25 July 2002, as amended on 1 July 2021 (available in Russian language at pravo.gov.ru)
<http://pravo.gov.ru/proxy/ips/?docbody=&nd=102079221>
- Federal Law No. 121 on amendments to certain legislative acts of the Russian Federation with regard to regulating the activities of non-commercial organisations acting as foreign agents [Федеральный закон от 20.07.2012 № 121-ФЗ “О внесении изменений в отдельные законодательные акты Российской Федерации в части регулирования

деятельности некоммерческих организаций, выполняющих функции иностранного агента”], 20 July 2012 (available in Russian language at pravo.gov.ru)

<http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001201207230003>

- Federal Law No. 129 on amending certain legislative acts of the Russian Federation [also known as law on undesirable foreign and international organisations] [Федеральный закон от 23.05.2015 № 129-ФЗ “О внесении изменений в отдельные законодательные акты Российской Федерации”], 23 May 2015 (available in Russian language at pravo.gov.ru)
<http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001201505230001>
- Federal Law No. 149 on information, informational technologies and the protection of information [Федеральный закон от 27.07.2006 № 149-ФЗ “Об информации, информационных технологиях и о защите информации”], 27 July 2006, as amended on 30 December 2021 (available in Russian language at pravo.gov.ru)
<http://pravo.gov.ru/proxy/ips/?docbody&nd=102108264>

2 Treatment of protesters against Ukraine war by state authorities

In a March 2022 article, the British daily newspaper The Guardian states that the political opposition in Russia is not able to coordinate an anti-war movement, because it has been decimated in the last years (The Guardian, 10 March 2022):

“Following the January 2021 protests in support of Alexey Navalny, his organisations were declared extremist and functionally eliminated. Other opposition political parties with national reach, such as Yabloko, are exceedingly unlikely to chance severe penalties for organising illegal protests, or expose their followers to repression.

For individual activists, the landscape is also bleak. Many oppositionists are in self-imposed exile, and lack both the social media reach and the moral authority to call for protest. Those in Russia are rapidly repressed, such as human rights activist Marina Litvinovich, who was arrested on the day of the invasion, a few hours after she posted about protesting. The repressive landscape is changing rapidly, with new consequences for speaking out introduced seemingly on a daily basis, and many potential protesters have already begun leaving the country.” (The Guardian, 10 March 2022)

Leonid Volkov, chief of staff of the detained opposition politician Alexei Navalny, shares his assessment of possibilities for protest in Russia in an interview with Time magazine in March 2022:

“There is a thing that many people in the West don’t understand: the risks that ordinary protesters face in Russia. Now, if you go to protest, you will very likely be detained, highly likely arrested, expelled from university or fired from your job. You are risking a prison term, like real prison, for three or five years. It has changed over the last six years dramatically. Two years ago, the largest risk for a protester was to get arrested for 10 days. Now it’s 15 years. Ten years ago, the largest risk for a protester was to get fined 500 rubles [approx. \$6]. Still, over 15,000 people were detained during anti-war rallies in the first couple of weeks, which means that hundreds of thousands of people attended. There were arrests in over 130 Russian cities. And very importantly, every protester in a country like Russia represents maybe a thousand people who are sympathetic but can’t afford to risk going to prison for five years; can’t afford to get fired from their job. So we know that many people are supporting us, but for very natural reasons, because they live in a totalitarian regime, they can’t turn out and participate.” (Time magazine, 30 March 2022)

2.1 Detention and arrest of protesters

2.1.1 General information

OVD-Info on 23 May 2022 counts 15,445 detentions in connection with anti-war actions since 24 February 2022 (OVD-Info, undated, accessed on 23 May 2022). In an April 2022 update of a report on how Russian authorities suppress anti-war protests, OVD-Info informs that “[t]he peak of detentions occurred in the first weeks of the war; most people were detained during the rallies on March 6 - at least 5,558 people in seventy-seven cities of Russia.” (OVD-Info, updated 14 April 2022). Since 24 February OVD-Info has become aware of the detention of at least 94 journalists. The source also informs that lawyers and legal practitioners who try to help

people persecuted for protests and anti-war statements are under pressure from authorities. There are reports of lawyers being beaten by the police, being detained and their apartments searched. The organisation recorded around 150 cases of lawyers not being admitted to help detainees in police departments (OVD-Info, updated 14 April 2022).

HRW in March 2022 published an article addressing protests against the war in Ukraine and states that protesters and journalists covering the protests face the risk of house raids, arbitrary detention and dubious criminal accusations:

“In the four weeks since Russia began its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, on February 24, 2022, hundreds of thousands of people across Russia have participated in peaceful protests to speak out against the war and express their discontent with the government. Police arbitrarily detained thousands of peaceful protesters. Russian authorities have also detained activists across the country and raided their homes, apparently in response to their participation in the peaceful anti-war movement. The raids and detentions, under the guise of dubious criminal cases, have taken place in cities across the country, including Moscow, Saint Petersburg, Pskov, Volgograd, Krasnodar, Novosibirsk, Rostov-on-Don, Arkhangelsk, as well as in the Kaluga region. [...]

On March 17, Kazan police raided the homes of at least nine activists in connection with a criminal investigation into ‘inciting mass riots,’ and seized some of their personal devices. The investigation was reportedly triggered by a message from an anonymous user in a Telegram chat. Among them are three members of the opposition political party, Yabloko, which publicly spoke out against the war. Police detained three of the activists as suspects in the mass riot case. On March 19, a court ordered one of them, Andrey Boyarshinov, to be placed under house arrest and amended charges against him to ‘justification of terrorism.’ The two others were released without charge.

On March 18, the police detained two activists in Volgograd and searched their apartments. On March 20, police raided the homes of five more anti-war activists in Volgograd and seized their personal devices. All seven have been designated as witnesses in a criminal case involving a false bomb threat. All seven had previously been detained for publicly protesting the war.

Also on March 18, police raided 10 homes in Pskov, including the head of the local Yabloko branch, Lev Shlosberg, and two other party members, and their parents. The authorities also searched Yabloko’s local headquarters for the second time in recent weeks. The searches were carried out in connection with a case involving alleged libel against the governor of Pskov region.

On March 12, the Pskov governor had recorded a video, referring to some of these activists as those who ‘hate our motherland.’

On March 7, assailants physically attacked Roman Taganov, an activist with the opposition movement Mayak (The Lighthouse), as he was coming home with his son, in the southern city of Maykop. They broke his nose and injured his neck, his wife said. The assailants, he later learned, were plain-clothes police officers. They detained Taganov, who was then fined for ‘discrediting the Russian army’ in an anti-war post on Instagram and sentenced to

10 days detention for ‘disobeying the police.’ On March 17, authorities charged Taganov with ‘violence against a police officer’ and placed him under house arrest.

Police briefly detained at least nine journalists during mass anti-war protests on March 13. One week earlier, authorities briefly detained at least 13 journalists. On March 16, the head of the Saint Petersburg police announced that law enforcement officers had detained people wearing press vests claiming the police were seeking to root out ‘provocateurs.’ Earlier, Moscow’s mayor implied that anti-war protests were organized by ‘provocateurs.’ The authorities also apparently prevented independent journalists from covering the officially organized pro-government events on March 18 in Moscow and Saint Petersburg. In Saint Petersburg, the police detained four journalists who were planning to report on the event just before it started. Officers questioned them for about an hour, then released them. In Moscow, police detained four journalists before they arrived at Luzhniki stadium where the event took place. The police charged Pavel Ivanov, a reporter with the independent outlet SOTA, with ‘disobeying a police officer’ for allegedly refusing to show his documents. A court sentenced him to three days detention. A SOTA photographer, Ruslan Terekhov, was sentenced to 10 days for refusing to show the contents of his camera bag. The Police threatened one of the detained journalists ‘not to report on protests or face detention.’” (HRW, 24 March 2022)

AI also reports “preventive arrests” on the eve of the 6 March protests, after raiding dozens of homes and offices of opposition activists and politicians. On 5 March “mass home searches” took place in several cities. On these “preventive arrests” AI observes:

“While some of those arrested in advance of the protests were later released under certain restrictions, others like Darya Heiniken in St Petersburg, were detained for 48 hours impeding their participation in the protests. Many activists reported that their mobile phones and computers were confiscated during searches, and expressed concern that the police may be studying their contacts, networks and affiliations. The activists believe that the searches were used as a tool of intimidation and to prevent them from participating in anti-war rallies.” (AI, 14 March 2022, p. 4)

An article by the Christian Norwegian human rights organisation Forum 18 of May 2022 reports on cases of detentions and prosecutions of laypeople for religious opposition to war, referring to information provided by OVD-Info:

“– 11 March, Pushkin Square, Moscow: two people held a placard with the quotation from the Gospel of Matthew, ‘Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy’, and the slogan ‘No to war’; they were detained but do not appear to have been charged.

– 15 March, outside the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour, Moscow: Anastasiya Parshkova stood with a placard saying ‘6th Commandment. Thou shalt not kill’, while wearing a headscarf; she was detained and taken to Khamovniki police station but not charged.

– 17 April, outside the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour, Moscow: Yevgeny Biryukov held up a piece of A4 paper with the words ‘6. Thou shalt not kill’; he was taken to Khamovniki

police station and charged under Administrative Code Article 20.3.3 [‘Public actions aimed at discrediting the use of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation’].

– 24 April (Orthodox Easter Sunday), Nizhny Novgorod: Aleksandr Malenkov was detained for holding up a placard reading ‘6th Commandment – Thou shalt not kill’, but not charged.

– 24 April (Orthodox Easter Sunday) Red Square, Moscow: Andrey Kryukov held up a placard with the words ‘Christ is for peace’; he was detained at Kitay Gorod police station and charged under Administrative Code Article 20.2 (‘Violation of the established procedure for organising or holding a meeting, rally, demonstration, procession or picket’ – Part unknown);

– 24 April (Orthodox Easter Sunday), outside church in Mitino, Moscow: Sergey Melnikov held up a placard reading ‘Enough war’ [‘Khvatit voyny’] beneath a picture of a church with the letters KhV (representing the Easter proclamation ‘Christ is risen’); he was detained but released without charge; police later went to his home, detained him again, and this time charged him under Administrative Code Article 20.3.3.

Forum 18 wrote to Moscow City Prosecutor's Office and Nizhny Novgorod Regional Prosecutor's Office to ask why people were being detained for quoting the Bible or otherwise peacefully expressing their beliefs, and why these actions were considered to be grounds for prosecution under Administrative Code Article 20.3.3. No reply has been received.” (Forum 18, 6 May 2022)

The Russian independent media outlet Mediazona, which was founded to counterbalance state-owned media, reports on several protests that took place on 9 May 2022, Victory Day, and presents the following “highlights”:

“On the eve and on Victory Day itself, security forces searched at least 23 activists in 6 cities. [...] A Muscovite was detained for distributing sweets to opponents of the war. In Vladikavkaz, a woman was detained who stood with a poster ‘They did not fight for this’. In St. Petersburg, an activist was detained, who was sitting on Nevsky Prospekt with a white rose and the book ‘Boys in Zinc’. In St. Petersburg, a municipal deputy was detained, who brought a portrait of a former concentration camp prisoner who died in Ukraine to the ‘Immortal Regiment’ rally. On Trubnaya Square in Moscow, an activist was detained with a poster ‘Russia, arrest me. I don't give a fuck!!!’. Yury Shcherbachev, head of the regional branch of the PARNAS party, was detained in Severodvinsk. Activist Daniil Davydenko was detained at the Novatorskaya metro station in Moscow. In Yekaterinburg, residents who wanted to launch white boats on the river were detained. A protocol was drawn up against a Novosibirsk citizen on the ‘discrediting’ of the army for the poster ‘We defeated that fascism, we will defeat this one’.” (Mediazona, 9 May 2022; working translation from Russian)

According to an OVD-Info telegram post 125 people were detained by Russian security forces on Victory Day, 82 of which were detained for anti-war symbols and protests. The other 43 were detained for past actions or statements, for other actions or for preventive purposes. Among the detained was a lawyer cooperating with OVD-Info (OVD-Info, 9 May 2022).

2.1.2 High-profile protesters or dissidents

HRW writes in a March 2022 article that Lev Ponomarev, a human rights defender, was detained by the police:

“Lev Ponomarev, a prominent human rights defender and the founder of the Movement for Human Rights, initiated a petition ‘against war,’ calling on the Russian military to withdraw from Ukraine and inviting people to join the peaceful anti-war movement. The police detained Ponomarev on February 24 and charged him with organizing unsanctioned protests in connection with the petition, which had gathered over 550,000 signatures by the evening of February 25.” (HRW, 26 February 2022)

On 25 February 2022 Marina Litvinovich, another prominent human rights activist, was fined 30,000 roubles for “an attempt to organize an unsanctioned rally in Moscow’ against Russia’s invasion of Ukraine”, reports RFE/RL on 25 February 2022 (RFE/RL, 25 February 2022). According to the independent international media platform openDemocracy, Litvinovich filled the role of protest coordinator, as Russia lacks institutions that are capable of organising protests (openDemocracy, 28 February 2022).

The Russian sociologist and political scientist Grigory Yudin was arrested for protesting the invasion of Ukraine, according to the Canadian public broadcaster CBC (CBC, 5 April 2022), and reportedly beaten up (The Guardian, 1 March 2022). BBC News publishes a video on 3 March 2022 that shows how elderly artist and activist Yelena Osipova is being arrested while protesting against the invasion of Ukraine (BBC News, 3 March 2022; see also AFP, 15 May 2022).

In March 2022 AI reports the arrest of the two prominent human rights defenders Oleg Orlov and Svetlana Gannushkina:

“On 6 March, the police arrested Oleg Orlov, a prominent human rights defender from the Human Rights Centre Memorial, minutes after he came to Manezhnaya Square in Moscow with a poster reading ‘Peace to Ukraine, Freedom to Russia’. His colleague Svetlana Gannushkina, chair of another prominent NGO ‘Civic Assistance’, was arrested shortly after when entering a metro station in Moscow. The police said that she had been identified with the help of facial recognition technology and took her to a police station without providing any reasons for her arrest. Both Gannushkina and Orlov were later charged under Article 20.2 (5) of the Code of Administrative Offences (‘Violation of the rules of public assemblies, rallies, marches or picketing by their participants’).” (AI, 14 March 2022, p. 2)

On March 14 Marina Ovsyannikova, news editor at Channel One, a stat-run TV channel watched by millions of Russians, ran onto the set “holding a poster reading ‘NO WAR’ in English and ‘Stop the war. Don't believe propaganda. They are lying to you’ in Russian. The bottom line of the poster said, ‘Russians against war’ in English” (RFE/RL, 30 March 2022). For this she was detained and reportedly questioned for 14 hours. She said she didn’t sleep for two days and could not access legal help (BBC News, 15 March 2022).

Mediazona reports on 30 March, that Vera Bashmakova, editor of a popular science publication “Biomolecule” was detained by the police on 29 March 2022, because her car had the inscription “No to war” on the rear window (Mediazona, 30 March 2022).

Russian authorities on 22 April 2022 started a criminal investigation against the opposition politician Vladimir Kara-Murza for sharing fake news about the Russian army amid its military campaign in Ukraine (AI, 22 April 2022) and he was declared a foreign agent. Kara-Murza is held in pretrial-detention until 12 June 2022. According to international news agency AFP, Kara-Murza was “a close associate of opposition leader Boris Nemtsov, who was assassinated near the Kremlin in 2015, and Mikhail Khodorkovsky, a former oligarch turned Kremlin critic” (AFP, 22 April 2022).

2.2 Use of excessive force

The arrests during the anti-war rallies taking place in Russia on 6 March were, according to OVD-Info, “accompanied by police violence: people were knocked to the ground, dropped on the asphalt, beaten with police truncheons, strangled, punched in the stomach, face, eyes, hit their heads against the wall, twisted and wrung their hands” (OVD-Info, updated 14 April 2022). In March 2022 a report on the situation of human rights in Russia was published in Russian by prominent human rights experts Pavel Chikov, head of the rights group Agora, and Damir Gainutdinov, head of the Net Freedoms Project. This report provides the following information on police brutality against anti-war protesters:

“On 24 February alone, human rights activists reported 113 complaints about the use of force by police and the National Guard in 11 regions of the country. Most reports came from Moscow and St. Petersburg. Detainees were beaten (truncheons were also used) on various parts of the body, including on the head. In addition, stun guns were actively used. Some of the detainees suffered craniocerebral injuries and concussions of the brain. For example, in Vladivostok, Anastasia Kotlyar's head was hit against a table and then she was subjected to strangulation. Mikhail Strelkin, a resident of Samara, said that after the beating, one of the police officers stood on his lower back with his foot. According to Shukhrat Sheraliev, a resident of St. Petersburg, the law enforcers gave him several blows on the head with a truncheon. Another St Petersburg resident, Andrei Ivanov, had his head bashed in. SOTA published an audio recording made at Moscow's Brateevo police station, where lawyers were not allowed to visit the detainees. On the recording the detainees are heard to be hit, insulted and threatened. [...] Journalists covering the protests were also subjected to violence. For example, in Yekaterinburg a reporter from It's my city was hit with a truncheon ‘interfering with the work of the police’, while in Moscow three Radio Liberty correspondents were violently detained.” (Chikov/Gainutdinov, 25 March 2022, p. 5; working translation from Russian)

HRW in March 2022 publishes an article on the ill-treatment of anti-war protesters by the police and reports the following:

“Russian authorities have arbitrarily arrested thousands of peaceful protesters at anti-war rallies across Russia, in line with their increasingly brutal crackdown on those who disagree with Russia’s military offensive in Ukraine. The police used excessive force against protesters while detaining them and, in several instances, inflicted abuse amounting to torture or inhuman and degrading treatment, on those in custody. [...]”

Numerous videos filmed in various cities show the police using excessive force as they arrest people. A video from Moscow shows five police officers detaining a man, while one of them kicks him. In Saint Petersburg police officers are seen pushing a man to the ground and punching him. A police officer in Moscow hit a protester with his baton while the officer and fellow officers had the protester restrained and were carrying him.

In Saint Petersburg, between four and six police officers were filmed beating a man, pinned to the ground, with batons and then appear to administer electric shocks to him. The man is shouting that he is not a protester and was simply passing by. The use of an electroshock weapon on a person clearly in police custody violates the prohibition on torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment.

Detainees reported sustaining cuts, bruises, and electric burns. One protester allegedly suffered a concussion and another had an open laceration on his head, allegedly inflicted during his arrest. Some detainees were hospitalized. [...]

Detainees also reported degrading and inhuman treatment, including torture, at police stations. Police in Moscow detained Marina Morozova, 22, for allegedly participating in the anti-war protests and took her to the Bratayevo police station. She was able to discretely make an audio recording inside the station. In the audio, which she later shared with the independent media outlet Novaya Gazeta, three police officers can be heard questioning her. One unidentified policeman was especially aggressive, insulting Morozova, punching her in the head, and threatening to shoot her and smash the chair into her head.

Aleksandra Kaluzhskikh, 26, also managed to discretely record audio while she was being questioned at Bratayevo. She shared this with OVD-Info. It appears that the same unidentified police officer who interrogated Morozova, slapped Kaluzhskikh, hit her in the face with a water bottle, grabbed her by the hair, threatened to give her electric shocks, and smashed her phone. 'Do you think I will be punished somehow? Putin told us to kill you [all]. Putin is on our side,' says the unidentified officer in the audio. 'You are enemies of the state. You are enemies of the nation. We will get a bonus for this.' Four other women reported to Novaya Gazeta that police officers at Bratayevo held them down while pouring water on their faces, which one of the women said made her feel like she was drowning. The description given by the women suggests the police subjected them to treatment commonly known as waterboarding, which constitutes torture. The women also said the police grabbed them by the hair, slapped them in the face, threatened them with sexual assault, and kicked them in the stomach. Dmitry Muratov, editor-in-chief of Novaya Gazeta and a 2021 Nobel Peace Prize winner, filed a complaint with the Internal Affairs Ministry, calling for investigations into these incidents at the Bratayevo police station.

OVD-Info also reported that officers at police stations across the country routinely threatened detainees with violence. Even though they were detained for alleged administrative offenses, detainees were forced to have their photo and fingerprints taken and surrender their telephones, contrary to Russian law." (HRW, 9 March 2022)

AI in a public statement of 14 March 2022 also reports use of excessive force in connection with anti-war demonstrations:

“Anti-war demonstrations to protest against Russia’s invasion of Ukraine have been routinely dispersed, often with the use of unnecessary and excessive force. OVD-Info reported at least 34 cases in the context of the demonstrations of 6 March that may amount to torture. Videos taken at the scenes and examined by Amnesty International show peaceful protesters, including women, being brutally beaten by police with batons and electrocuted with stun guns, punched, kicked, dragged and otherwise ill-treated. Several protesters have reported head and other injuries as a result. In some cases, the police assaulted peaceful protesters for attempting to film the events, including arrests of other protesters, on a mobile phone. There have also been reports of torture or other ill-treatment of people held in some police stations. A disturbing audio recording made by a woman detained in the police station Bateevo in Moscow showed how she was being verbally humiliated and abused, slapped and hit allegedly with a plastic bottle filled with water – a common method used by the police to inflict pain without leaving visible signs on the victim’s body.” (AI, 14 March 2022, p. 3)

[Section 2.1.1](#) of this report has already mentioned opposition activist Roman Taganov, who was injured by plainclothes police officers during his arrest on 7 March 2022, suffering a broken nose and an injury to his neck. (HRW, 24 March 2022).

2.3 Legal action or criminal prosecution

OVD-Info on 7 April 2022 publishes an article, which deals with prosecutions of anti-war dissidents. It notes the following:

“The authorities are exerting unprecedented pressure on dissenters. There are mass detentions, and protest participants are being threatened with criminal prosecution for participating in activities of extremist organizations. [...] The details of criminal cases against those opposing the war are not always known, but their overall demeanor and the identities of those persecuted suggest the authorities are using the war as an excuse to crush dissent and totally ‘cleanse’ civil society. [...] Despite the numerous instances of violence perpetrated by representatives of the authorities, who unjustifiably detain people at demonstrations, not a single criminal court case has been filed in response to these acts. Nonetheless, criminal proceedings continue to be brought against protesters for violence against police officers. Experience has shown that unbiased investigations and due process in such cases are not upheld in Russia. On the contrary, judicial proceedings are characterized by a blatant disregard for procedural norms and evidence for the defense. Penalties are disproportionate even for formal charges.” (OVD-Info, 7 April 2022).

The article continues with examples of individuals who are charged with, among others, the use of non-lethal violence against a representative of the authorities (Article 318.1 of the Criminal Code), Hooliganism (Article 213 of the Criminal Code), Vandalism (Article 214 of the Criminal Code), slander (Article 128.1 of the Criminal Code) and public dissemination of deliberately false information concerning the armed forces of the Russian Federation (OVD-Info, 7 April 2022).

OVD-Info in its April 2022 updated report on Russian authorities suppressing anti-war protests describes that the rallies in the first weeks of the war, when most detentions occurred, were “followed by a wave of criminal prosecutions” (OVD-Info, updated 14 April 2022). In a May article OVD-Info speaks of 145 known defendants in criminal cases, who are, according to the article, prosecuted, because they spoke out against the war (OVD-Info, 3 May 2022).

In addition to criminal charges, OVD-Info also reports of administrative cases against protesters:

“A wave of administrative cases against protesters is gaining momentum. From February 24 to April 12, the courts ordered at least 960 arrests in connection with the protests in Russia. Along with the ‘rally’ article 20.2 of the CAO [Code of Administrative Offences], Article 20.3.3 of the CAO, which was adopted in March and imposes liability for the ‘discrediting’ of the Russian military, is used to suppress anti-war rallies. According to the police and courts, posters, badges with the words ‘For peace’, ‘No war’, blank sheets of paper, flags of Ukraine, etc. discredit the Russian military. Currently, we are aware of at least 993 cases initiated under article 20.3.3 of the CAO. It is common for detainees at protest rallies to be charged with two articles at the same time: 20.2 for participating in an uncoordinated public event and 20.3.3. for ‘discrediting’ the Russian military. In addition, at least two administrative cases have appeared since then on charges of calling for sanctions against Russia (Article 20.3.4 of the CAO).” (OVD-Info, updated 14 April 2022)

According to a public statement by AI of March 2022 most anti-war protesters who get arrested are charged with administrative offences:

“[They] face charges under Article 20.2 (5) of the Russian Code of Administrative Offences, Article 20.2 (2) (‘Organization of a public event without submitting a notification’), Article 20.2(8) (‘Repeated violation of the rules of participation in a public assembly’) and Article 19.3 (‘Disobedience to the lawful order of a police officer’). The Russian Net Freedoms Project had already reported since the protests of 6 March at least 144 cases brought under the newly introduced Article 20.3.3 (‘Public actions aimed at discreditation of the Russian armed forces’) across Russia and in the occupied Crimea.⁴ As of 7 March, at least seven people were issued with fines ranging from RUB 30,000 to RUB 60,000 (US\$ 224 to US\$ 447) for having called others to join an anti-war action by staging a single picket with an anti-war slogan or by writing ‘No to war’ on the snow.” (AI, 14 March 2022, p. 2)

The Guardian in March 2022 reported that “pro-Kremlin parties in the Duma presented a bill that would forcibly conscript opposition protesters to fight in Russia’s ‘special operation’ in the Donbas region” (The Guardian, 3 March 2022a; see also Interfax, 4 March 2022). Kevin Rothrock, managing editor at the English-language edition of Meduza, in a Tweet of 27 March 2022 states that “the bill hasn’t gone anywhere” (Rothrock, 27 March 2022). Within the limited timeframe for the research and among sources consulted for this report more information could not be found on this topic.

OVD-Info provides “chronicles of political prosecution” for the months March and April 2022, in Russian language. The chronicles inform on blocked websites, new entries in the foreign

agent lists, journalists and cultural workers who left Russia because of fear of police pressure and prosecutions of citizens arranged according to regions for the respective month:

- OVD-Info: Chronicle of Political Prosecution in March 2022: Essentials [Хроника политических преследований в марте 2022 года: главное], 9 April 2022
<https://ovd.news/news/2022/04/09/hronika-politicheskikh-presledovaniy-v-marte-2022-goda-glavnoe>
- OVD-Info Chronicle of Political Prosecution in April 2022: Essentials [Хроника политических преследований в апреле 2022 года: главное], 7 May 2022
<https://ovd.news/news/2022/05/07/hronika-politicheskikh-presledovaniy-v-aprele-2022-goda-glavnoe>

Rights in Russia, an independent NGO promoting Human Rights, translates and publishes a weekly bulletin by OVD-Info, that monitors politically motivated arrests and prosecutions in Russia:

- Rights in Russia: Rights Groups in Russia, OVD-Info Weekly Bulletin, undated
<https://www.rightsinrussia.org/category/ovd-info/>

2.4 Government capacity to track protests and protesters

Freedom House in its Freedom on the Net 2021 report notes that the Russian government was lately increasing pressure on internet activities, especially with regard to the organisation of protests:

“Although the internet remains the most versatile and effective platform for activism in Russia, facilitating efforts to confront propaganda, hold officials to account, and organize protests, this function has come under increasing pressure from the authorities. A 2019 report from the OVD-Info human rights project highlighted how the government restricts freedom of assembly online. Those calling for demonstrations on the internet may face criminal or administrative penalties, and the government sometimes restricts connectivity before and during demonstrations, as in Ingushetia in 2018 and 2019. Other tactics the government employs to constrain mobilization include cyberattacks against activists, monitoring activists’ social media profiles, placing informers in public or private chat groups that are used to organize demonstrations, harassing journalists who cover protests, and otherwise preventing journalists from gathering information about protests and protesters.” (Freedom House, 21 September 2021, section B8)

A March 2022 Washington Post article points out that Putin wants to deliver the message to the Russian people that “no one is too small to escape notice” (The Washington Post, 26 March 2022). The article continues with the example of a technician of the Interior Ministry who was arrested for talking privately on the phone (The Washington Post, 26 March 2022).

According to the RSF report on internet censorship and surveillance of August 2021, computers, smartphones and other smart devices sold in Russia must come with pre-installed Russian software, as legally required since April 2021. Those pre-installed software “include Yandex services (browser, search engine, map service), the email provider Mail.ru, the messenger service ICQ, the social networks Vkontakte and Odnoklassniki, the Russian state’s public

services portal Gosuslugi and antivirus software from the Russian cybersecurity company Kaspersky” (RSF, August 2021, p. 12). The report continues:

“Many of these companies are registered as ‘organisers of dissemination of information’ (Russian abbreviation: ORI) with media regulator Roskomnadzor, and are thus obliged to store users’ data and make it accessible to law enforcement agencies. Federal Law No. 54-FZ of 24 March 2021 foresees fines of up to 200,000 roubles (approx. €2,200) in the event of noncompliance with this regulation.” (RSF, August 2021, p. 12)

The USDOS report on Human Rights Practices 2021 adds more details concerning the storage of user data:

“The law requires domestic and foreign businesses to store citizens’ personal data on servers physically located in the country. Companies refusing to localize Russian users’ data may be subject to penalties [...], with fines of up to 18 million rubles (\$243,000) for repeat offenses or being blocked from operating in the country. [...] Telecommunications companies are required to temporarily retain user data and make it available to law enforcement bodies. Regulatory requirements specify users’ voice records must be stored for a period of six months, and electronic correspondence (audio, images, and video) for three months. Observers believed that the country’s security services were able to intercept and decode encrypted messages on at least some messaging platforms. The law also requires telecommunications companies to provide authorities with ‘backdoors’ around encryption technologies. Companies are fined up to six million rubles (\$81,000) if they refuse to provide the FSB with decryption keys that would allow it to read users’ correspondence.” (USDOS, 12 April 2022, section 2a)

The USDOS report also states that providers must ensure that the Russian federal security service FSB has access to customer data, internet activities and private communication:

“Law enforcement agencies required telecommunications providers to grant the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the FSB continuous remote access to client databases, including telephone and electronic communications, enabling them to track private communications and monitor internet activity without the provider’s knowledge. [...] The Ministry of Information and Communication requires telecommunications service providers to allow the FSB to tap telephones and monitor the internet.” (USDOS, 12 April 2022, section 1f)

“The government monitored all internet communications [...]. The law requires internet providers to install equipment to route web traffic through servers in the country. The government continued to employ its longstanding use of the System for Operative Investigative Activities, which requires internet service providers (ISPs) to install, at their own expense, a device that routes all customer traffic to an FSB terminal. The system enables police to track private email communications, identify internet users, and monitor their internet activity. Internet freedom advocates asserted the measure allows for surveillance by intelligence agencies and enables state authorities to control information and block content.” (USDOS, 12 April 2022, section 2a)

The surveillance tool System for Operative Investigative Activities mentioned in the above USDOS quote is also known for its acronym SORM (Russian: Система оперативно-разыскных мероприятий). A NYT article of March 2022 reports that this tool “was used to track supporters of the Russian opposition leader Aleksei A. Navalny. Investigators said it had intercepted the phone calls of a Kremlin foe who was later assassinated” (NYT, 28 March 2022). The NYT assumes that SORM is also being used to silence voices that speak out against the Ukraine war (NYT, 28 March 2022). According to a reference note on Russian communications surveillance published already in 2014 by the Center for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS), a bipartisan, nonprofit policy research organisation, the SORM programs “provide the foundation of Russian mass communications surveillance” (CSIS, 18 April 2014). CSIS explains that SORM is being used since 1990 and the FSB is legally authorised to use SORM “to collect, analyze and store all data that [is] transmitted or received on Russian networks, including calls, email, website visits and credit card transactions” (CSIS, 18 April 2014).

Meduza in an April 2022 article reports on a large data leak from Roskomnadzor. Analysing the data Meduza and others found that “Roskomnadzor started monitoring protest sentiment back in 2020, sharing daily reports with various government agencies (including the national security apparatus) [...]. Meduza learned that Roskomnadzor has a new automated monitoring system called the Office of Operational Interaction (AS KOV) that is missing from the agency’s official list of information systems.” (Meduza, 13 April 2022). According to the article the Roskomnadzor’s regional divisions are tasked with “compiling daily reports about spikes in popular dissent appearing on social media” (Meduza, 13 April 2022). By means of AS KOV automated monitoring system, Roskomnadzor transfers these reports to the FSB and the Interior Ministry. Among “destabilizing topics” that were recorded in these reports sanctions pressure and anti-militarism are listed.

“Notably, RKN [Roskomnadzor] was targeting ‘anti-militarism’ as early as September 2020 — well more than a year before Moscow launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine. [...] The materials [...] indicate that this monitoring work is designed to cover all mass media resources (the news media, blogs, and social networks), with the exception of what the agency calls ‘pro-state’ outlets.” (Meduza, 13 April 2022)

Russian authorities use facial recognition technology to identify and prosecute protesters. The use of this technology is not regulated by Russian law, not even for the purpose of policing (HRW, 15 February 2022). USDOS refers to a December 2020 study by the information and analytical agency TelecomDaily that observed that there are more than 13 million closed-circuit television (CCTV) cameras in Russia, of which one third were installed by the government. With the help of facial recognition technology protesters are identified, sometimes incorrectly (USDOS, 12 April 2022, section 1f). The USDOS report provides the example of a Moscow municipal deputy, Vladimir Zalizhchak, who in 2021, “after attending the January 23 demonstrations in Moscow as a representative of the state, was arrested by police based on facial recognition software placing him at the protest” (USDOS, 12 April 2022, section 1d). Also because of the use of facial recognition technology the human rights activist Svetlana Gannushkina was detained in March 2022. She was detected by CCTV leaving a metro station near an anti-war protest site (Business Insider, 21 March 2022). The New-York based online

news-site Business Insider published a text on the use of facial recognition and cites human rights activist Alyona Popova:

“‘We can be followed, we can be arrested, no matter where we are,’ said the outspoken activist against Russia's widespread surveillance of protesters. ‘It is a place of total surveillance, where the government collects our personal data, our biometrics, our faces, and our messages when we are online.’ Popova's awakening came in September, 2019, when she found herself eye-to-eye with a government camera as she joined a peaceful anti-government rally in Moscow. City officials had approved the rally, held to protest prior police brutality against demonstrators. But in Sakharov Square that day, Popova and her fellow rally-goers were forced to go through metal detectors. Each was equipped with an eye-level surveillance camera. [...] ‘[...] the 2019 rally was the first known mass harvesting of the faces of Russian dissent. Now, they are collecting this data just because you attend a protest or rally,’ she told Insider. ‘They have data now on tens of thousands of protesters,’ [...]. Once officials know who you are, ‘They can arrest you that day, or days, even months later,’ said Popova.” (Business Insider, 21 March 2022)

OVD-Info published a comprehensive report on the use of cameras and facial recognition technology by authorities. It also deals with the phenomenon of “post factum detentions”, when protesters are detained after the event has finished, sometimes even days later:

“After the April rally [April 2021, in support of Alexei Navalny] many wondered: why were participants detained in large numbers only in some cities? Unlike the winter protests, the rally in Moscow was held without thousands of detainees; police wagons and stations were not overcrowded; police officers did not use violence against protesters. It seemed that the authorities had resigned themselves and decided not to interfere with those gathered to exercise their right to freedom of assembly. But after a few days, it became obvious that this was not the case. Police visits, detentions and trials began. Detentions of protesters after the end of the event, or, as we call them, ‘post factum detentions’, have taken place before 2021. In 2018, OVD-Info counted 219 such cases in 39 regions of Russia; [...] From July to early December 2020, OVD-Info recorded 121 post factum detentions there — almost twice as many as at the protests themselves. [...] In total, in 2021, we recorded at least 454 post factum detentions. Most of them - 363 - are connected with the rally in support of Navalny on April 21.” (OVD-Info, 17 January 2022)

For the full OVD-Info report on the authorities’ use of cameras and facial recognition against protesters please refer to:

- OVD-Info: How Authorities Use Cameras and Facial Recognition against Protesters, 17 January 2022
<https://reports.ovdinfo.org/how-authorities-use-cameras-and-facial-recognition-against-protesters#1>

3 Treatment of dissidents

It is often not possible to make a clear distinction between dissidents and protesters. Therefore, incidents mentioned under the subheadings of section 2 may also include protesters.

3.1 Treatment of vocal or public critics by state authorities

The USDOS report on Human Rights Practices 2021 observes that government-controlled media pejoratively refer to individuals who express critical views of government policy as “traitor”, “foreign agent” or “fifth column” (USDOS, 12 April 2022, section 2a). HRW in March 2022 also writes that people critical of the Ukraine war are labelled “national traitors” (HRW, 24 March 2022):

“Russian authorities have cracked down on journalists, human rights defenders, and activists in an effort to silence any criticism of the war in Ukraine, Human Rights Watch said today. The authorities have arbitrarily detained, judicially harassed, raided, and engaged in smear campaigns against critics. Unidentified assailants have physically attacked activists and damaged human rights organizations’ offices. In recent weeks, various high-level officials, including President Vladimir Putin, labeled people critical of the war ‘national traitors.’ ‘Having already intensified a crackdown against critics in 2021, the authorities are escalating their witch-hunt even further to punish all anti-war sentiment,’ said Hugh Williamson, Europe and Central Asia director at Human Rights Watch. [...] Police regularly detain independent journalists reporting on anti-war protests, and in some cases have paid them visits at home, apparently to harass and threaten them not to take part in protests.” (HRW, 24 March 2022)

The Moscow Times in April 2022 reports on Russian society’s self-cleansing encouraged by officials:

“In the weeks that have followed [Russia’s invasion of Ukraine], officials have encouraged the creation of ‘self-cleansing of society’ leading to the appearance of lists of ‘traitors and enemies’ - Russians who oppose the war - online. Elsewhere, websites have urged Russians to report on ‘pests’ to public officials. Some citizens have enthusiastically taken up the call.” (The Moscow Times, 11 April 2022)

A March 2022 Reuters special report shows how the foreign agent law is being used to harass dissidents and stifle criticism of the government. The report provides, among others, the example of Galina Arapova, a lawyer and head of the non-profit Mass Media Defence Centre, which advocates for freedom of expression:

“Throughout 2021, the Kremlin tightened the screws on its opponents – including supporters of jailed opposition leader Alexei Navalny – using a combination of arrests, internet censorship and blacklists. The crackdown accelerated after Russia invaded Ukraine. [...] A widely used weapon in the Kremlin’s armoury is the state’s register of ‘foreign agents.’ People whose names appear on this official list are closely monitored by the authorities. [...]

The designation [as foreign agent] brings close government scrutiny of Arapova’s daily life and a mountain of red tape. She must file a quarterly report to the Ministry of Justice

detailing her income and expenses, including trips to the supermarket. The report runs to 44 pages. [...] Every six months, 'foreign agents' must file an account to the ministry of how they spend their time. Some retired people list their household chores. Arapova states in her account simply that she works as a lawyer, unsure whether she's providing enough detail. She offers legal advice to other 'foreign agents,' but says she's often in the dark about what the rules require. 'We don't fully understand what exactly they want us to do because the law is very vague,' she told Reuters. 'They don't explain anything. Do we have to list all utility costs and receipts from supermarkets or just overall expenses for three months?' People deemed to be 'foreign agents' must set up a legal entity, such as a Limited Liability Company. This too is added to the list of 'foreign agents' and must report its activities to the authorities. The process involves finding premises to register a legal entity, drawing up seals and electronic signatures, submitting documents to the tax service, and opening a company bank account. The company has to undergo annual audits but, as Arapova explains, auditors are not keen on taking clients with 'foreign agent' status, and those who do tend to charge a lot. She estimates that complying with the requirements so far has cost her about 1,000 euros. Accounting fees will add to that sum when her LLC undergoes an audit. Even more costly is the endless time spent on meeting the requirements. 'It takes time away from my work and causes a lot of psychological stress,' she said. 'When you're forced to do this type of bureaucratic and humiliating nonsense it's a kind of psychological torture.'

And that, some analysts say, is the Kremlin's aim. These registers, said Ben Noble, associate professor of Russian politics at University College London, are 'part of a broader project, which involves both moving against individuals who are publicly critical of the government and also trying to have a broader chilling effect to stop people from even thinking about getting involved with opposition or critical, independent journalism in the first place, for fear that they will, essentially, be framed by the authorities as traitors.'" (Reuters, 31 March 2022)

For the Reuters special report 76 people of the foreign agent list were contacted, of which 65, all critics of Kremlin politics, responded to questions of how the designation affected them:

"The respondents, all Russian citizens, denied working for a foreign power. Most said they had received no explanation for their inclusion on the list. Several lost work or were forced to change jobs. Others said they left Russia because they didn't feel safe. Dozens said they reduced their social media activity because everything they publish, even personal social media posts, must contain a 24-word disclaimer that identifies them as a 'foreign agent.' Since the invasion of Ukraine, at least five people on the register said they have been briefly detained for involvement in anti-war protests or while carrying out reporting related to the war. [...] [Galina Arapova] learned that one of the reasons for her designation was that she received foreign funding - a \$400 payment for speaking at a media conference in Moldova about European data protection. She believes that she has been classified as a 'foreign agent' because of her work promoting free speech and in defending journalists whose output is critical of the Russian government." (Reuters, 31 March 2022)

3.2 Treatment of dissidents by state-affiliated institutions

Forum 18 on 13 May 2022 cites Lutheran Archbishop Dietrich Brauer saying that “at the start of the war, President Putin's administration made ‘a clear demand’ of religious leaders to speak out in favour of the invasion” (Forum 18, 13 May 2022) and another Protestant pastor is quoted as saying “FSB officers visited clergy to warn them not to say anything critical in sermons or on social media” (Forum 18, 13 May 2022). Another May 2022 article by Forum 18 reports that “Russian religious organisations [are] largely supportive of [the] invasion” (Forum 18, 6 May 2022) and that dissident clergymen and laypeople often “face detention, prosecution, and the loss of their jobs in consequence” (Forum 18, 6 May 2022) for protesting or speaking out against the war in Ukraine. The article describes the cases of two Russian Orthodox priests and a Baptist preacher, all three charged of discrediting the armed forces:

“Two Russian Orthodox priests are known to have received administrative fines of about one month's average local wages each for ‘discrediting the armed forces’ as a result of their opposition to the war. Fr Ioann Burdin, of the Moscow Patriarchate's Kostroma Diocese, [was fined for posting an anti-war statement on the website of his parish and] described the fine to Forum 18 as ‘a ban not only on expressing one's opinion but also even on professing one's religious beliefs’. [...] Deacon Sergey Shcherbyuk in Samara was fined for ‘discrediting the Russian armed forces’ in conversations with parishioners and colleagues, one of whom reported him to the Interior Ministry. [...]

In late April, October District Court in Tambov fined Baptist preacher and local journalist Sergey Stepanov 40,000 Roubles under Administrative Code Article 20.3.3 (‘Public actions aimed at discrediting the use of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation’) for anti-war posts he had made on his VKontakte page.” (Forum 18, 6 May 2022)

OVD-Info in its April 2022 updated publication on the suppression of anti-war protests by Russian authorities reports that “[m]anagers and employees of state-funded or government-affiliated structures - theatres, museums, or large companies - resign due to moral considerations and disagreement with the policies of organizations” (OVD-Info, updated 14 April 2022), but there are examples of forced dismissals as well:

“This [pressure on employees and forced dismissals] is especially common in the culture sector. For example, an actor of the Moscow Academic Theatre of Vladimir Mayakovsky published ‘information from the Department of Culture’, presumably distributed among employees, that any negative comments on the ‘course of the special military operation in Ukraine’ would be regarded as treason to the Motherland. Director of the ‘Polet’ and ‘Zvezda’ cinemas Ekaterina Dolinina was asked to resign the day after signing an open letter against the war. Artistic Director of the Meyerhold Center Dmitry Volkostrelov was fired after publishing an anti-war post on the Center's Instagram. The Friday and TNT TV channels closed the shows and cut ties with producers who spoke out against the war. Russian comedians Denis Chuzhoy, Mikhail Shats and Danila Poperechniy, who signed an open letter against the war, told about threatening phone calls. On March 3, Lev Ponomarev was attacked by unidentified individuals - employees of the NTV TV channel were also present during the attack.” (OVD-Info, 14 April 2022)

According to SWP from the beginning of the Ukraine war “schools received instructions from the education ministry about how to handle the ‘special operation’ in class” (SWP, April 2022, p. 4). Several sources (AI, 12 May 2022; BBC News, 20 March 2022) report on dismissals of or reprisals against university professors, lecturers and schoolteachers who oppose the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Amnesty International released an article on that topic on 12 May 2022, stating the following:

“Dozens of schoolteachers and university lecturers have faced harsh reprisals for speaking out against the war in Ukraine. Some have been put behind bars to serve so-called administrative arrest or have had to pay extortionate fines simply for expressing their opinions either publicly or in the classroom. Others have been dismissed or otherwise reprimanded. Roman Melnichenko, Associate Professor at Volgograd State University, was dismissed on 19 April for an ‘immoral disciplinary offense’ that ‘violated ethical and moral norms’ when he re-posted an anti-war message on VKontakte, a popular Russian social network. He was dismissed after the local Prosecutor’s Office informed the university he had faced administrative proceedings.

Some educators have been reported to the police by their own students or colleagues. Elena Baybekova, a maths teacher from Astrakhan, southern Russia, was dismissed on 1 April. One of her students had objected to ‘political conversations’ during her class, after which she was accused of ‘absence without leave’ and dismissed. She had previously participated in a protest against the war in Ukraine, for which she was sentenced to five days in detention. She denies talking about politics during her class. Marina Dubrova, an English teacher from Korsakov on Sakhalin island, was dismissed on 5 April. Less than a week earlier, she had said the war was ‘a mistake’ when talking with students during a break. A student recorded the conversation in a video. A mother of one of the students saw the clip and reported Dubrova to the police. Three days later, she was summoned to appear in court and fined 30,000 Rubles (US\$ 370) for ‘discrediting the Armed Forces.’

Irina Gen, an English teacher from Penza, Central Russia, is facing a prison sentence under the new criminal offence of disseminating ‘fake news’ about the Russian army. On 30 March, she was charged for criticizing the invasion and calling Russia ‘a totalitarian state’ where ‘any dissent is considered a thought crime’. She had been reported to the police by her students in eighth grade.” (AI, 12 May 2022)

More examples of pressure on teachers for anti-war positions can be found in a May 2022 article of OVD-Info: Ilya Kukulin, a philologist at the National Research University Higher School of Economics was forced to sign a letter of resignation, as was Maria Mayofis, associate professor of the School of Cultural Studies in March 2022. The reason was their statements in social networks against the “special operation” on the territory of Ukraine (OVD-Info, 4 May 2022). At the end of March 2022, a teacher was fined for making anti-war remarks in class, she was issued a disciplinary sanction. Also in March, Sergei Levitsky, associate professor at the East Siberian State Institute of Culture in Ulan-Ude was temporarily suspended from work, because a private telegram text “contained negative statements about Russia”. The OVD-Info article also states that at least three educators were reprimanded for taking part in anti-war protests (OVD-Info, 4 May 2022).

Students must also expect consequences, if they express an opinion that does not agree with the official line. Several sources report on students having been expelled after expressing unwanted opinions on the Russia-Ukraine war (The Moscow Times, 9 March 2022; THE, 12 April 2022; Der Standard, 11 May 2022). The Times Higher Education (THE), a London-based magazine that covers topics related to higher education in April 2022 writes on that topic:

“Russian institutions are leading the charge in cracking down on student opposition to the Kremlin’s war on Ukraine, with hundreds of students estimated to have been expelled already. With Russian academia increasingly cut off from the outside world, student dissidents are finding themselves targeted by the very institutions tasked with nurturing their critical thinking. On 9 March, Russia’s Ministry of Internal Affairs reportedly ordered Saint Petersburg State University to expel 13 students who participated in anti-war protests, in what academics have said is an escalation of the crackdown on free speech.

While no official figures exist, hundreds of students have likely been expelled for their opposition to the war, estimated Vladimir Ashurkov, a Russian activist and executive director of the Anti-Corruption Foundation, a Moscow-based non-profit established by opposition politician Alexei Navalny. [...]

Even at universities that stop short of expelling students, scare tactics are ‘blatant and offensive, and they target the brightest and most promising students’ – students are being rejected by supervisors, fired from laboratories and told they’ll face problems defending their theses, he said. [...] He [Ashurkov] described administrators as zealous in their pursuit of offenders: ‘We have the impression that university managers are playing the key role in the attempts we’re seeing to silence students – not an order from above.’

Dmitry Dubrovsky, a professor at the School of Higher Economics (HSE) University in Moscow, said that many Russian universities have been scouring social media to identify anti-war students and pressure them to remove so-called anti-patriotic posts.

Universities are increasingly taking ‘extraordinary measures’ – escalating their response from warning talks with students to making ‘direct threats’, said Professor Dubrovsky.” (THE, 12 April 2022)

On the treatment of dissident university students OVD-Info in its April 2022 publication reports:

“According to DOXA [a Russian online student magazine], as of March 10, at least 30 higher educational institutions had conversations about the inadmissibility of participating in rallies and publicly expressing a position other than the official one, and criminal liability for it. Students of the Higher School of Economics report that the guards make ‘some lists’ of students who came wearing anti-war masks. One of the employees of the RUDN University [Peoples’ Friendship University of Russia] reported to OVD-Info that on the morning of February 26, the police were looking for anti-war protests participants in the university dormitories. The Dean of the MGIMO [Moscow State Institute of International Relations] Faculty of Management and Politics, Henry Sardaryan, launched a project ‘to help and support Donbas’, students who did not want to participate in the project were asked to leave the faculty chat. ‘Takie Dela’ report that Russian universities warn students

from speaking out against the war. For example, students of the Moscow State University of Food Production were threatened with administrative penalties or expulsion for posts on social networks criticizing the actions of the Russian state. Representatives of the university noted that they can be expelled both for materials in social networks and for an active discussion of events in Ukraine. A similar situation is observed in the Russian State University named after S. A. Yesenin. At the Financial University under the Government of the Russian Federation, the group leaders were asked to 'monitor' the statements of both students and employees, and those who lived in a dormitory were threatened with eviction for hanging posters. Students of the Faculty of Bioengineering and Bioinformatics and the Faculty of Biology of Moscow State University reported the arrival of security officers who threatened to expel students who go to the rallies. But the pressure is not only limited to words. St. Petersburg State Pediatric Medical University has already expelled two students - Ilya Bochkarev and Victoria Pershenkova. Earlier, they were detained because of anti-war rallies and were imposed on administrative charges. Information about this appeared on the university's website. In the message, the university notes that the decision to expel was made according to violation of the universities charter, as well as due to 'incompatible with the high rank of a doctor and a student of a medical university behaviour'.

On March 9, it also became known that St. Petersburg State University had prepared the expulsion orders of 13 students who were detained at anti-war rallies. Veronika Samusik, who covered the rallies as a journalist of the Sota.Vision network, was also detained thus ended up on the list. The list may be replenished, as several more large rallies have taken place since the order was issued." (OVD-Info, updated 14 April 2022)

BBC News in March publishes an article that provides examples of employees, who were dismissed or told to resign, because they had made their opinion against the Russian aggression in Ukraine public. One is the case of Ekaterina Dolinina, already mentioned above. Another example given is that of a paediatrician, Anna Levadnaya. After posting anti-war messages on Instagram, she was informed by colleagues that the director of the state medical center she worked for talked about those comments during the morning conference and soon after she was instructed to write a letter of resignation, otherwise she would be fired (BBC News, 20 March 2022).

3.3 Treatment of signatories of petitions and open letters

OVD-Info in its April 2022 updated report on the suppression of anti-war protests by Russian authorities writes the following on petitions and open letters:

"A broad anti-war public campaign, despite the official rhetoric of the authorities, manifested itself quite noticeably from the very beginning taking various forms. First of all, petitions, open letters and statements against the war were being launched on the Internet. A petition created by human rights defender Lev Ponomarev on the Change.Org portal has gained more than a million signatures. At the moment, there are around 100 such documents from representatives of various professions and other associations of citizens. The Economist analyzed 50,000 posts on Twitter and Instagram using the hashtag #nowar, determined the geolocation of 7,000 of them and found publications in 83 Russian regions and 50 cities all over the country – the geography and scale of support are

unprecedented. After the publication and dissemination of such statements, reports began to arrive concerning visits by law enforcement officers to the people and organizations that signed the petitions. [...] Ksenia Suvorova, the compiler and initiator of the open anti-war letter of medical workers, which gained more than 17 thousand signatures in a week, told about the threats. The collection of signatures was suspended due to the entry into force of the amendments on 'fake news'. Moreover, the St. Petersburg State Pediatric Medical University examined the personal files of employees who signed letters that were allegedly 'aimed at radicalizing society and extremist manifestations'. Some of the employees decided not to continue working in Russian state institutions. [...]

On March 1, NGOs and charitable foundations that signed an open letter to the president against armed hostilities on the territory of Ukraine reported that they were disconnected from the charity program on the website of the Moscow mayor mos.ru. Later, Olga Zanko, the chairman of the central council of supporters of United Russia, the deputy chairman of the State Duma Committee for the Development of Civil Society, proposed to deprive NGOs that oppose the interests of Russia of state support. (OVD-Info, updated 14 April 2022)

According to HRW Lev Ponomarev, the organiser of the Change.org petition cited above, was detained by the police on 24 February and charged with organising unsanctioned protests in connection with the petition. (HRW, 26 February 2022)

The Moscow Times reports in February 2022 on an open letter initiated by journalist Elena Chernenko, who was in consequence barred from attending events of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as her Foreign Ministry accreditation was withdrawn. Elena Chernenko asked the Foreign Ministry spokeswoman not to punish the letter's other signatories. The letter was signed by more than 200 journalists and according to the source "was one of many public proclamations of resistance among Russians, with public figures, celebrities, scientists, municipal deputies and more also penning open letters." (The Moscow Times, 25 February 2022)

RFE/RL quotes Chulpan Khamatova, a prominent Russian actress, who was on holiday when the war against Ukraine started, as saying: "[...] I signed the petition against the war. And then it was made clear to me it would be undesirable for me to go back." (RFE/RL, 21 March 2022).

In a May 2022 article OVD-Info reports on another open letter, the "Teachers against war initiative" that started when a teacher decided he could not help but speak out against the war in Ukraine. By 4 March 2022 the initiative had collected around 5,000 signatures and published them on a website. After the introduction of the fake news legislation the text of the appeal was changed and a few weeks later the text was removed from the website altogether. In some regions, many of the signatory teachers had been forced to write explanatory letters, in some teachers were asked to remove their signatures and threatened with dismissal, while in other regions no questions at all came up. (OVD-Info, 4 May 2022)

Forum 18 in a May 2022 article on religiously driven opposition to the war in Ukraine writes that "a Baptist Union preacher was fined for making anti-war posts on his VKontakte page,

including a link to an open letter condemning the war, hosted by a Protestant publishing house.” About the open letter the article reports:

“According to the court verdict, seen by Forum 18, Stepanov's posts included the text of an open letter condemning the invasion of Ukraine, originally posted on 2 March on the website of St Petersburg Protestant publisher Mirt. ‘Our army is conducting full-scale military operations in another country, dropping bombs and rockets on the cities of our neighbour Ukraine’, it begins. ‘As believers, we consider what is happening the grave sin of fratricide.’ The letter goes on to assert that ‘No political interests or goals can justify the deaths of innocent people’, and that ‘In addition to bloodshed, the invasion of sovereign Ukraine encroaches on the freedom of self-determination of its citizens. Hatred is being sown between our peoples, which will create an abyss of alienation and enmity for generations to come. The war is destroying not only Ukraine, but also Russia - its people, its economy, its morality, its future.’ ‘We still have a chance to avoid punishment from above and prevent the collapse of our country,’ the letter concludes. ‘We need to repent for what we have done, first of all before God and then before the people of Ukraine. We must give up lies and hatred. We call on the authorities of our country to stop this senseless bloodshed!’ The number of signatures from Baptists and Pentecostals reached 400 within two days, before the letter was taken down.” (Forum 18, 6 May 2022)

Another Forum 18 Article of March 2022 reports on an open letter that was signed by more than 280 Russian Orthodox priests, an appeal of the priests of the Russian Orthodox Church calling for reconciliation and an end to the war. The article does not speak of consequences for the signatories (Forum 18, 11 March 2022).

The Culture of Peace News Network, a project of the Global Movement for a Culture of Peace, initiated by the United Nations, where readers exchange information about events, etc. that promote a culture of peace, provides a collection of public appeals, petitions and open letters condemning the war in Ukraine:

- CPNN – Culture of Peace News Network: Russians are against the war on Ukraine, 12 March 2022
<https://cpnn-world.org/new/?p=26666>

3.4 Treatment of dissidents by unknown actors

The Washington Post in March 2022 describes how unknown actors intimidate dissidents:

“When Russia invaded Ukraine last month, state TV went to wall-to-wall propaganda blaming Ukrainian ‘neo-Nazis’ and ‘nationalists.’ Now, shadowy pro-Putin figures are daubing the words ‘traitor to the motherland’ on the doors of peace activists and others. A pile of animal excrement was left outside the door of St. Petersburg activist Daria Kheikinen on Friday, and a severed pig’s head and an antisemitic slogan were left Thursday at the door of Alexei Venediktov, editor in chief of the now-disbanded liberal radio station Echo of Moscow.” (The Washington Post, 26 March 2022)

OVD-Info reports on intimidation campaigns against human rights activists and journalists:

“Mass campaigns of intimidation of human rights defenders and journalists have become widespread, including using the symbols of the Russian ‘special operation’ in the form of the letters Z and V: unknown people put these symbols on the doors of houses, plant pig heads near the doors, pour paint on people, etc.” (OVD-Info, updated 14 April 2022)

Mediazona reported on 31 March 2022 that a sticker with her picture and the words "Collaborator" and "Don't betray the homeland" had been pasted on the door of the Moscow municipal deputy (and Pussy Riot activist, note ACCORD) Lyusya Shtein. In addition, the symbol “Z” was also visible on the sticker. The sides of the sticker refer to Articles 207.3 and 280.3 of the Russian Criminal Code (public dissemination of false news about the Russian army and discrediting the Russian army). According to Mediazona, after the start of the war in Ukraine, the letter Z and inscriptions concerning the betrayal of the homeland appeared on the doors of activists, politicians and social actors who spoke out against the war, including activists and journalists from Moscow, Petersburg and Kaliningrad (Mediazona, 31 March 2022). The German politically independent think tank Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP) in an April 2022 publication on internal political repercussions of the attack on Ukraine explains that “[t]he letter ‘Z’ (‘Za pobedu!’ – ‘For victory!’) became the main symbol for support of the ‘special operation’ a few days after the war began and is now ubiquitous in public space (SWP, April 2022, p. 4).

Dmitriy Muratov, editor-in-chief of Novaya Gazeta, an independent newspaper that has suspended its operations, was attacked with red paint during a train ride, “an unidentified man shouted ‘Muratov, here’s one for our boys’ and threw red paint on Muratov” (CPI, 7 April 2022).

A March 2022 article by The Times reports that anti-war dissidents are forced to recant in apology videos:

“Russians who oppose the war are being made to publicly recant their beliefs [...]. A Muscovite who posted a video of himself on social media saying ‘glory to Ukraine’ was forced to apologise and release a second video in which he declared his support for the ‘special operation’ in Ukraine, RIA Novosti, the state news agency, reported. ‘I said statements used by Ukrainian nationalists,’ he said. ‘I am not a nationalist and do not recommend these statements to the people of the Russian Federation. If I offended anyone I am sorry. I support the special operation of Russian forces in Ukraine.’ The man, who was not named, was arrested by police in Alushta, Crimea, which Russia seized from Ukraine in 2014.

A Ukrainian man living in Krasnogorsk, on the outskirts of Moscow, was also forced to apologise for ‘speaking badly about Russian soldiers’ in a video he had posted on Instagram. In his recantation video, published by RIA Novosti, he explained that he had been drunk when he made the original video. [...]” (The Times, 30 March 2022)

3.5 Treatment of dissidents by non-state actors

openDemocracy states in an April 2022 article that according to the Russian Ministry of Labour about 59,000 Russians will be “released from work”. The article continues that this “‘release’ is

due to a crisis of the Russian economy [...]. But there is also a less visible category among those Russians who have been recently fired: those who lost their jobs for speaking out against the war in Ukraine” (openDemocracy, 22 April 2022). The article mentions the example of a hairdresser in Krasnodar who lost her job for expressing anti-war views (openDemocracy, 22 April 2022). A Washington Post article published in March 2022 describes the story of the chief engineer at an ice-skating rink in Rostov region who was told to sign a resignation letter because of a social media post against the war (The Washington Post, 1 March 2022). Within the limited timeframe for the research and among sources consulted for this report more information could not be found on this topic.

4 Information sources

4.1 Closure of non-state media sources

RFE/RL in a May 2022 article on the blocking of a Ural online newspaper states the following concerning the closure of media sources:

“Since Russia’s February 24 invasion of Ukraine, the government has cracked down forcefully on all forms of anti-war dissent. Roskomnadzor has ordered media not to use words like ‘war’ and ‘invasion’ and only to report information provided by official government sources. New laws against ‘discrediting the armed forces’ by spreading ‘false information’ have been hastily adopted, threatening violators with prison terms up to 15 years. One by one, leading independent national media outlets have closed down or moved abroad.” (RFE/RL, 3 May 2022)

According to the April 2022 publication by SWP on the internal political repercussions of the Ukraine war, more than 180 media outlets have been blocked since the Russian invasion of Ukraine:

“More than 180 media outlets have been blocked, including the flagships of independent Russian journalism, the Echo of Moscow radio station and TV Rain. Echo of Moscow’s frequency has already been transferred to the propaganda station Russia Today. TV Rain had already lost its terrestrial broadcasting licence in 2014 for its critical reporting of the annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbass, but had remained available on the internet. The prestigious Novaya Gazeta, whose editor-in-chief Dmitry Muratov received the Nobel peace prize in 2021, suspended publication for the duration of the ‘special operation’ after two official warnings from Roskomnadzor. Western social media like Facebook, Instagram and Twitter have been blocked, Facebook’s owner Meta classed as an extremist organisation. Access to YouTube, which is used by many dissenting independent journalists, is also threatened. Without tools like VPN Russians have no access to information deviating from the state propaganda. The outcome of this process is the complete destruction of independent media in Russia. Dozens of independent journalists have fled abroad. This goes beyond dismantling broadcasters, newspapers and internet media through blocking and bans. Under the present circumstances any attempt to engage in independent professional journalism represents an existential risk.” (SWP, April 2022, p. 3)

Concerning the suppression of independent media, the April 2022 OVD-Info publication on Russian suppression on anti-war protests describes the course of events as follows:

“On February 24, 2022, Roskomnadzor informed the media that when preparing materials concerning the ‘special military operation’, they are obliged to use only information and data obtained from official Russian sources. Otherwise, fines of up to 5 million rubles may be imposed on such media for the dissemination of deliberately false information based on Article 13.15 of the CAO [Code of Administrative Offenses]. In addition, such materials are subject to immediate blocking following Article 15.3 of Federal Law ‘On Information, Information Technologies, and Information Protection’, No. 149-FZ, which was amended at the end of 2021 to tighten censorship.

On February 26, 2022, Roskomnadzor sent notifications demanding to restrict access to ‘unreliable information’ to 10 media outlets — ‘Echo of Moscow’, ‘InoSMI’, ‘MediaZona’, ‘The New Times’, ‘Dozhd’, ‘Free Press’, ‘Crimea.Realities’, ‘Novaya Gazeta’, ‘Journalist’, ‘Lenizdat’. Among the reasons for the restriction, Roskomnadzor pointed out that these media outlets distributed ‘materials in which the operation is called an attack, invasion, or declaration of war’. A similar notification was sent to the online encyclopedia Wikipedia, with claims to the article ‘2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine’.

After that, some publications began to accompany their materials with notes that, at the request of Roskomnadzor, they provided information about the war in Ukraine based on Russian official sources. For example, RBC began to do this.

The matter was not limited to notifications. Since the beginning of the ‘special military operation’, Roskomnadzor blocked several independent media outlets covering events related to the actions of the Russian armed forces in Ukraine. [...] By March 9, only one case of unblocking had appeared. The journal ‘Snob’, which removed all materials about the war in Ukraine from its website and refused to cover this topic, was unblocked.” (OVD-Info, updated 14 April 2022)

London-based Press Gazette reports in a March 2022 article that around the introduction of the 4 March 2022 amendments on the Fake news law, numerous media shut down:

“Novaya Gazeta. In a brief article published on Monday 28 March, Novaya Gazeta said it would halt publication online and in print until the ‘special operation’ in Ukraine had ended. The outlet said this followed a second warning from Roskomnadzor, the Russian government’s mass media and telecommunications regulator. The well-known opposition newspaper, which is edited by 2021 Nobel Peace Prize winner Dmitry Muratov, had earlier said on Friday 4 March that it would remove material from its website that covered the invasion of Ukraine. [...]

Meduza. Latvia-based Russian and English-language news site Meduza had its website blocked in Russia on 4 March, prior to the fake news law’s passage through the Russian legislature. Much of the publication’s Russia-based staff fled the country following the passage of the law. [...]

The Moscow Times. Online newspaper The Moscow Times announced it was suspending its Russian-language reporting because of ‘a new repressive law, which actually introduces censorship prohibited by the Constitution of the Russian Federation’. English-language coverage continues.

It’s My City. Like Novaya Gazeta, Yekaterinburg news site It’s My City said on Telegram the day the law passed that it would be removing content about the war, saying: ‘In the current situation, we cannot put journalists at risk.’

The Bell. Another independent news site, The Bell, said on Telegram that following the passage of the law ‘we have decided to completely stop covering the ‘special military operation’.

Znak.com. Yekaterinburg-based independent outlet Znak.com suspended operations altogether 'due to a large number of restrictions that have recently appeared for the work of the media in Russia', according to a note on the now otherwise blank site.

TV Rain. Youth-oriented television station TV Rain (also known as Dozhd) was shut on Tuesday 1 March, before the introduction of the 'fake news law'. The channel ended its final broadcast by showing old footage of a performance of Swan Lake. [...]

Ekho Moskvyy. The Russian prosecutor-general's office also ordered independent radio station Ekho Moskvyy off air. On 3 March the channel's board voted to liquidate the outlet, according to Radio Free Europe.

Russia's fake news law: Impact on foreign media. Numerous English-language outlets have suspended coverage or removed their journalists from Russia as a result of the law. Several, including the BBC, Voice of America, Radio Liberty and Deutsche Welle, already had their websites blocked in the country earlier on the day the law was passed.

The BBC became the first major publisher to suspend its coverage from the ground in Russia on Friday 4 March; it continued to broadcast in Russian to the country, however, and promoted deep web editions of its foreign-language editions to help readers evade detection. Four days after the suspension the corporation announced it was resuming coverage – one of few outlets to do so. [...]

Canadian national broadcaster CBC/Radio-Canada followed the BBC on 4 March, announcing it too would freeze reporting from Russia: 'In light of this situation and out of concern for the risk to our journalists and staff in Russia, we have temporarily suspended our reporting from the ground in Russia while we get clarity on this legislation.'

Bloomberg News also suspended coverage from Russia on 4 March. Editor-in-chief John Micklethwait said: 'The change to the criminal code, which seems designed to turn any independent reporter into a criminal purely by association, makes it impossible to continue any semblance of normal journalism inside the country.'

CNN said in a statement on the night of 4 March that it would 'stop broadcasting in Russia while we continue to evaluate the situation and our next steps moving forward'.

CBS News announced their suspension the same night, telling Deadline it was 'not currently broadcasting from Russia as we monitor the circumstances for our team on the ground given the new media laws passed today'.

Deadline also reported on 4 March that ABC News had suspended coverage in Russia. A spokesperson told the outlet it was 'not broadcasting from the country tonight. We will continue to assess the situation and determine what this means for the safety of our teams on the ground.'

The Washington Post did not suspend its coverage from Russia, but on 5 March said it would be removing its journalists' bylines from some Russia stories as a precaution.

The New York Times on Tuesday 8 March became the first major outlet to announce it would be removing journalists from Russia altogether.

Conde Nast chief executive Roger Lynch said on 8 March in a memo to staff that ‘we have decided to suspend all of our publishing operations with Condé Nast Russia at this time’.

Open-source investigation outlet Bellingcat was blocked inside Russia on 16 March.” (Press Gazette, 28 March 2022)

Furthermore, OVD-Info reports the following media being forced to suspend their work, or change the format of their reporting, in March 2022: Yugra PRO [Югра ПРО] (the Khanty-Mansiysk edition of Yugra PRO reported to suspend work due to pressure from law enforcement agencies, the huge number of restrictions making their work meaningless and dangerous, OVD-Info, 16 March 2022); City Projects [Городские проекты], Colta [Кольта], TV2 [TB2] (the TV2 editor-in-chief wrote on Facebook that after the second warning TV2 was blocked, prior to the decision to stop the work by their own decision, “since it has become impossible for us to work in such a way as we see fit, we will not work in such a way as prescribed by the Russian authorities”, OVD-Info, 4 March 2022). The Yakut portal Ykt.ru announced its closure (according to the founder the portal “does not want to become a pro-government, censored resource, subserviently supporting all decisions made at the top”, OVD-Info, 9 March 2022), The Village closed its office. (OVD-Info, 9 April 2022)

4.2 Restriction of access to information for persons in the Russian Federation

Internet freedom in Russia was restricted already before 24 February 2022. Between June 2020 and June 2021, the coverage period of Freedom House’s report on freedom on the net 2021, this freedom was restricted “by passing laws, issuing fines, and temporarily throttling Twitter” (Freedom House, 21 September 2021, overview). The same report states:

“Russian authorities routinely block access to sensitive political and social content on the internet. Citing a range of justifications, they also restrict, or have attempted to restrict, access to many social media and communication platforms. According to unofficial data, more than 4.74 million internet resources were blocked in Russia at the end of 2019. Officially, only about 315,000 internet resources were listed as blocked. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Roskomnadzor blocked more than a thousand allegedly false reports about the coronavirus.” (Freedom House, 21 September 2021, section B1)

About the Russian media watchdog Roskomnadzor Freedom House reports:

“Roskomnadzor, which regulates the ICT [information and communication technology] and media sectors, often fails to act fairly or transparently. The agency is under the control of the Ministry of Digital Development, Communications, and Mass Media, meaning it has little to no independence from the government. Roskomnadzor is responsible for implementing the many laws regulating the internet in Russia, including those governing the blocking of online content and the localization and retention of user data. [...]” (Freedom House, 21 September 2021, section A5)

The USDOS Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2021 writes the following on the Russian government's blocking of access to information and internet censorship:

"The government blocked access to content and otherwise censored the internet. Roskomnadzor maintained a federal blacklist of internet sites and required ISPs [internet service providers] to block access to web pages that the agency deemed offensive or illegal, including information that was already prohibited, such as items on the Federal List of Extremist Materials. The law gives the prosecutor general and Roskomnadzor authority to demand that ISPs block websites that promote extremist information and 'mass public events that are conducted in violation of appropriate procedures.' A law requiring social media companies to independently block and remove 'obscene language' or other prohibited content went into effect on February 1 [2021].

[...] The government prohibited online anonymity. The law requires commercial virtual private network (VPN) services and internet anonymizers to block access to websites and internet content prohibited in the country. The law also authorizes law enforcement agencies, including the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the FSB, to identify VPN services that do not comply with the ban. By law Roskomnadzor may also block sites that provide instructions on how to circumvent government blocking. In March, Roskomnadzor announced the forthcoming launch (in 2022) of Oculus, an automated system for checking proxies, VPNs, and search engines for compliance with the requirements for blocking access to prohibited sites, images, and videos." (USDOS, 12 April 2022, section 2a)

Roskomsvoboda, a Russian public organisation operating in the field of digital rights protection, in a May 2022 article states that since 24 February more than 3,000 websites have fallen under military censorship. Access to most of these sites was restricted at the request of the Prosecutor General's office (Roskomsvoboda, 5 May 2022). Roskomsvoboda also provides a register of blocked sites, which on 23 May 2022 listed 589,186 entries:

- Roskomsvoboda: Register of blocked sites [Реестр заблокированных сайтов], undated, accessed 23 May 2022
<https://reestr.rublacklist.net/>

According to OVD-Info's chronicle of political persecution in March 2022, Roskomnadzor began to work with zeal after 24 February 2022 and blocked a record number of internet resources in March alone (OVD-Info, 9 April 2022).

The OVD-Info chronicle for March provides the following details of resources blocked and restricted in March 2022:

"For example, access was restricted to 'Ark' [Ковчег] project to help emigrants, the website of human rights organization Amnesty International, the anti-war project 'Blame' [Виноваты], the services of Euronews and the Israeli Channel 9, the publications Free Media [Свободные медиа], Nasha Niva [Наша Нива], All Rus News, Bild, Mediazona [Медиазона], 7x7, Star [Звезда], Aktivatica, Mediazona Central Asia [Медиазона.Центральная Азия], Agentura.ru, Caucasian Knot [Кавказский узел], Novye Izvestiya [Новые известия], Bellingcat, Caucasus Times, Euroradio, Postimees, BBS News, Troitsky Option – Science [Троицкий вариант — Наука], Kuzpress [Кузпресс], SVTV News,

Republic, Agency [Агентство], Ekho Kavkaza [Эхо Кавказа], Protocol [Протокол], Zasekin [Засекин], Deutsche Welle, Voice of Kuban [Голос Кубани], Pskov Gubernia [Псковская губерния], Sobesednik [Собеседник], Lenta Chel [ЛентаЧел], Dozhd [Дождь], Echo of Moscow [Эхо Москвы], Delfi, It's My City, Taiga.info [Тайга.Инфо], Paper [Бумара], Fortanga [Фортанга], Dovod [Довод], Polygon.Media [Полигон.Медиа] and Rugrad.eu, the projects of Radio Liberty in Central Asia - Radio Ozodi [Радио Озоди], Radio Azattyk [Радио Азаттык], Radio Azatlyk [Радио Азатлык]. The websites of the Voice [Голос] and For Human Rights movement [За права человека], the websites of Lev Shlosberg, chairman of the Pskov branch of Yabloko and journalist Alexander Nevzorov were blocked. The Masyanya [Масяня] cartoon series, Google News and even the Google Play and Apple Store websites were blocked. Meduza [Медуза], Paper [Бумара] and TJournal were twice added to the register of blocked media outlets. Access was also restricted to Ukrainian mass media - TSN [ТСН] TV channel, Segodnya [Сегодня], Ukrinform [Укринформ], Zaxid, Zerkalo Nedeli [Зеркало недели], Censor.net, Vesti.ua, Depo.ua and Delo.ua." (OVD-Info, 9 April 2022; working translation from Russian)

In addition, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter were blocked in Russia in March 2022. Social networks VKontakte and in some cases also Odnoklassniki and the recommendation system Yandex.zen blocked pages of several politicians (OVD-Info, 9 April 2022). In April 2022 Roskomnadzor continued to block media and other independent resources on the Internet. For example, access was restricted to the websites of the Ukrainian finance ministry, the cryptocurrency magazine FokrLog, WikiArt, Chess.com, Novaya Gazeta.Europe, The Moscow Times and others. Certain materials on the war by Human Rights Watch and others were also blocked (OVD-Info, 7 May 2022).

As already mentioned above Facebook's and Instagram's parent company Meta was labelled "extremist" under the extremism law in March 2022 (see [section 1.2.4](#) and also [section 4.1](#)) (The Guardian, 21 March 2022). In a May 2022 article, Tass refers to a study by Otkritie Bank, according to which 26 percent of Russians access Facebook and Instagram by using a VPN, even though both sites are blocked. Almost a third of respondents to the survey have reduced their visits to Facebook and Instagram due to the need to use a virtual private network (VPN) (Tass, 13 May 2022).

According to the not-for-profit media outlet The Conversation, Russians who want to receive independent news must now use encrypted Telegram chats or VPNs, as all significant independent media outlets have shut down (The Conversation, 31 March 2022). Much of the Russian news media is tightly controlled by the Kremlin, with state television acting as the government's mouthpiece (NYT, 6 May 2022). SWP in its April 2022 report states that the state-controlled television stations are no longer broadcasting entertainment, but the entire schedule is only filled with reporting on the "special operation" and propagandist political talk shows. Since independent media outlets have closed, this remains the only information source easily accessible to Russians (SWP, April 2022, p. 4).

RFE/RL in March 2022 and the New York Times (NYT) in May 2022 both published articles on how the war in Ukraine is presented in Russian television:

- RFE/RL – Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty: 'Military Brainwashing': Russian State TV Pulls Out The Stops To Sell Kremlin's Narrative On The War In Ukraine, 29 March 2022
<https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-ukraine-war-tv-brainwashing/31776244.html>
- NYT – The New York Times: The War in Ukraine, as Seen on Russian TV, 6 May 2022
<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2022/05/06/technology/russian-propaganda-television.html>

5 Protesters and dissidents leaving the Russian Federation

5.1 Reasons and motives

SWP in its April 2022 report provides a summary of who is leaving the Russian Federation after its invasion of Ukraine and their reasons. Among those leaving are political and civil society actors:

“Shock, repression, censorship, and also the immediate economic repercussions of the Western sanctions led thousands of Russians to leave the country in the first weeks of the war. This exodus is unprecedented in the country’s post-Soviet history. To date it has principally involved political and civil society actors, independent journalists, as well as many politically unorganised individuals who see no future for themselves in the country and can afford to leave. Young men flee to avoid military service. Jewish people take the chance to emigrate to Israel. The number of applications for Israeli citizenship was already increasing before the war. It must be assumed that many more will leave if and when they find the opportunity. Tipping into totalitarianism, the state has finally transgressed the line between public and private. Even those who are not politically active but hold different opinions find themselves exposed to massive hostility, defamation and denunciation. They can no longer withdraw into their private niches. Many will therefore seek to leave the country. Ever more professions will be affected. The post-invasion emigration has only just begun. It could assume dimensions comparable to the 1917–22 exodus triggered by revolution and civil war.” (SWP, April 2022, p. 5)

The Moscow Times in April 2022 describes the motives for leaving Russia briefly as follows:

“Some members of this new diaspora have left in protest against the war, some are seeking security as Russia’s economy falters, and some have fled ongoing repression against anti-war journalists, activists and protesters.” (The Moscow Times, 19 April 2022)

Other motives to leave Russia are the fear of military mobilisation and closing borders:

“Rumors of martial law being imposed by President Vladimir Putin in early March caused more panic. Martial law would mean a military mobilization of men, the closure of borders, and various restrictions on people’s everyday lives and activities.” (RFE/RL, 14 March 2022)

The Russian NGO OK Russians conducted a survey on 16 March 2022 for which it interviewed 2,067 people who left Russia in connection with the war in Ukraine, from February to March 2022. OK Russians identified six reasons why people have left Russia:

“1. Disagreement with the war in Ukraine: Unwillingness to live in an aggressor country and become an ‘accomplice in crime’ [...]. 2. Fear of reprisals: People are afraid of being fired from their jobs, being expelled from university, being persecuted for political reasons. Some respondents have already been subjected to administrative and even criminal proceedings. [...] 3. Difficulties at work: Job loss, employer leaving the Russian market (including relocation of employees), the inability to cooperate with foreign clients and receive money from them. [...] 4. Standard of living: Impossibility to lead one’s normal life, use familiar goods and services, travel. [...] 5. No Future: Lack of prospects (economic,

political, cultural) and fear for the future of children. [...] 6. Alienation: Feeling superfluous among people who support the current regime. The feeling of being in the minority, which cannot influence the situation in any way.” (OK Russians, March 2022a; working translation from Russian)

The NYT in a May 2022 article states:

“The Kremlin has long encouraged its critics to leave, and Mr. Putin made his scorn for dissenters amply clear in March, saying in a nationally televised speech that he considered those who identified with Western values ‘scum and traitors.’ He threatened to remove them from society, while his spokesman, Dmitri S. Peskov, said the ‘cleansing’ would happen spontaneously as disloyal people moved abroad.” (NYT, 5 May 2022)

Ekaterina Schulmann, a political scientist and associate professor at the Moscow School of Social and Economic Sciences and registered foreign agent, came from Russia to Berlin due to a work engagement. In Russia she is well known for her YouTube channel, where she comments on political events, followed by almost a million people. In an interview with the German weekly newspaper Die Zeit, she speaks about her reasons to leave the country:

“[A]fter February 24th, it became self-evident that our old life was over. I was not sure if I was going to leave the country or stay, whether to stop my public appearances or continue. But it was absolutely clear that things would not go on as they were. I continued to appear on social media. I continued my weekly program until the radio station [Echo Moscow] was closed down, and then the program continued on YouTube. My co-host, Maxim Kurnikov, left the country almost immediately. Now we are in Berlin together. Most of the Echo Moscow staff left the country much sooner than I did. Editor-in-Chief Alexei Venediktov, the last samurai, is still in Russia. They threw a pig's head in front of his door. A severed head of the pig in a wig, evidently representing his hairdo.” (Die Zeit, 6 May 2022)

Ekaterina Schulmann in the interview with Die Zeit also states that she cannot return home, because the status of a foreign agent “prevents you from leading any sort of social or professional life. If you have been declared a foreign agent [...] [y]ou won’t be invited to speak publicly, to participate in conferences and events, or hold lectures” (Die Zeit, 6 May 2022). The March 2022 Reuters special report on the consequences of being listed in a foreign agent register writes that 30 out of 65 survey respondents registered as foreign agents have left Russia (Reuters, 31 March 2022).

RFE/RL in March 2022 wrote about Yakov, an anti-war protester who left Russia for Kyrgyzstan. Yakov was among the thousands of protesters arrested by Russian police, and he doesn’t want to live in Russia under the ruling government (RFE/RL, 14 March 2022). In a May 2022 article RFE/RL reports on another Russian activist who has fled the country out of fear for his safety:

“Russian activist Dmitry Zvonaryov has fled Russia, fearing for his safety amid a crackdown by the state on anyone challenging Russia's ongoing invasion of Ukraine. [...] ‘I did not feel I was safe in my country. I could be at least sentenced to 15 years in prison for my protests against the war (in Ukraine). They could even kill me! They constantly threatened me, followed me, and even questioned my 14-year-old son, demanding he tell them about my

whereabouts,’ Zvonaryov said. Before fleeing his home in the city of Kirov, some 900 kilometers northeast of Moscow, Zvonaryov stayed with a friend to escape possible arrest. Zvonaryov has taken part in unsanctioned rallies protesting the arrest of jailed opposition politician Aleksei Navalny. After Russia launched its invasion of Ukraine on February 24, he was arrested several times and held briefly for single-person pickets protesting the war. Many activists, journalists, and others have left Russia for other countries since Moscow launched the unprovoked attack on Ukraine on February 24.” (RFE/RL, 11 May 2022)

The Chronicles of political prosecution for the months March and April 2022 by OVD-Info (see [section 2.3](#)) contain short lists with the names of prominent journalists, (political) activists and creatives who left Russia due to fear of political pressure.

5.2 Numbers and destinations

OK Russians in March estimates that at least 300,000 Russian citizens have left Russia since its invasion of Ukraine:

“Due to the lack of data, it is still difficult to quantify the outflow. Based on the data of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia (20-25 thousand in the first week) and the results of our survey (Georgia accounts for about 15% of those who left), we can make a cautious estimate that we are talking about at least 300 thousand Russians who left the country.” (OK Russians, March 2022a, working translation from Russian)

DW publishes higher estimates in April:

“Figures about exactly how many people have left Russia are not available, but one thing is clear — in the five weeks since the start of the war, Russia experienced the largest exodus since the October Revolution. Several hundreds of thousands of people are sure to have left the country; some suggest the number is over a million.” (DW, 5 April 2022)

BBC News in March 2022 reports that Russians “are heading for countries where flights are still permitted and where visas are not required, such as Turkey, Central Asia and the South Caucasus. Many have fled to Armenia” (BBC News, 13 March 2022). According to the 16 March survey by OK Russians the most popular destinations for Russian citizens who left Russia are Georgia, Turkey, Armenia. Those countries account for about a third of those who left (OK Russians, March 2022a).

Canadian news outlet National Post in an April 2022 article refers to information by Armenia’s Migration Service and speaks of nearly 142,000 Russians having crossed borders into Armenia between 1 January and 1 April 2022, compared to more than 43,000 last year (National Post, 22 April 2022).

RFE/RL in an article of 26 March 2022 writes that according to Georgia’s government more than 30,000 Russians have arrived in Georgia since the war began (RFE/RL, 26 March 2022), The Moscow Times refers to the FSB and speaks of 38,281 Russians who were accepted by Georgia in the first quarter of 2022 (The Moscow Times, 6 May 2022). Deutsche Welle (DW) reports that Georgia “expects to receive more than 100,000 refugees from Russia” (DW, 5 April 2022). The 26 March article of RFE/RL also states that more than 14,000 Russians have moved to Turkey in the first three weeks after the beginning of the Ukrainian invasion (RFE/RL, 26 March 2022; see also Hürriyet Daily News, 4 May 2022).

5.3 Background of emigrating Russian citizens

Several sources speak of a “brain drain”, as tens of thousands of Russians left their country (BBC News, 13 March 2022; The Economist, 25 March 2022; NYT, 13 April 2022). Findings by two March 2022 OK Russians surveys, one a primary sociological study conducted on 16 March 2022 that was already quoted above (see [section 5.1](#)) (OK Russians, March 2022a), and the other one conducted at the end of March among 1,500 Russian emigrants that is to be the first in a series of regular surveys (OK Russians, March 2022b), confirm these assessments:

According to both of the OK Russians surveys, those leaving Russia are young and educated (OK Russians, March 2022a; OK Russians, March 2022b). The regular survey compares those who left with the Russian average and states that the ones leaving are better educated and younger than the average Russian (OK Russians, March 2022b). The primary sociological study shows that a third of Russians that had left until March are IT specialists and another third comprises a variety of managers. The third fraction “is extremely diverse, but it can be said that they are mainly ‘office’ or creative specialists (lawyer, psychologist, designer, blogger, NGO employee, journalist, consultant, and so on)” (OK Russians, March 2022a; working translation from Russian).

In addition, the primary sociological study shows that only 14 percent of those who left are older than 45 years and only a third of them have children (OK Russians, March 2022a). The second survey provides the information that the average Russian person who left is 32 years old in comparison to Russians in general who are on the average 46 years old.

Furthermore, 80 percent of Russian emigrants who left because of the war with Ukraine have a higher education, as compared to only 27 percent of Russians in general. 50 percent of respondents signed petitions and open letters or posted political information on the internet before and after 24 February 2022 and 55 percent said they faced some form of political pressure before leaving Russia (OK Russians, March 2022b).

The Austrian daily newspaper Der Standard in April 2022 publishes an article on Russian IT specialists leaving Russia. In March alone, 50,000 to 70,000 IT professionals are said to have left the country and another 100,000 were expected to leave in April 2022:

“The estimated number is probably just five to ten percent of all IT professionals in Russia. In view of the constant shortage of technological specialists, this exodus, especially of young executives and female founders, could set Russia back in the technology sector in the long term. The Russian leadership has long recognised the drama and is therefore trying to stop the mass exodus with a combination of positive incentives and intimidation. IT professionals who stay in the country are promised tax and military exemptions by the Russian leadership.” (Der Standard, 28 April 2022; working translation from German)

A NYT article also deals with the issue of departing tech workers like software developers, entrepreneurs and other technology specialists:

“Tech is a small part of the Russian economy compared with the energy and metals industries, but it has been growing rapidly. The loss of many young, educated, forward-looking people could have economic ramifications for years to come, economists said.” (NYT, 13 April 2022)

AI in a March 2022 statement speaks of a mass exodus of another professional group: journalists. The statement cites an online media which states that as of 7 March at least 150 journalists left Russia since 24 February 2022, out of fear of reprisals (AI, 14 March 2022, p. 4). The New York City-based foreign policy magazine Foreign Affairs in a May 2022 article states that emigrating journalists, activists and employees of nongovernmental organisations probably don't number much more than 1,000 people, but "given their importance in undergirding an independent civil society, will have outsize consequences for the country" (Foreign Affairs, 13 May 2022)

Another group of Russians leaving their home country are intellectuals and artists, as DW reports in April 2022:

"In particular, academics, IT specialists, journalists, bloggers and artists are turning their backs on Russia, as its leader, Vladimir Putin, has set the country against the whole world."
(DW, 5 April 2022)

5.4 Difficulties with departure

Flights out of Russia are hard to obtain, after western countries closed their airspace to Russian airlines and Moscow closing its airspace to much of the west in response (The Guardian, 3 March 2022b). This is confirmed in April 2022 by Anaida Zadykyan, a Los Angeles immigration lawyer, who told New York City-based News television program CBS News that "Russians are hitting a dead end when it comes to fleeing. 'All the sanctions that western countries took against Russia, there is basically no flights. It's really hard to get out right now'" (CBS News, 20 April 2022). RFE/RL also reports on restrictions faced by Russian dissidents who want to leave the country:

"But due to an ever-increasing number of crippling sanctions piled upon Russia, they don't have many destinations to choose from, with many Western countries restricting visas for Russian citizens. [...] Russians are going to countries that don't require a visa, such as the former Soviet countries of Armenia, Georgia, and Kyrgyzstan. Turkey is a top destination because of its direct flights, visa-free regime, and a sizeable Russian-speaking community. Those with more financial resources have left for the United Arab Emirates." (RFE/RL, 14 March 2022)

In early March the head of a popular online travel agency stated that "ticket prices to certain destinations skyrocketed as Russians rushed to buy one-way tickets. [...]". Amid the high demand, the price for one-way tickets to Dubai increased fivefold (to 200,000 roubles, \$ 1,800), as did tickets to Istanbul (RFE/RL, 14 March 2022). According to a March 2022 article in The Guardian the price increase was even higher:

"Flights to Yerevan, Istanbul and Belgrade were completely sold out for the coming days while a one-way ticket to Dubai was priced at over £3,000 (\$4,006) – compared with £250 (\$334) in ordinary times – according to the flight aggregator Skyscanner. Train tickets from St Petersburg to Helsinki were also sold out on Thursday and Friday." (The Guardian, 3 March 2022b).

According to various sources, Russian citizens leaving the Russian Federation must fear being interrogated at the border (Mediazona, 2 March 2022; The Guardian, 3 March 2022b; RFE/RL, 26 March 2022). RFE/RL publishes an article dealing with this issue and gives the example of IT expert Artyom Saprykin, who left Russia on 15 March 2022:

“Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, many emigrating Russians have reported unpleasant experiences getting through passport control to leave the country. On a special Telegram channel called Passport Control From The Russian Federation 2022, dozens of travelers report that they underwent long interrogations. Many had to unlock their telephones and computers and watch as Federal Security Service (FSB) operatives read their personal messages. [...] As soon as the border guards learned that Saprykin was an IT specialist, he was pulled out of the line for interrogation. [...] Such interrogations and searches are illegal under Russian law, said human right lawyer Alyona Savelyova of the NGO Russia Behind Bars. ‘Not having any authority to interrogate people or carry out personal searches -- including of telephones -- the agents call them conversations,’ Savelyova explained.

Lawyer Ivan Pavlov, who heads the NGO First Department, added that border agents also pressure travelers with ‘an informal means of blackmail.’ ‘They can keep you at passport control for so long that you simply miss your flight,’ he said. ‘Russians these days have real problems with tickets and with money. If a person is in danger of losing a ticket that cost him 50,000 rubles [\$500], of course he is going to show them whatever they ask to see.’ [...] Ruslan, who asked that his surname be withheld, left Moscow for Turkey on March 5. He told RFE/RL that his wife is Ukrainian, and her relatives live in that country. [...] When he was passing through passport control, the agent asked to see their return tickets. As soon as he admitted they didn’t have any, he and his wife were pulled from the line and taken to an interrogation room. [...] Agents asked him what organizations he belonged to, whether he had donated any money or transferred any funds to Ukraine. They asked about his attitude toward ‘ongoing political events’ and how he distinguishes fake news from the truth.” (RFE/RL, 26 March 2022)

The April 2022 Standard article on the emigration of IT specialists reports that if people at the borders declare that they work in software or IT industry, they are harassed, and their notebooks and other mobile devices are searched. The article refers to a computer programmer who reports that when leaving the country, he was able to look at a table on an authority computer. According to what he saw, authorities distinguish only between IT and non-IT when questioning people at the border. Various personal data as well as information on which company one has already worked for and still intends to work for are meticulously recorded by the border officials. Telegram groups are already warning people to be especially careful when leaving the country. (Der Standard, 28 April 2022)

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