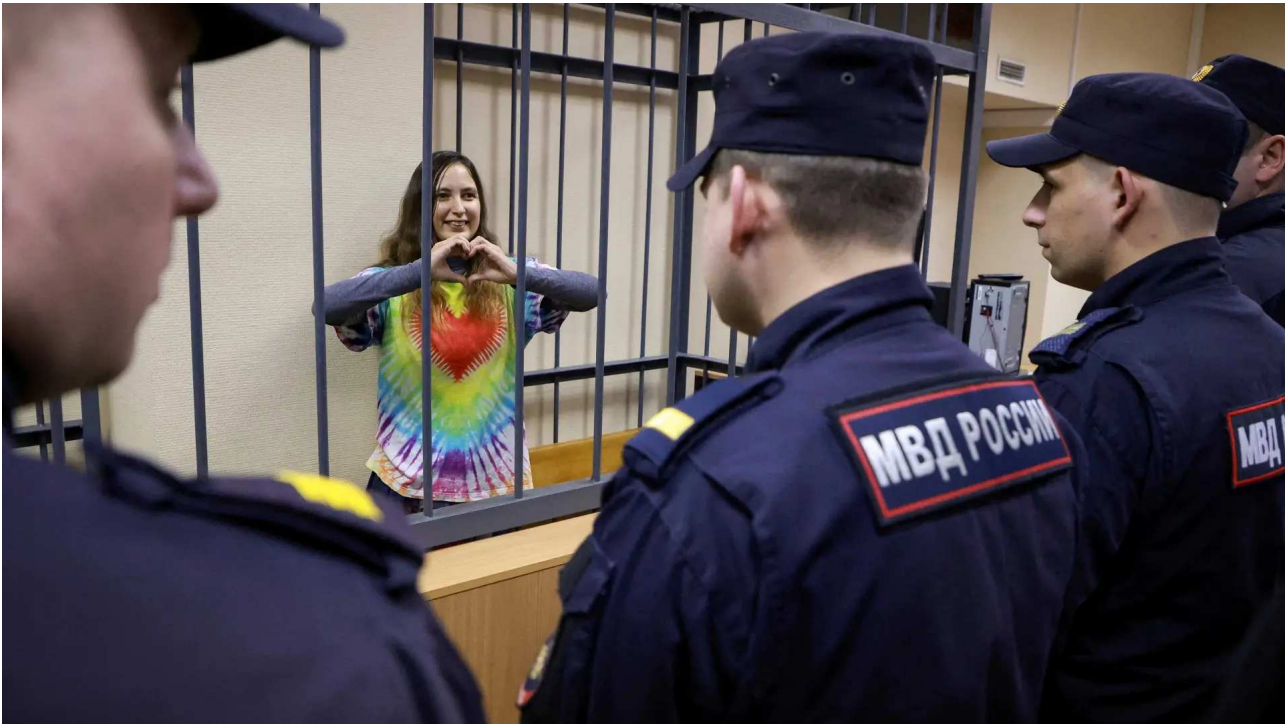


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World Report 2024



Russia

Events of 2023

Aleksandra (Sasha) Skochilenko, a 33-year-old artist and musician facing charges of spreading false information about the army after replacing supermarket price tags with slogans protesting Russia's war in Ukraine reacts during a court hearing in St. Petersburg, Russia on November 16, 2023.

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In the second year of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Russian authorities have further intensified efforts at home to eradicate any dissent about the war or the Kremlin's domestic policies. They adopted and enforced new, repressive legislation, issued punitively long prison sentences for peaceful anti-war speech, and forcibly closed several prominent human rights groups.

Russia remained the most sanctioned country in the world.

The failed mutiny by the Wagner mercenary group prompted President Vladimir Putin to admit that the group, known for serious human rights abuses in its overseas operations and for recruiting Russian convicts to fight in Ukraine in exchange for amnesty, was fully funded from Russia's budget.

In March, the International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants for Putin and Russian children's rights commissioner Maria Lvova-Belova for the forcible transfer of Ukrainian children from occupied areas of Ukraine and their unlawful deportation to Russia. In response, in April, Russia adopted a law [criminalizing](#) assistance to foreign and international bodies "to which Russia is not a

party.” For more information on Russian forces’ violations of the laws of war in Ukraine, including potential war crimes and crimes against humanity, see Ukraine chapter.

New [laws](#) imposed extensive limitations on rights and access to state services for perceived draft evaders.

Freedom of Expression

Russian authorities continued to use administrative and criminal charges of “discreditation” and “false information” about Russia’s armed forces to suppress anti-war speech and prosecute and imprison individuals for their lawful, peaceful expression. According to the human rights group OVD-info, in 2023, at least 77 people were convicted and sentenced on “false information” and 52 on “discreditation” charges; as of October 2023, criminal cases have been opened against over [350 people](#) on these charges. Among them were both prominent opposition figures and people with no background in activism.

In December 2022, a Moscow court [sentenced](#) political opposition figure Ilya Yashin to eight-and-a-half years in prison on “false information” charges. In April 2023, after a year in pretrial detention, another prominent opposition figure, Vladimir Kara-Murza, [received](#) a 25-year sentence in a maximum-security prison on combined charges of treason, “false information,” and involvement with an “undesirable organization.”

In March, a new law extended “discreditation” and “false information” provisions to cover “volunteers” taking part or “assisting” in armed conflicts.

An April law allowed the authorities to strip naturalized Russian nationals of their citizenship, even if this rendered them stateless, and deport them for committing “discreditation” and “false information” offenses.

Authorities [increasingly used](#) Russia’s “undesirable organizations” legislation to outlaw exiled independent Russian media, including TV Rain, Meduza, The Project, and Novaya Gazeta Europe. Between 2022 and 2023, at least five people were convicted for reposting publications by “undesirable” media.

Russian authorities also increasingly prosecuted people on bogus treason, confidential cooperation, and espionage charges. In March, the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) [arrested](#) *Wall Street Journal* reporter Evan Gershkovich on espionage charges. At time of writing, he remained in pretrial detention.

In the first half of 2023 alone, the FSB [opened](#) more new treason cases, against a variety of individuals, than in all of 2022. An April law increased the penalties for treason and other crimes.

According to Russian human rights group First Department, in 2023, authorities opened at least 21 criminal cases against people who allegedly engaged in “confidential cooperation” with non-Russian nationals under a law reminiscent of the Soviet-era ban on contact with foreigners.

In October, a journalist with Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) (a US government-[funded](#) media organization), Alsu Kurmasheva, was [arrested](#) for [failing](#) to register as a foreign agent while allegedly gathering information on the Russian military for foreign sources. This is the first known application of such charges. She faces up to five years in prison. At time of writing, she remained in pretrial detention.

Russian authorities also used legislation against the rehabilitation of Nazism to suppress legitimate free expression. In January, a Russian publishing house [censored](#) sections of a book by an American author that compared the Soviet army’s conduct in Poland during World War II to that of Nazi Germany.

In November, Russian authorities [opened](#) a criminal case against the local head of an opposition party in Russia's Kamchatka region for social media posts comparing images of “patriotic” singer Shaman (Yaroslav Dronov) with images of a Nazi youth from the 1972 movie *Cabaret*. He faces up to four years' imprisonment for display of Nazi symbols. In June, a court in Blagoveschensk, in Russia's Far East, [fined](#) a former deputy of the local legislative assembly on similar administrative charges for reposting on social media a parody video showing clips from a video by Shaman side by side with a clip from *Cabaret*. Shaman shot to fame after the start of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine with a number of “patriotic” [music video releases](#).

Freedom of Assembly

Freedom of assembly remained effectively defunct. Since 2020 Russian authorities have repeatedly used Covid-19 restrictions as a [pretext](#) to ban opposition and anti-war [protests](#) in the country, despite lifting all other Covid-19 related restrictions and organizing large crowds not adhering to quarantine requirements for pro-Kremlin events, including [concerts](#) in support of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. In February, authorities in various regions detained and prosecuted individuals who participated in [sparse protests](#) on the anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Freedom of Association

Russian authorities again expanded legislation on “foreign agents” and “undesirable organizations.” They added at least 192 individuals and organizations to the “foreign agents” [registry](#), with the total count reaching 707 as of November 3. At least 44 organizations were banned as “undesirable” in 2023; according to a Russian governmental website, which in some countries outside Russia can be accessed only with certain types of VPNs, the cumulative [count](#) was 116 organizations as of early November.

A December 2022 law streamlined criminal prosecutions for noncompliance with the “foreign agents” law and drastically increased penalties for creating or participating in “destructive” nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), further increasing avenues for authorities to penalize civic activists. In February, Artiom Vajenkov, coordinator of Russia's leading independent election watchdog Golos, [became](#) the first person accused of revised “foreign agent” charges.

Laws adopted in July and August further harshened the “foreign agents” legislation, [outlawed](#) foreign organizations without legal presence in Russia, and criminalized participation in their activities.

In March and April, authorities respectively [banned](#) Transparency International and the EU-Russian Civil Society Forum as “[undesirable](#).”

In August, police [detained](#) Grigoriy Melkonyants, the chair of Golos, and [raided](#) the apartments of several members and perceived affiliates on allegations of continued participation in the European Network of Election Monitoring Organizations despite Golos' departure from the network after it was banned as “undesirable” in 2021. At time of writing, Melkonyants remained in pretrial detention.

Attacks on Human Rights Defenders

Russian authorities continued to harass, intimidate, and prosecute human rights defenders and forcibly shut down human rights groups.

In January, a court [ordered the shutdown](#) of the Moscow Helsinki Group, Russia's oldest human rights group.

In March, police [raided](#) office spaces affiliated with Memorial, one of Russia's most prominent human rights groups that was forcibly shut down in 2021, and the homes of nine of its staff and board members. Earlier in January, the prosecutor's office opened a criminal case against unspecified Memorial members on "justification of Nazism" charges. In October, a court in Moscow [sentenced](#) Oleg Orlov, co-chair of Memorial, to a large fine on "discreditation" charges for a November 2022 social media post on the applicability of the term "fascist" to Russia today. The prosecution [appealed](#) the verdict, seeking his imprisonment.

In April, the Moscow City Court ruled to [liquidate SOVA](#), a watchdog on Russian extremism, on the pretext of holding activities outside Moscow.

In August, a court ordered the closure of the human rights NGO [Chelovek I Zakon](#) (Man and Law) based in the Mari El Republic, following a Justice Ministry lawsuit, on the grounds of operating outside the region where it was registered, non-compliance with "foreign agents" labeling rules, and alleged discrepancies between its activities and aims listed in incorporating documents.

In December 2022, a court [fined](#) the Moscow-based Sakharov Center, a human rights group, 5 million rubles (about US\$50,000) for violating "foreign agents" labeling requirements. In August 2023, another court [ordered](#) its forcible closure following a Justice Ministry lawsuit alleging several violations, including non-compliance with these requirements. In January 2023, authorities [banned](#) the US-registered Andrei Sakharov Foundation as "undesirable."

In July, Russian authorities [banned](#) the Human Rights House Foundation, headquartered in Norway, as "undesirable," making cooperation with it a criminal offence for its Russian partners.

In May, a court [sentenced](#) Bakhrom Khamroyev to 14 years in prison on terrorism-related charges reportedly for social media posts and for preparing materials related to Hizb ut-Tahrir (HuT), a pan-Islamist movement that seeks to establish a caliphate but publicly repudiates violence to achieve that goal. Khamroyev was affiliated with Human Rights Center Memorial and in recent years defended the rights of migrant workers from Central Asia.

Ill-Treatment in Custody

Russian authorities [subjected](#) at least 40 activists and members of persecuted religious minorities to repeated and extended placement in disciplinary cells, according to a Russian human rights watchdog. They subjected such detainees to other forms of ill-treatment, including incommunicado detention during lengthy transfers from pretrial detention facilities to prisons.

In September, opposition figure Alexei Navalny was [subjected](#) to the maximum disciplinary penalty of one year. Following his arrest in January 2021, he had already been placed in a disciplinary cell at least [20 times](#) for various terms. Prison authorities also [placed](#) historian and rights advocate Yuri Dmitriyev in a disciplinary cell for 15 days, in spite of his reportedly poor health.

[Despite](#) risks to those with known health conditions, Crimean Tatars serving sentences in Russia for alleged involvement with HuT have also repeatedly been placed for prolonged periods in disciplinary cells. One has spent some [four months in a row](#) in disciplinary cell, and another has cumulatively [spent over two years](#) in disciplinary cells since his conviction in 2019.

In January 2023, Andrey Pivovarov, former executive director of Open Russia, was effectively held in [incommunicado detention](#) for a month during his transfer from pretrial detention to a penitentiary. Russian authorities ignored his lawyer's and family's inquiries about his whereabouts and well-being, a [practice](#) to which the authorities also subjected Vladimir Kara-Murza and numerous others.

Chechnya

Chechen authorities under governor Ramzan Kadyrov continued to eviscerate all forms of dissent, targeting critics and retaliating against their family members, including by [forcibly mobilizing](#) men to fight for Russian forces in Ukraine.

In July, armed men in balaclavas [violently attacked](#) Elena Milashina, a journalist with *Novaya Gazeta*, and Alexander Nemov, a human rights lawyer, who arrived in Grozny to attend a court hearing in the politically motivated case against Zarema Mussaeva. Mussaeva was found guilty and sentenced to several years in prison. Milashina and Nemov suffered a severe beating, resulting in multiple traumas, including fractures. The assailants also threatened to kill them. At time of writing, an investigation was ongoing.

In February, Moscow authorities [arrested](#) Idris Arsamikov, who had previously been tortured in Chechnya for his presumed sexual orientation, on fabricated fraud charges and transferred him to Chechnya. Police in Chechnya refused to disclose his whereabouts or give his lawyers access. Two videos appeared on Arsamikov's VKontakte page, showing him at home denouncing efforts to find him and making other statements that appear to have been forcibly extracted.

In August, a video circulated on social media showing Kadyrov's 15-year-old son beating a suspect detained for destroying the Quran. Kadyrov publicly [expressed](#) approval of his son's actions. In October, the boy received the "Hero of the Chechen Republic" governmental award.

Counterterrorism and Counter-Extremism

In mid-2023, some of Alexei Navalny's former allies received lengthy sentences on bogus extremism and related [charges](#) following closed trials. They included Lilia Chanyшева, who in June was sentenced to 7.5 years in prison in Ufa, Bashkortostan, on extremism and "destructive NGO" charges; her co-defendant, Rustem Muliukov, who was sentenced to 2.5 years for extremism; and Vadim Ostanin, sentenced to 9 years on the same charge in Barnaul. At time of writing, Kseniya Fadeyeva remained on trial in Tomsk on charges of "aggravated extremism" and participation in a "destructive" organization.

In August, a court [sentenced](#) Navalny to 19 years in a maximum-security prison on spurious extremism and other charges. His co-defendant, Daniel Kholodny, former technical director of Navalny's YouTube channel, was sentenced to eight years.

In September, several individuals were [arrested](#) on charges of [financing](#) an "extremist" organization for donations to the Navalny-affiliated organization "Foundation Against Corruption."

In October, three of Navalny's lawyers were [detained](#) on extremist charges for allegedly facilitating contact between Navalny and his aides and supporters while he remains in jail. They face up to six years in prison.

In June, six activists with the opposition youth movement "Vesna" ("Spring" in Russian) were [detained](#) on various spurious charges, including extremism. In September, authorities [listed](#) 21 Vesna members, including the aforementioned 6, in the registry of "extremists" and "terrorists." In 2022, Russian authorities [opened](#) several criminal cases against Vesna activists for organizing peaceful protests against Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. A court banned Vesna as extremist in December 2022 for its legitimate and peaceful civic activism.

In May, authorities [arrested](#) Yevgeniya Berkovich, a theater director, and Svetlana Petriyчук, a playwright, on "justification of terrorism" charges for an award-winning play they worked on together about women who became brides of members of Islamic State (also known as ISIS). At time of writing, both [remained](#) in pretrial detention.

Russian authorities opened new criminal cases on charges of justification of terrorism against at least two political prisoners already serving prison sentences, based on their alleged comments to fellow prisoners. In August and October, such cases were opened against [Azat Miftakhov](#) and

[Alexei Gorinov](#). Miftakhov was due to be released after [serving a sentence](#) for alleged attempted arson of an empty office of the ruling United Russia party, and Gorinov is serving a seven-year prison sentence for “false information” about Russian forces and for publicly talking about civilian casualties in Ukraine. The new charges may entail up to five years’ imprisonment.

In September, a court [sentenced](#) a Dagestani journalist, Abdulmumin Gadjiyev, to 17 years in a maximum-security prison on 3 spurious terrorism-related charges; his co-defendants received 17.5 and 18 years. Rights organizations [assert](#) the charges were in retaliation for his reporting.

Russian authorities also continued to abuse counter-extremism and counterterrorism legislation to persecute religious minorities. Police raided homes and opened new criminal cases against Jehovah’s Witnesses (JWs), banned as “extremist” in Russia since 2017. In 2023, at least 38 JWs were sentenced to up to 7 years in prison and 68 others were sentenced to various penalties not involving imprisonment. Since the 2017 ban, over 410 JWs have spent time behind bars, either awaiting trial or serving a prison sentence.

In 2023, Russian courts continued to issue lengthy prison sentences against people on politically motivated charges of membership in HuT, which was banned as a terrorist organization in Russia in 2003. According to Memorial, as of October 2023, at least [335 people](#) were being prosecuted for alleged HuT affiliation in Russia and occupied Crimea, 115 of whom were sentenced to over 15 years in prison.

Several people were also [sentenced](#), [indicted](#), or [detained](#) for their supposed affiliation with Nurdzhular, a group of followers of the late Turkish theologian Said Nursi that Russia banned as extremist in 2008 even though it has no history of incitement or violence.

Russian authorities also continued to expand counter-extremism legislation. Under a [June law](#), possession or distribution of material that falls under the overly broad and vague legal definition of “extremist” can trigger administrative liability, which can then lead to criminal liability for a repeated offence; previously, liability was triggered by possession or dissemination of materials if they were on the authorities’ list of “extremist materials.”

Climate Change, Environment, and Human Rights

Watchdogs continued to [report](#) physical attacks, harassment, and prosecution of environmental activists and groups.

Between April and July, authorities banned five environmental groups, including [Greenpeace](#) and the [World Wildlife Fund](#), as “undesirable.”

Massive forest fires raged again in different parts of Russia, but the resources allocated by Russian authorities to manage them [reportedly](#) remained insufficient. And local authorities allegedly attempted to underreport the extent of forest fires.

In September, the first-ever “[climate lawsuit](#)” against the Russian government, demanding a radical reduction of Russia’s greenhouse gas emissions, was [submitted](#) to the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR).

Migrants, Statelessness, and Xenophobia

Russian police continued to racially profile non-Slav migrants and [ethnic minorities](#) and subject them to unsubstantiated ID checks and [detentions](#), often prolonged, in inhumane conditions. Some have been [physically assaulted](#).

In July, police [raided](#) mosques in Moscow region under the pretext of immigration checks, interrupting worship and physically assaulting and verbally insulting worshippers.

In some cases, during raids, police [sought out](#) dual Russian nationals among Central Asian migrants and [forcibly delivered](#) them to draft offices. In August, authorities in Kaluga region allegedly [refused](#) to accept naturalization applications from migrant workers unless they signed military service contracts.

Since autumn 2022, Russian authorities have been actively [recruiting](#) Central Asian migrants to sign military contracts, including by luring them with cancellation of deportation orders and simplified naturalization processes or by using [coercion](#) and [deceit](#). In several cases, officials [issued](#) draft notices to Central Asian nationals who do not have Russian passports and cannot be drafted.

In January, a high-ranking official [stated](#) that authorities should prioritize sending dual nationals from Central Asian countries to fight in Ukraine. He later also [proposed](#) stripping naturalized Russian nationals of their citizenship if they refuse to fight in Ukraine. In August, the head of the Russian Presidential Human Rights Council [proposed](#) synchronizing the naturalization procedure with registration at military draft offices.

At time of writing, parliament was considering a [bill](#)—whose official version is available on a Russian governmental website, which in some countries outside Russia can be accessed only with certain types of VPNs—that would allow naturalized citizens to be stripped of their Russian nationality for draft evasion, even if that renders them stateless.

Experts [reported](#) a rise in xenophobic racist attacks by neo-Nazis in the country and noted a [rise](#) in xenophobic anti-migrant rhetoric in [parliament](#), the media, and wider society.

In late October, there were at least four antisemitic incidents in the North Caucasus, including a mob attack in an airport hunting for Israeli passengers. The police detained 201 people for participating in the airport riots and opened a criminal case. However, they have not acknowledged any of the incidents as antisemitic.

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

Russian authorities intensified their crackdown on lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people.

In November, the Russian Supreme Court in a closed hearing [deemed](#) the international LGBT movement as an extremist organization and banned it following a lawsuit by the Justice Ministry. The Ministry accused the “LGBT movement” of inciting social and religious discord.

A July law [prohibited](#) gender-affirming surgeries and trans health care, dissolved marriages of transgender people, banned changing gender markers in official documents, barred trans people from adopting or taking guardianship of children, and allowed coercive medical interventions on intersex children.

Russia’s media and communications regulator, Roskomnadzor, [prosecuted](#) streaming services for movies featuring scenes with LGBT people and ordered blockings of websites featuring any LGBT content. In February 2023, Roskomnadzor developed [by-laws](#) outlining criteria for defining “gay propaganda.”

Authorities used “foreign agent” designations against several LGBT organizations, including Centre T, which focuses on the rights and welfare of trans people. They extrajudicially [blocked](#) the websites of LGBT rights groups, including Centre T and Delo LGBT+.

In June 2023, Russia’s health minister [stated](#) that President Putin instructed the ministry to establish a new psychiatry institute to study the behavior of LGBT people. Human rights defenders are

concerned that this could lead to the official introduction of conversion therapy.

Online Censorship, Surveillance, and Privacy

Russian authorities continued to arbitrarily block websites without court orders and further expanded the list of state bodies tasked with doing so. Blocked content included independent media outlets, rights groups, thousands of websites criticizing Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, and content about LGBT and gender-affirming care.

Authorities also continued tightening control over internet infrastructure. A July law requires entities providing internet hosting services to enroll in a state registry. In September, another law entered into force requiring internet exchange points and telecom operators to install deep packet inspection (DPI) technology in their networks allowing the state to directly filter and reroute internet traffic.

In April, Moscow officials acknowledged using video surveillance with facial recognition technology to detain alleged draft evaders. Authorities further expanded the use of facial recognition technology, including at border crossing points and schools.

In December 2022, a personal data leak confirmed that the Moscow city government failed to secure sensitive personal data of millions of children and parents. In February, a new law extended compulsory lifetime DNA data collection for millions of people suspected of any crime or convicted of certain misdemeanors. In September, a law entered into force allowing Russian security services live access to taxi ride data.

Key International Actors (see also Ukraine chapter)

In September, Mariana Katzarova, the first United Nations special rapporteur on human rights in Russia, presented her first report to the UN Human Rights Council, outlining the significant deterioration of human rights in Russia since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. In October, the UN Human Rights Council voted to extend her mandate for a year.

Throughout the year, UN institutions issued numerous statements on the human rights situation in Russia. The UN high commissioner for human rights expressed serious concern about Navalny's latest sentence, condemned Kara-Murza's sentence in April, expressed deep concern about "foreign agent" and anti-LGBT legislation, and the forced closure of human rights groups and independent media.

Likewise, UN special procedures, individually or jointly, called for the immediate release of Kara-Murza and Gershkovich, urged Russia to investigate the attack against Milashina and Nemov, urged Russia to drop criminal charges against Orlov, expressed distress over Navalny's gravely deteriorating health and raised concerns about three imprisoned Navalny supporters, and expressed alarm at Wagner's recruitment of inmates and "over the escalating crackdown against civil society."

Two UN human rights treaty bodies issued concluding observations on Russia. In April, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination expressed deep concern about the unclear definition of "extremist activity" in Russian law and called on Russia to combat racist hate speech, racial hatred, and discrimination. In November 2022, the UN Human Rights Committee expressed deep concern about rights violations in Ukrainian territories occupied by Russia and about a wide range of other rights issues, many of which were previously outlined in this chapter.

In February, the European Union imposed further sanctions against the Kremlin-sponsored Wagner mercenary group for serious human rights abuses in the Central African Republic and Sudan alongside sanctions on Wagner mercenaries under the EU's Mali and Ukraine sanctions regimes. In

September, the EU [condemned](#) Russia's "elections" in occupied territories of Ukraine as a "violation of international law."

Throughout 2023, the EU issued numerous statements condemning human rights violations in Russia, including the [sentencing](#) of Navalny and [Kara-Murza](#). In July, the EU [urged](#) Russia to drop criminal "discreditation" charges against Orlov. In June and July, the EU Council [announced](#) human rights sanctions against individuals and entities for Kara-Murza sentencing and Navalny's detention and other human rights violations.

The EU [issued](#) several statements expressing solidarity with Russia's independent civil society and [with those](#) who have been persecuted for criticizing Russia's war in Ukraine. The European Parliament also adopted several resolutions condemning Russia's human rights record.

In February, outlining EU priorities in UN human rights fora, the EU Council [condemned](#) violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law stemming from Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

In September, the ECtHR handed down a [ruling](#) in the case of Maxim Lapunov, the only victim of Chechnya's [2017 anti-gay purge](#) who dared seek justice despite great personal risk. The court found that Lapunov was "detained and subjected to ill-treatment by State agents," which "amounted to torture" and was perpetrated "solely on account of his sexual orientation."

In July, the ECtHR [ruled](#) in favor of a Russian national in a case concerning police use of facial recognition technology to prosecute peaceful protesters. The court concluded that using personal data—including from facial recognition technology—to identify and later arrest a protester amounted to an unjustified interference with his private life. It also expressed "strong doubts" as to whether provisions in Russian law provide an appropriate legal basis for processing biometric data.

In October, Russia failed to reclaim a seat on the UN Human Rights Council during a General Assembly election. The General Assembly had suspended Moscow's membership of the council in 2022 due to its full-scale invasion of Ukraine and reported atrocities and rights record at home.