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World Report 2022 - Russia

The legislative crackdown that started in November 2020 intensified ahead of the September 2021 general elections. Numerous newly adopted laws broadened the authorities’ grounds to target a wide range of independent voices. Authorities used some of these laws and other measures, to smear, harass, and penalize human rights defenders, journalists, independent groups, political adversaries, and even academics. Many left Russia for their own safety or were expelled. Authorities took particular aim at independent journalism.

Amendments expanding and harshening “foreign agents” and “undesirable foreign organizations” legislation were among the newly adopted laws. Authorities continued to add more groups to the “foreign agents” registry, which imposes a toxic label and burdensome labelling and reporting requirements. They also expanded their registry of “undesirable organizations,” blacklisting international and foreign organizations, including prominent rights group, and used the “undesirable” law to prosecute people.

After political opposition leader Alexey Navalny returned to Russia in January 2021, having received treatment in Germany for near-fatal poisoning, he was unjustly arrested, imprisoned and additionally prosecuted on new charges. This sparked countrywide protests that authorities suppressed. Authorities banned three groups affiliated with Navalny as “extremist.”

Human Rights Defenders

In 2021, authorities continued to employ a variety of tools to harass human rights defenders and disrupt their work.

In December 2020, authorities revoked the residence permit of Vanessa Kogan, a US national, and ordered her to leave, based on the Federal Security Service’s (FSB) claim that she was a national security threat. Kogan is the director of Stitching Justice Initiative (SJI), a nongovernmental organization (NGO) that successfully litigated hundreds of cases against Russia at international human rights bodies. In September, authorities initiated the forced closing of Astreya, SJI’s Russian partner, on technical grounds.

In January, authorities interfered with the work of lawyers representing peaceful protesters and human rights defenders who monitored the January protests.

In March, Izzat Amon (Kholov), who for over 10 years provided legal services to migrants from Tajikistan, was stripped of his Russian citizenship and deported to Tajikistan, where authorities detained him on fraud charges reportedly pertaining to his work in Moscow.

In April, authorities opened a criminal case against Ivan Pavlov, a human rights lawyer and head of Team 29, an informal lawyers association that represented clients in highly sensitive cases. Pavlov was wrongly accused of disclosing classified information about one of his clients. In July, in order to protect its clients, team members and supporters, the group closed after it learned authorities were equating it with a foreign organization blacklisted as “undesirable.” Team 29 also represented Navalny’s Foundation Against Corruption (FBK) in its legal challenge to the authorities’ designating it an “extremist” group. In August, the Justice Ministry filed a complaint that may lead to Pavlov’s disbarment. In September, Pavlov left Russia, stating that authorities had paralyzed his work, and in October, he learned that the authorities put him on a wanted list. In November, authorities designated him and four other Team 29 members as “foreign agent—foreign media.”

In June, authorities opened a criminal case against Ernest Mezak, a human rights lawyer who litigates cases at the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR). They charged him with insulting a judge in a social media post.

After a year under criminal investigation, in July, a court in Sochi sentenced rights defender Semyon Simonov to 250 hours of community service over supposed violations of the “foreign agents” law. In October, he was released from serving the sentence due to the expiration of statutory limitations.

In September, authorities barred human rights lawyer Valentina Chupik from re-entering Russia and stripped her of her refugee status, obtained in 2009. Chupik, a national of Uzbekistan, provided legal assistance to migrants in Russia and was an outspoken critic of the abuses she documented against them.

Also in September, authorities fined two human rights defenders, Alexey Glukhov and Igor Kalyapin, for mostly old

social media re-posts with hyperlinks to an “undesirable” organization.

In October, Soldiers’ Mothers of St Petersburg suspended work assisting servicemen because new FSB guidelines, issued following the expansion of the “foreign agents” law (see below), prohibited, among other things, disclosing information about the mood in the military.

In November, the prosecutors’ office filed a lawsuit to close Memorial, one of Russia’s oldest human rights organization, for alleged noncompliance with the foreign agents law.

Freedom of Expression

Since December 2020, the number of individuals and entities authorities branded “foreign media—foreign agent” exploded, reaching 94 by early November. Most are prominent investigative journalists and independent outlets.

In April, FSB raided the home of Roman Anin, editor-in-chief of iStories, several weeks after Anin published an article with allegations about a high-level FSB official. Also in April, the editorial team of DOXA, an independent university student magazine, faced criminal investigation on baseless accusations of encouraging the participation of students under 18 in unauthorized protests.

In July, authorities blacklisted Project Media, an investigative outlet behind high-profile anti-corruption investigations, as an “undesirable organization” and branded its Russian editor-in-chief, Roman Badanin and four other staff “foreign agents – foreign media,” shortly after law enforcement searched Badanin’s home and named him a suspect in a criminal defamation suit. Project Media evacuated some of their staff from Russia.

In June, authorities designated independent media outlet VTimes a “foreign agent” and blocked its website, prompting it to close, citing risks to its journalists.

In August, authorities blocked the websites of MBKh-Media, Open Media, and Open Russia’s human rights project.

In July, police raided the apartments of Roman Dobrokhoto, editor-in-chief of investigative outlet The Insider, and that of his parents, apparently in relation to a criminal defamation case. Dobrokhoto left Russia in August. In September, authorities opened a criminal case against him on charges of illegal border crossing, and again raided his and his parents’ apartments.

Police detained and in some cases physically assaulted journalists covering protests, despite their explicit compliance with official requirements to wear special identifying gear.

In February, a court in Moscow sentenced Sergei Smirnov, the editor-in-chief of Mediazona, to 25 days’ detention for retweeting a post with imagery concerning a pro-Navalny protest.

In January, new legislative amendments came into effect imposing further restrictions on free expression. One amendment could allow authorities to institute misdemeanor proceedings on insult charges without a complainant and victim. Other amendments expanded the definition of criminal defamation and introduced imprisonment as a possible penalty.

Russian authorities continued to penalize artistic expression that criticized or shed light on sensitive issues.

In November 2020, Pavel Krisevich served 15 days’ detention for a performance dedicated to political prisoners in front of the FSB building in Moscow, which also led to his expulsion from university. In June, Krisevich was detained and later indicted on criminal hooliganism charges after staging a performance against state repression and intimidation at Red Square. At time of writing, he remained in pretrial detention.

In December of that year, Moscow police detained Maria Alyokhina and Rita Flores of the punk collective Pussy Riot and two other people after they staged a performance that mocked authorities for prosecuting protesters. Alyokhina also spent several months under house arrest over a social media post supporting the January protest and was sentenced, in September, to one year of restricted freedom. In June and July, authorities repeatedly detained, for up to 15 days each time, several Pussy Riot activists on highly questionable charges of non-compliance with police orders. Three of the activists left Russia.

In March, a court fined civic activist Karim Yamadayev for “insulting authorities” and “incitement to terrorism” for a video of a mock corruption trial of President Vladimir Putin and two public officials. Yamadayev had spent more than a year in pretrial detention.

In August, police detained over two dozen attendees of an outdoor photography exhibition in St. Petersburg and questioned them regarding some of the photos, one of which included police, and another, a church. The exhibition organizers were charged with violating public assembly rules.

In September, authorities questioned a renowned actress, Liya Akhedzhakova, over a monologue her character delivers in a play which some groups claimed insulted war veterans and propagated same-sex relationships. In October, a popular rapper, Morgenshtern, in a media interview criticized the amount of money spent on the annual Victory Day celebration. Shortly after, authorities announced an inquiry into his statement that may lead to criminal

prosecution. Also in October, authorities opened an inquiry into a St. Petersburg artist’s painting depicting people carrying portraits of decomposing bodies. The complainants claimed it was an allusion to commemoration marches for World War II soldiers.

In October a couple was sentenced to 10 months in prison for insulting religious feelings over a photo in which the woman faked oral sex, with St. Basil’s Cathedral in the background. The day after that trial, another woman was arrested on the same criminal charges for a photo showing her buttocks, across the street from a cathedral. A court released her pending trial. Earlier in 2021, several women served 2 to 14 days in detention for indecent exposure near police stations and Kremlin.

Throughout the year, authorities resorted to expelling or deporting foreigners in retaliation for their reporting, criticism, or activism. These included British BBC journalist Sarah Rainsford; Tajik activist Saidanvar Sulaimonov, barred from re-entry for 40 years; and Belarusian stand-up comic Idrak Mirzalizade, banned for life over a joke he told that authorities claimed was insulting to ethnic Russians.

Freedom of Assembly

Between January and April, six sets of legislative amendments entered into force, that further curtailed already restricted freedom of assembly.

Russian authorities also used Covid-19 as a pretext for blanket bans on public assemblies organized by civic and political activists and prosecuted organizers and participants for noncompliance. The pandemic did not deter the authorities from holding mass pro-government or state-sponsored events.

Navalny’s arrest triggered countrywide protests in late January. Where organizers sought permission, authorities refused. Ahead of the protests, authorities detained and harassed presumed organizers and well-known activists. On several occasions, state universities threatened students with expulsion to prevent them from participating.

Police in some instances used excessive force to disperse crowds. Authorities detained thousands and in many instances denied them access to lawyers. Many were fined or jailed on administrative charges. Numerous criminal cases were opened. In late October a protester, Gleb Maryasov, was sentenced to 10 months in prison on allegations of organizing the blocking of traffic during the January 23 protest.

In March, authorities in Moscow raided a forum of municipal deputies, arresting around 200, claiming it was organized in collaboration with an “undesirable” organization. In May, a court fined activist Yuliya Galyamina and jailed her for seven days in relation to a similar gathering in Velikiy Novgorod, which authorities groundlessly claimed violated Covid-19 restrictions.

Authorities continued to hand down criminal penalties for peaceful protest. In December 2020, Galyamina received a two-year suspended sentence and in October 2021 Viacheslav Yegorov received a 15-month prison sentence, for repeated participation in peaceful albeit unauthorized protests.

Freedom of Association

In December 2020 and March 2021, parliament passed two laws to toughen Russia’s “foreign agents” legislation. The December law drastically widened the scope of “foreign agents” to individuals and unregistered groups. It also expanded the definition of funding sources that could trigger a “foreign agent” designation, expanded the inspection regime, and introduced new labeling requirements. The other law expanded reporting requirements, allowed the Justice Ministry to ban any “foreign agent” organization’s program or event, and set out additional grounds for unscheduled inspections.

By July, two new laws on “undesirables” also entered into force. One expanded the applicability of “undesirable” provisions, banning Russians’ involvement with any such organization beyond Russia’s borders and enabling authorities to ban any organization that assists an “undesirable” group’s operations in Russia. The other substantially reduced the threshold for criminal liability for perceived members or supporters of “undesirable” groups.

As a result of these amendments, Open Russia civic movement—which authorities had targeted since 2019 with “undesirable”-related prosecutions—closed, citing risks to supporters and members. But at the end of May, authorities detained Andrey Pivovarov, the group’s former director. At time of writing, he remained in detention facing up to six years in prison.

In February 2021, after two years under house arrest, a court sentenced Anastasiya Shevchenko to a four-year suspended sentence merely for being part of the Open Russia movement. In August, Mikhail Iosilevich was released after six months’ pretrial detention for providing space for civil society events in his café. He still faces trial on “undesirable” and other trumped up charges.

Torture, Ill-Treatment in Custody, Police Accountability

Authorities regularly allowed cruel treatment, torture and suspicious deaths in custody to go unpunished by refusing to open criminal cases, explanations by law enforcement as justification to close or drop cases due to expiration of statutory limitations.

In January, a court in Moscow sentenced Azat Miftakhov to six years in prison on allegations of throwing a Molotov cocktail into an empty office of the ruling party. The investigation and trial were marred by allegations of torture, and reliance on “secret witnesses.” The other two defendants pleaded guilty but repeatedly denied Miftakhov’s involvement.

Also in January, a riot policeman was caught on camera kicking in the stomach a woman standing in his way. After public outcry, the authorities aired on television his staged apology to the victim while she was in hospital. Later, they claimed they were unable to identify the perpetrator.

In September, a court in Nizhny Novgorod jailed a man who a Russian anti-torture group said was severely beaten in police custody on charges of inflicting bodily harm on a police officer. Police pressed similar charges against a 66-year-old pensioner in Orenburg, whom police reportedly beat and tasered. At time of writing, authorities refused to investigate allegations of police misconduct in both cases.

Torture and ill-treatment of inmates continued in Russia’s penitentiary system, despite official assurances following the publication of leaked, graphic videos of torture of inmates. In July, a number of inmates complained of intensified cruel treatment in retaliation for an April riot in a penal colony in Angarsk, reportedly sparked by ill-treatment.

In October, after new media reports about leaked videos documenting numerous incidents of rape and other ill-treatment of male inmates at a prison hospital in Saratov region, law enforcement announced they were opening an investigation. The person who leaked the videos fled the country.

In April and October, inmates rioted in penal colonies in Angarsk and Vladikavkaz, reportedly prompted by beatings.

Chechnya

Chechen leadership under governor Ramzan Kadyrov continued to ruthlessly quash all forms of dissent.

In February, Russian police forcibly returned Salekh Magamadov and Ismail Isaev who fled Chechnya fearing persecution for posting anti-government messages on social media. At time of writing, they remained in jail. In March, Chechen authorities temporarily detained and threatened their family members.

In April, Chechen security officials abducted Magomed Gadaev, an asylum seeker and key witness in a high-profile torture case against Chechnya’s leadership, two days after France deported him to Russia. They took him to Grozny and apparently coerced him to refuse the services of his trusted lawyer. In June, a court sentenced him to 18 months’ imprisonment on spurious weapons charges.

In May, Ibragim Selimkhanov was abducted from Moscow and forcibly returned to Chechnya, where authorities interrogated him about gay people in the region. He later managed to escape Chechnya.

Counterterrorism and Counter-Extremism

In June, a court approved authorities’ request to ban three organizations affiliated with Navalny as extremist, including FBK, despite lack of any credible evidence that their activities were extremist, much less a security threat. Shortly before the ruling, parliament adopted a law retroactively banning staffers and founders of extremist organizations from running in parliamentary elections. The law was later expanded to ban them from any elections.

In September, authorities announced a new criminal case against Navalny and his allies over continuing “extremist group” activities. In November, authorities arrested Lilia Chanysheva, the former head of Navalny’s team in Ufa, on charges of leading an extremist group.

Police continued to raid houses and open new criminal cases against Jehovah’s Witnesses, banned as extremist in Russia since 2017. Russian courts convicted 92 people, 27 of whom were sentenced to prison terms of up to eight years. At time of writing, at least 15 people remained in prison, hundreds under criminal investigation, and 63 in pretrial detention. Those convicted and prosecuted included people in Russia-occupied Crimea. Authorities stripped two Jehovah’s Witnesses of their citizenship and deported them.

Several persons were convicted for 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. In October, authorities raided homes and arrested over 15 alleged Nursi followers.

In August, Yevgeniy Kim, who had been stripped of his Russian citizenship in 2019 following his prison sentence on charges of involvement with Nurdzhular, was released after more than two- and-a-half years in deportation custody. He remains stateless and without identification documents.

Since late 2020, at least 11 people were convicted for alleged affiliation with Tablighi Jamaat, an international Islamic missionary movement banned in Russia as extremist since 2009 although it disavows violence. At least 13 others were detained in 2021, with authorities pressing charges against five and deporting several others.

Since November 2020, at least eight people were sentenced, and several dozen detained over alleged involvement with Hizb-ut-Tahrir (HuT), a pan-Islamist movement that seeks to establish a caliphate but denounces violence to achieve that goal. Russia banned HuT as a terrorist organization in 2003. In May, an appeals court upheld verdicts against 10 people sentenced to 11 to 22 years in prison. According to Human Rights Center Memorial, as of October 2021, over 170 people served prison sentences upon conviction for involvement with HuT, 29 were on trial, at least 61 were under investigation and 27 more were wanted. Memorial’s figures include Crimean Tatars.

Environment, Climate Change, and Human Rights

Environmental watchdogs continued to report physical attacks, harassment, intimidation, and prosecution of grassroots activists and environmental groups in different parts of the country.

In October authorities designated a prominent environmental defender, Yevgeniy Simonov, a “foreign agent.”

As one of the world’s top 10 emitters of greenhouse gases, Russia is contributing to the climate crisis that is taking a mounting toll on human rights around the globe. It is also the third largest producer of fossil fuels and a top gas exporter.

In its November 2020 update to its national climate action plan, Russia committed to reducing its emissions by 30 percent by 2030 compared to 1990 levels. The Climate Action Tracker rates Russia’s domestic target as “highly insufficient” to meet the Paris Agreement goal to limit global warming to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.

Russia has failed to protect its forests that absorb and store carbon. Rising deforestation, driven by illegal logging; increasingly destructive wildfires exacerbated by climate change; and poor fire management, have increased overall emissions. In the summer months, smoke from record breaking wildfires in Siberia’s Sakha (Yakutia) region resulted in air pollution threatening the health of thousands of residents.

Permafrost, ground that has been frozen continuously for a minimum of two years and currently covers about 65 percent of Russian territory, is rapidly degrading across Russia’s north, due to warming temperatures and more intense fires. This poses a threat to livelihoods and infrastructure, increasing the risk of industrial accidents.

In February, a court ordered the Russian mining company, Norilsk Nickel, to pay a US\$2 billion fine over an oil spill that caused massive environmental destruction. Norilsk Nickel said the spill resulted from the impact of climate change on permafrost, upon which all their infrastructure is located. But investigative reporters emphasized the role played by company’s failure to invest in infrastructure.

Right to Asylum, Prohibition of Refoulement, Migration

In March and in April, numerous migrants were deported with multi-year re-entry bans for attending peaceful, unauthorized protests.

At least one asylum seeker was forcibly removed to Uzbekistan after “disappearing” from Russia; another—a Tajik political opposition group member— was refouled to Tajikistan in September 2020 under similar circumstances. In May, a member of the same group who was a naturalized Russian citizen “disappeared.”

In October, a Belarussian journalist “disappeared” in Moscow and was later found in detention in Minsk. He had fled to Russia fearing persecution.

In spring, as authorities started lifting the special Covid-19 regime that had temporarily vacated the need for migrants’ regular registration, many migrants became exposed to heightened risk of coronavirus due to extreme overcrowding at the processing centers, which resulted from the limited timeframe to regularize their status. Police renewed massive raids and mass arrests of migrants.

In June, Russia adopted new amendments to its migration law that mandate fingerprinting, photographing, and regular medical examination of all foreigners who spend more than 90 days in the country (30 days for migrant workers). Also, in July authorities developed a new bill that reforms migration legislation. The bill includes mandatory software and digital IDs for migrants that would aggregate private information—including biometric, health, and potentially location data. It would also require migrants to sign “loyalty agreements.”

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

The government continued its trajectory of anti-lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) discrimination and failed to investigate threats and attacks against LGBT people, in which their sexual orientation or gender identity was considered a motive.

In February, authorities in Khabarovsk region indicted Yulia Tsvetkova, a feminist and LGBT activist, on spurious pornography charges related to a group she administered on social media.

In April, an unidentified man in St. Petersburg assaulted and broke the nose of Ilya Bronsky, a gay blogger who earlier tweeted about living in Russia with HIV. The authorities failed to investigate. Bronsky later left Russia.

In July, a Russian supermarket chain retracted an advertising campaign that included a lesbian family and published an apology after being targeted by an online hate campaign and threats for boycott. The family received threats on social media that police failed to investigate, and later left the country citing safety concerns.

In November, authorities designated Russian LGBT Network as a “foreign agent” and LGBT activist Igor Kochetkov was designated a “foreign agent-foreign media”

Gender-Based Violence

Russia’s systemic failure to properly address domestic violence continued to lead to tragic outcomes for victims deprived of state protection and support due to inadequate legislation, poor police response, and insufficient services, such as access to shelters.

In December 2020, the Justice Ministry added Nasiliu.net, a group that provides legal and psychological help to domestic violence survivors, to its “foreign agents” registry. In April, the authorities fined it for non-compliance with the “foreign agents” law.

In June, police raided a women’s shelter in Dagestan and forcibly returned to Chechnya Khalimat Taramova, who identifies as bisexual and who had fled her parents’ home to escape abuse. Several days later, she appeared on local TV stating on camera that she was “fine” and was being looked after by her family. In October, two women from Dagestan were forcibly taken, allegedly by police, from a shelter for domestic violence survivors in Tatarstan and forcibly returned to their families. Authorities opened an inquiry but denied police involvement.

Research published in 2021, covering nearly a decade, estimated that 66 percent of all murdered women in Russia were victims of domestic violence.

Rights of Older People

Approximately 25 percent of Russia’s population are over pension age. Reforms have aimed to expand certain home services for older people. However, funding and delivery are inadequate and inconsistent, compelling many to enter nursing homes or other institutions. Journalists and advocates have documented serious human rights abuses in institutions, including use of restraints, inappropriate use of medication, and poor medical treatment.

In August, the government made one-off 10,000 rubles (US\$135) payments to pensioners, in the face of rising inflation. Analysts believe this was to influence their vote in favor of the ruling party in the September elections.

Digital Rights, Right to Privacy

In 2021, Russia escalated pressure on foreign and Russian social media companies to strengthen its grip on free expression and curtail access to information online.

Several new laws encroaching on digital freedom entered into force. Amendments obliged social media platforms to take down content on request of the authorities and prohibited them from censoring the content of social media accounts affiliated with the Russian state. Another law entered into force in April, introducing penalties on manufacturers that do not pre-install designated Russian software on relevant devices sold in Russia. In July, new provisions obliged popular foreign websites and apps to open representative offices in Russia. Sanctions for noncompliance include fines, advertisement bans, and blocking.

In February, following a wave of country-wide protests, authorities escalated pressure on social media companies to censor online content related to protests.

Throughout the year, authorities continued to slam social media platforms with large fines over noncompliance with regulations on content blocking and data localization, and eventually threatened to issue fines of up to 20 percent of the companies’ annual revenue. The majority of fines against social media companies related to content about mass protests in January, February and April 2021.

In March, the government slowed access to Twitter over its alleged failure to censor calls for protests. Later, authorities stated that Twitter eventually complied, but threatened to block the platform entirely.

In May, authorities threatened to block VPNs for not complying with local regulations. By September, eight had been blocked.

In July, Russian authorities demanded that YouTube block channels linked to Navalny groups that had been designated “extremist.” In August, they demanded that Apple and Google take down Navalny’s app from their stores. The companies eventually complied but Google reinstated the app in October.

Authorities continued integrating public surveillance systems with facial recognition technology across the country,

despite serious privacy concerns, lack of regulation, oversight, and data protection.

Russia and Crimea (see also Ukraine chapter)

Russian authorities continued to persecute critics of its actions in occupied Crimea.

In March, the authorities arrested freelance journalist Vladyslav Yesypenko, on apparently fabricated charges. Yesypenko alleged FSB officers tortured him to extract a false confession.

Russian authorities continued to target Crimean Tatars in Crimea with bogus terrorism charges related to involvement with HuT, which operates legally in Ukraine. In February and August, authorities raided homes and arrested a total of 12 men, 11 of them Crimean Tatars. In August, a court sentenced four Crimean Tatars to prison terms ranging from 12 to 18 years, and dozens more continued to serve baseless and harsh prison sentences.

Russia and Syria (see also Syria chapter)

Russia continued to play a critical role in the Syrian conflict. As part of a military alliance, it continues to support, and in some cases conduct, deliberate and indiscriminate attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure, including schools, hospitals, markets, homes, and shelters, through what has become trademark tactics over the years, including the use of internationally banned weapons. Human Rights Watch has determined that the Syria-Russia alliance’s attacks against civilian infrastructure in Idlib in northeast Syria are apparent war crimes and may amount to crimes against humanity.

In July 2021, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) failed to reauthorize full cross-border operations into the region and authorize a resumption of aid flows from Iraq to northeast Syria, due to the threat of a Russian veto. Instead, the Security Council was able to extend the opening of one border crossing to Northwest Syria. Russia and the United States disagree regarding the duration of the authorization, which remains unclear.

Key International Actors

In January, the arrest of Navalny drew international outcry. Among others, top European Union (EU) institutions and a group of 45 states at the United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC) publicly condemned his imprisonment, the detention and prosecution of peaceful protesters, “shrinking civil society space” and Russia’s use of the “tools of the state to ... to silence dissenting voices.

In February, the ECtHR requested that Russia release Navalny, and the Council of Europe’s (CoE) Commissioner for Human Rights stated that Navalny’s sentencing “contravenes Russia’s international human rights obligations.”

Following his first-ever visit to Russia in February, the EU high representative for foreign affairs, Josep Borrell, observed that “Russia is progressively disconnecting itself from Europe and looking at democratic values as an existential threat.”

In March, the EU imposed sanctions over serious human rights violations as part of broader package of listings under the EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime.

In March, June, and October, UN-appointed human rights experts deplored the alleged involvement of individuals from the so-called Wagner group— a Russian military contractor with reported ties to the Kremlin—in indiscriminate killings, summary executions and widespread looting and sexual violence in the Central African Republic (CAR).

UN human rights experts and the UN human rights office repeatedly criticized Russia for Navalny’s detention.

In September, 45 countries pressed Russia to urgently answer questions about Navalny’s poisoning, under the rules of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW).

In June, in its conclusions on Russia, the EU Foreign Affairs Council condemned the “limitations on fundamental freedoms ... and the shrinking space for civil society.” Also in June, the European Commission recommended that the EU “continues to push back against human rights violations and will speak up for democratic values.”

Also in June, the European Parliament denounced the listing of German NGOs as “undesirable organizations” and Pivovarov’s arrest. It called on Russian authorities to end all reprisals against political opposition.

In August, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly announced that the organization would not send observers to monitor the parliamentary elections, due to “limitations imposed by Russian Federation authorities on the election observation.”

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Austrian Red Cross Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD)	Wiedner Hauptstraße 32, 1041 Wien T (Telephone) +43 1 589 00 583 F (Fax) +43 1 589 00 589 info@ecoi.net	Contact Imprint & Disclaimer F.A.Q. Data Protection Notice
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