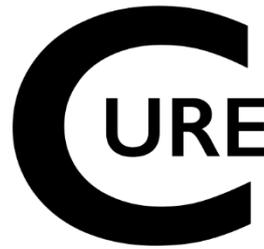


# Campaign to Uphold Rights in Europe



FOR A STRONG AND EFFECTIVE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

## Recommendations on Engagement of the Council of Europe with the Russian Civil Society

29 November 2022

1. As it was already recognised by the Committee of Ministers and the PACE, maintaining channels of communication with independent Russian civil society – both on the ground and in exile – remains important for the Council of Europe even after Russia’s expulsion from the organisation in 2022<sup>1</sup>.
2. We appreciate the attention paid by the CoE High-Level Reflection Group to this matter and the group’s suggestions in the run-up to the Fourth Summit of Heads of State and Government in 2023. However, we cannot support the Group’s conclusion that ‘the avenues of cooperation should focus at present on those organisations and individuals who are located in Council of Europe member states.’ Many important civil society actors that chose to continue working on the ground in Russia, in a very hostile environment, should not be abandoned in isolation. They are fully capable of assessing their own risks related to potential engagement with international partners, including CoE, and take informed decisions.
3. We welcome the decision to create the [CoE Contact Group on Belarus](#) in September 2022. We are convinced that a similar framework should be created for coordinating CoE’s permanent engagement with independent Russian civil society, with necessary adjustments made regarding the differences between the situations in these two countries and the status of their relations with CoE.
4. As noted in the [CURE’s submission to the HLRG](#), independent pro-democracy civil and political actors of Russia should be seen by CoE as full-fledged partners for dialogue in three main thematic areas:
  - developments in the situation of human rights and democracy in the country, possible CoE reactions to these and necessary future reforms,
  - further development and strengthening of European standards and mechanisms in the field of human rights, democracy and rule of law (along with civil societies of the CoE member states), and

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<sup>1</sup> See also the CoE Commissioner for Human Rights in her Human Rights Comment “[Support Russian and Belarusian civil societies and human rights defenders](#)” (August 2022).

- termination of the Russian aggression against Ukraine, including ensuring proper legal assessment and accountability for violations of international law, as well as solving key humanitarian issues, and post-conflict reconstruction, peace-building and reconciliation (subject to consent by Ukrainian civil society).
5. A *new framework* for CoE's cooperation with the Russian civil society should:
- address Russian civil society actors that continue staying and working on the ground in the country and those who were forced to relocate to other CoE member states;
  - expand target audiences for respective programmes and initiatives (e.g. new unregistered civic initiatives, diaspora groups, independent academic community and educators, political opposition structures, pro-democratic bloggers, etc.),
  - aim at building systemic cooperation with these groups as allies and intermediaries with an ability to reach out to wider parts of the population and influence public opinion in their respective countries.
6. This framework should also seek innovative, more effective approaches and formats of interaction, such as:
- internships for young human rights defenders, journalists, lawyers in the CoE structures;
  - cooperation with independent polling agencies to define and better understand potential target audiences for information and awareness-raising campaigns;
  - special partnership projects with independent Russian-language media outlets;
  - targeted information campaigns to promote CoE values using modern and attractive means and forms of communication;
  - granting some form of official associative status to organised civil society and pro-democracy political opposition structures of these countries with the CoE bodies and institutions for a more systemic engagement with them.

These formats of engagement should be developed and further adapted in close cooperation with civil society actors in Russia and take into account their security concerns.

7. Lastly, we call on the Committee of Ministers and the member states to ensure implementation of the [Recommendation CM/Rec\(2018\)11 on the need to strengthen the protection and promotion of civil society space in Europe](#) which urges to 'provide measures for swift assistance and protection for human rights defenders in danger in other countries, such as, where appropriate, attendance and observation of trials and/or, if feasible, the issuing of emergency visas.'

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