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Answer given by High Representative/Vice-President Borrell i Fontelles
on behalf of the European Commission
(26.4.2022)

Russia's unprovoked and unjustified military aggression against Ukraine has accelerated an exodus of large numbers of civil society activists, government critics, investigative journalists and liberal Russians from their country.

EU support to Russian civil society remains a key priority enshrined in a number of EU policiesⁱ. At the Foreign Affairs Council on 21 March 2022, EU Foreign Ministers confirmed their commitment to supporting non-profit organisations, civil society organisations, human rights defenders and independent journalists in and outside Russia. Substantial support is already in place or planned, covering some of the immediate needs. The Human Rights Defenders protection mechanismⁱⁱ is also accessible for Russian activists, including covering relocation costs of those exiled.

At the same time, thousands of brave Russians are being detained for participating in calm protests for peace and against the unjustified attack on Ukraine. In this vein, on 25 February 2022, the EU partially suspended the EU-Russia Visa Facilitation Agreement, targeting diplomats, other Russian officials and business people. The ordinary Russian citizens are not affected by this suspension and continue enjoying the same facilitations under the Visa Facilitation Agreement as before (reduced visa fees, shorter deadlines and longer validity of multiple-entry visas).

ⁱ 2020-24 Action plan on Human Rights and Democracy; 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals.

ⁱⁱ <https://protectdefenders.eu/>