



Plenary sitting

B9-0267/2019

17.12.2019

MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

with request for inclusion in the agenda for a debate on cases of breaches of human rights, democracy and the rule of law

pursuant to Rule 144 of the Rules of Procedure

on the Russian "Foreign Agents" Law
(2019/2982(RSP))

Michael Gahler, David Lega, Željana Zovko, Tomáš Zdechovský, Andrey Kovatchev, David McAllister, Antonio López-Istúriz White, Sandra Kalniete, Eva Maydell, Magdalena Adamowicz, Milan Zver, Roberta Metsola, Tomas Tobé, Romana Tomc, Seán Kelly, Arba Kokalari, Vladimír Bilčík, Maria Walsh, Michaela Šojdrová, Luděk Niedermayer, Inese Vaidere

on behalf of the PPE Group

B9-0267/2019

European Parliament resolution on the Russian "Foreign Agents" Law (2019/2982(RSP))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its previous resolutions on Russia,
 - having regard to its recommendation to the Council of 2 April 2014 on establishing common visa restrictions for Russian officials involved in the Sergei Magnitsky case,
 - having regard to the Constitution of the Russian Federation, in particular Chapter 2 on the rights and freedoms of man and citizen,
 - having regard to the Venice Commission report of 18 March 2019 on funding of associations,
 - having regard to the Venice Commission opinion of 13 June 2016 on Russian Federal Law No 129-FZ (Federal law on undesirable activities of foreign and international non-governmental organisations),
 - having regard to the Statement by the Spokesperson on amendments to the “Foreign Agents” Law in the Russian Federation of 23 November 2019,
 - having regard to the EU Delegation to the Council of Europe Statement on amendments to the "Foreign Agent" Law in the Russian Federation of 11 December 2019,
 - having regard to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 1966,
 - having regard to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948,
 - having regard to Rule 144 of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas in December 2019 President Vladimir Putin has signed a law that will allow Russia to declare journalists and bloggers as Foreign Agents thus allowing the Kremlin to target government critics and to stifle criticism on Russian government;
- B. whereas under this Law, Russians and foreigners who work with media or distribute their content and receive money from abroad would be declared Foreign Agents, potentially exposing journalists, their sources, or even those who share material on social networks to foreign agent status;
- C. whereas Russia’s “Foreign Agents” Law was developed after large protests in 2012 against Vladimir Putin and has targeted NGOs;
- D. whereas since 2015, nineteen international organisations have been declared “undesirable”;

- E. whereas in November 2019, the Russian supreme court dissolved the veteran human rights activist Lev Ponomarev's "For Human Rights" NGO, following demands by the Justice Ministry to liquidate the "For Human Rights" movement on the basis of „administrative irregularities“ that conflicted with the "Foreign Agents" Law;
- F. whereas on 12 November 2019, the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation placed People in Need on the government's list of "undesirable organisations" following a baseless decision by Russian Deputy Prosecutor General on 7 November 2019;
- G. whereas in October and November 2019, Memorial and its chairman Aleksander Cherkasov were charged under the Law for not adding the "Foreign Agent" label on their YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and Vkontakte accounts; whereas over twenty violation statements have been filed against Memorial for not stating its "Foreign Agent" status on social media and on its website which have so far resulted in a fine of 1 400 000 RUB (approx. 19 824 EUR) for the organisation; whereas Memorial has had to resort to crowdfunding to pay this fine;
- H. whereas dozens of organization working on environmental issues were forcibly put on the Foreign Agents list since 2014, despite the ruling of Russia's Constitutional Court explicitly excluding environmental groups from the scope of that Law, and many of the affected groups had to close down to avoid labelling as a Foreign Agent or were unable to pay the fines;
- I. whereas the Russian "Foreign Agents" Law infringes the European Convention on Human rights, the Council of Europe international agreement which among others defends freedom of speech and media, and thus Russia is not fulfilling its obligations as a Council of Europe member;
1. Calls on the Russian authorities to immediately repeal the "Foreign Agents" Law and refrain from targeting human rights defenders and organisations;
 2. Strongly opposes the methods of the Russian authorities of using the power of the state to suppress freedom of expression and speech and thus to instill fear in society; believes that such methods are part of governance in totalitarian and not in democratic communities;
 3. Reminds the Russian authorities that freedom of speech is a fundamental human right which reinforces all other human rights, allowing society to develop and progress; stresses that it also guarantees the right of each individual to express themselves without a fear of government censorship and political persecution;
 4. Underlines that the new Law adds to the long list of reprisals in the digital information space; reminds in this aspect that most recently a Law was passed on the Russian segment of the Internet, which should allow disconnecting Russia from the global network or filtering it, thus creating an isolated digital information space, similar to China and Iran;

5. Considers this Law and the excessive use of fines and liquidations against human rights organisations and human rights defenders to be deliberately aimed at silencing civil society in Russia, forcing prominent human rights organisations to focus their entire resources on paying fines and pleading their cases in courts;
6. Reminds that already in 2017 the Russian Parliament passed a Law extending the article of a “Foreign Agent” - which has been applied to NGOs since 2012 - to information resources outside Russia; recalls that this label obliged them to report regularly on their funding, goals, expenditures and staff;
7. Notes that Russia’s register of Foreign Agent media has 10 entries, all of them outlets tied to either Radio Free Europe or Voice of America; reminds that Russia’s government has criticized other foreign media for reporting on the demonstrations held in the country, including suggesting it could revoke German broadcaster Deutsche Welle’s accreditation for sharing a map of the planned route for an unsanctioned protest in August 2019;
8. Praises and supports all Russian human rights defenders and organisations who still carry out their legitimate and peaceful human rights work despite the difficulties they have to face;
9. Asks the Venice Commission to examine the adopted "Foreign Agents" Law and to produce a legal opinion;
10. Asks the EU Member States to raise the “Foreign agents” Law, including a request for a legal opinion by the Venice Commission, in the institutions of the Council of Europe, primarily in the Committee of Ministers and in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE);
11. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the Council, the Commission, the governments and parliaments of the Member States, the Council of Europe, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the President, Government and Parliament of the Russian Federation.