

Environmental struggle in wartime

Status of Russia's repressive legislation and
implications for environmental defenders



Contents

Summary	3
Introduction	3
Background	4
New legal developments	8
Impacts of war on Russian civil society	10
New foreign agents and undesirable organizations in 2022	13
Suppression of environmental activists in 2022	20
Trends and possible actions	28
Conclusions	32

Published by
Naturvernforbundet/ Friends of the Earth Norway

Oslo, July 2023

Written by Kjersti Album, Vitaly Servetnik and Andrey Belyaev
Language editing by Aled-Dilwyn Fisher
Design by Kristian S. Aas

This and previous reports are available at:
www.naturvernforbundet.no/civilsocietyreports

Summary

This report presents an overview of the dramatic situation with the Russian civil society in 2022, with special attention to problems of environmental NGOs, groups and activists. The report shows how this situation drastically worsened during this year and also illustrates how the civil activities in Russia are affected by the war.

The adjustments in the law on foreign agents and other changes in the Russian legislation are described and their implications for the civil society are analysed. The report presents the statistics of episodes of pressure on environmental NGOs, groups and activists, and gives stories from environmental activists and groups. Finally, the trends of the Russian environmental movement are discussed, and recommendations are given on how to help Russian groups and activists in the current situation.

Introduction

While the Russian invasion in Ukraine continues, conditions for Russian civil society continue to worsen. Restrictions from Russian authorities makes it increasingly difficult to work on environmental and other issues.

Studies show that 70% of the population in Russia is concerned about the environmental situation. However, the current Russian state is unable to protect people's environmental rights. On the contrary, those who are bravely trying to defend these rights against combined economic and political power are being persecuted in many ways.

Increasingly repressive laws, harassment, and criminal prosecution make it more difficult to voice your opinion and work for change, also for those who do not directly speak for a change in power, but trying to protect their local forest, ensure clean air and water in their local community, or increase nuclear safety.

This report is based on information in open sources. Primarily useful for us has

been the web pages of environmental groups working in Russia. For instance, the Environmental Crisis Group regularly publishes monitoring of conditions for civil society and pressure towards environmental groups and activists.

As the human rights situation in Russia deteriorates, we are asked if our work in Russia continues, or if we have been forced to leave. Although the report shows a grim picture of the situation, we want to emphasize that there is still hope, and activists are still continuing their important work.

Naturvernforbundet has not left Russia. Actually, we were never there. We cooperate with independent Russian environmental groups. They consider if they can continue their work, and in what form. Some environmentalists have fled for other countries and continue the work from outside Russia. Some are staying, trying to figure out what can be done from inside.

Background

A brief background is necessary to assess the recent development of Russian civil society in 2022. This chapter gives a brief overview of the civil society development in Russia before 2022, with special attention to the environmental movement. Experienced readers may skip this chapter and continue reading about developments in 2022 in the following chapters.

The changes in legislation and actual law enforcement practice in Russia during the last decades are aimed at weakening the influence of civil society on the internal political life in Russia, the impossibility of exercising certain rights and freedoms, and the persecution of political opponents.

General situation

As we have shown in previous reports, each year the situation got worse. Thus, although Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 has provided shock and major setbacks, we have seen democratic regression since at least the year of 2000. However, the war rose more media attention to Russia, and the repression on media, civil society and opposition became more widely known.

The antidemocratic processes manifested themselves not only in laws and regulations. One of the ways that Russian authorities have been attacking the Russian civil society has been undermining them, accusing them of working against Russian interests, and naming them foreign agents. State media has been helpful in telling this story, we show an example in chapter 4. In his Munich speech in 2007, criticising the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), President Putin criticised financing non-go-

vernmental organisations from abroad, as a tool for foreign policy interests: (...) "so-called non-governmental organisations are (...) formally independent but they are purposefully financed and therefore under control (...) interfering in the internal affairs of other countries".¹

The law on foreign agents

Since 2006, the Russian legislation imposed increased reporting requirements on NGOs, especially those with foreign funding, and it also provided for planned annual inspections of the organisations and unannounced sudden inspections. Following this, several NGOs were inspected in 2007-2008, but most environmental organisations continued their work as before.

The concept of "an organisation performing the functions of a foreign agent" appeared in the Russian legislation in 2012, with the introduction of amendments to the federal laws On Non-Profit Organisations and On Public Associations and three other legislative documents. According to the amendments, organisations receiving foreign funding as well as Russian sources that used foreign funds and performing political activities shall register themselves in a special register. Also, additional and significant obligations were imposed on the associations, such as to maintain additional financial records and submit quarterly reports to government agencies, include a disclaimer about being a foreign agent in all publications, as well as to go on a special register with tax or judicial authorities.

The notion of 'political activity' was not specified in any of the Russian laws, and the practice of these laws enforcement

¹ The speech is available here https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2007_Munich_speech_of_Vladimir_Putin

showed that any civil activity is considered as being political. It is important to note that the laws mentioned above had special provisions that these laws do not apply to activities in the field of protection of flora and fauna. However, against the law, some environmental NGOs were declared organisations performing the functions of a foreign agent.

The so called “foreign agent law” intended, in the first place, to restrict foreign funding for non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that monitored elections after the massive protest movement that followed violations of legal electoral procedures in the 2011 and 2012 parliamentary and presidential elections. The law from 2012 prescribed certain NGOs to register as “foreign agents”. However, most of NGOs did not do so, and the Ministry of Justice was in 2015 given the authority to label NGOs as foreign agents. The “foreign agent law” marked a clear step in the wrong direction as the repression on civil society became systemic through regular inspections, labelling as foreign agents, fines, and court cases. During the years, several changes have been made to the laws on foreign agents, and all of them decreased the possibilities for civil society.

The term “foreign agent” itself is offensive and is not accepted by the Russian civil society. Many NGOs labelled so have ceased their activities or changed to others, less formalised and open forms of work.

The Russian citizens recognized as foreign agents citizens are severely deprived of their rights which is now set in the law. Unfortunately, little attention has been paid to this issue. However, from a legal point of view, this is significant, because, we are talking about the possibility of implementing basic constitutional principles, such as equality before the law and the courts (Article 19 of the Russian Constituti-



A protest against deforestation and sand pit development in the Komi republic.

on) and the inalienability of fundamental human rights and freedoms (Article 17).

Already existing bans on holding state and municipal positions, as well as restrictions on the exercise of voting rights, have been supplemented by a significant list of restrictions. Speaking of individuals who are foreign agents, they are prohibited from: teaching minors in state and municipal educational organisations and producing educational content; any creative activity funded by federal or municipal budgets; conducting environmental and anti-corruption expertise; organisation of public events, etc. (about 20 restrictions in total).

The Register of Foreign Agents is maintained by the Ministry of Justice and is displayed on their web-site. However, Russian official governmental websites can be accessed from outside Russia only using Russian VPN.

Interested readers outside Russia can also find unofficial versions of this list elsewhere. Wikipedia has a version of the total list in their web-page. For focus on environmental NGOs and individuals,

please refer to the Ecological Crisis Group (ECG).²

Other relevant laws

This report focuses on the foreign agent status, but being labelled as a foreign agent is in fact not the worst that can happen to an activist.

It is advisable, in order not to go completely into historical milestones, to start from 2012. Amendments to the Criminal Code came into force this year. First, the concept of high treason was expanded. Criminal prosecution is envisaged not only for the issuance of information constituting state secrets, but also for any assistance to a foreign state, international or foreign organisation if their activities are directed against the security of Russia. Under the new rules, charges of high treason can be brought not only to those who directly work for foreign intelligence services. A citizen collaborating with international organisations, if their activities are directed against the country's security, falls into the number of traitors.

Undesirable organisations

The legal term "undesirable organisations" first appeared in Russia in 2015. The official name is the Federal Law of 23.05.2015 N 129-FZ "On amendments of some legislative acts of the Russian Federation", signed by president Putin in May 2015. In 2021, law enforcers began to include organisations associated with the media in this list. On 14. July 2022, amendments came into force, according to which it is possible to receive a criminal term for participation in

the activities of an undesirable organisation, even outside the Russian Federation.

In 2015-2016, mainly US non-profit organisations and foundations were recognised as undesirable. Later, the register began to include not only human rights organisations, but also those associated with Russian media. Before 2022, no environmental organisations or organisations that have some environmental activities were entered in the List of Undesirable Organisations. For the development of the situation with environmental organisations after 2021, please see Chapter 5 of this report.

The recognition of the activities of organisations as undesirable is regulated by Article 3.1 of the Law "On Measures to Influence Persons Involved in Violations of Fundamental Human Rights and Freedoms, Rights and Freedoms of Citizens of the Russian Federation". It was introduced in 2015.

The decision to recognise an organisation as undesirable is made by the Prosecutor General or his deputies in agreement with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The list of organisations whose activities are recognized as undesirable on the territory of the Russian Federation is published on the website of the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation.³ The list of undesirable organisations can be also found in Wikipedia (in Russian)⁴

After the activity of the organisation is recognised as undesirable, all its branches and structural organisations in Russia are closed, transactions with non-cash funds and other properties are limited (since banks are obliged to refuse to conduct

² [Link to the list by Ministry of Justice](#)

[Link to the Ecological Crisis Group's list of NGOs and individuals included in the register of foreign agents in connection with environmental activities](#)

[Link to the Wikipedia list of foreign agents](#)

³ [The official list of undesirable organisations](#)

⁴ [The Wikipedia list of undesirable organizations](#)

transactions and report the facts of such refusals to Rosfinmonitoring), access to the website is prohibited, and implementation of programs (projects) and holding events is prohibited.

When an organisation is recognised as undesirable, restrictions are introduced not only for it, but also for other persons. Thus, all citizens of the Russian Federation, stateless persons who permanently reside in Russia, and Russian legal entities are

prohibited from participating in the activities of undesirable organisations, including distributing materials of undesirable organisations; providing and collecting funds or providing financial services to an undesirable organisation; and organising activities of an undesirable organisation. Violators of these prohibitions (as well as those established for undesirable organisations themselves) can be subjected to administrative and criminal liability.



Activists came up with this Munch-inspired meme after the "Center for the conservation and study of salmon species and their habitats" was labelled as foreign agents.

New legal developments

2022 was a year of continued deterioration in the situation of civil society in Russia. Moreover, the deterioration of this situation has accelerated significantly.

Individual foreign agents

In 2022, important changes related to state control regulation over “persons performing the functions of foreign agents” were introduced. In July 2022, the Law on Control over the Activities of Persons Under Foreign Influence was drafted. This law came into force on 1. December 2022. The law summarised almost all the provisions of previous laws related to foreign agents. First of all, the terms “non-profit organisation acting as a foreign agent” and “media acting as a foreign agent” were replaced by the blunt and insulting concept of “foreign agent”.

Secondly, not only a legal entity may be labelled as a foreign agent. Now, this term can also be applied to any unregistered association or structure, as well as to any individual.

Thirdly, the definition of “foreign agent” became even more vague. Now, direct funding from abroad is not required at all. The wording “receives support from abroad and (or) is under foreign influence” was introduced. Foreign influence can mean joint participation in the media, conferences, assistance with office equipment, etc. In addition, the legislator requires to include the disclaimer about the foreign agent status not only in all materials distributed in the media or on the Internet, but also in official requests and appeals to state and municipal authorities.

In fact, any Russian citizen with an active civil position can be claimed to be a foreign agent. The law also obliges the Russian Ministry of Justice to maintain a unified Register of Foreign Agents, as well as a Register of Individuals Affiliated with Foreign Agents.

There is now one unified register, instead of the previous four, and both NGOs, unregistered groups, media, and individuals are entered in this register.

It is important to note that the Ministry of Justice of Russia also maintains a list of persons “affiliated” with “foreign agents”. As of 31. December 2022, this classified register included 861 people. The names of persons “affiliated” with “foreign agents” are not made public. Maintaining such a list has no legal grounds in the Russian legislation.¹

Unfriendly countries

Also, in July 2022, the Criminal Code of Russia was supplemented with Article 275.1, which provides for criminal liability for cooperation (“on a confidential basis”) with a representative of a foreign state, international or foreign organisation in order to assist them in activities intentionally directed against the security of the Russian Federation (if these acts do not fall under the scope of “treason”). Considering that nowadays the official list of countries that are ‘unfriendly’ towards Russia includes 49 countries² and the enforcement of law is quite peculiar, many activists (and anyone else, for that matter) may potentially fall under the threat of criminal liability.

¹ [Article from the TV channel “Настоящее Время” \(“Current Time”\): Минюст России внес более 800 человек в закрытый реестр лиц, “аффилированных” с “иностранными агентами”](#) (in English The Ministry of Justice of Russia entered more than 800 people into the closed register of persons “affiliated” with “foreign agents”)

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unfriendly_Countries_List

European Convention

Unfortunately, Russia has ceased to be a party to the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) adopted a relevant resolution on 22. March 2022, stating that

Russia ceases to be a party to the Convention from 16. September 2022. On 11. June 2022, Russian President Vladimir Putin issued a decree on non-execution of ECHR decisions that entered into force after 15. March, 2022.



Oil spill in Caspian sea in 2021. The company was fined for more than 5 billion rubles in 2022.

Impacts of war on Russian civil society

The start of the Russian full-scale invasion in Ukraine became a huge shock for environmental defenders. Many questioned the need of environmental protection work in the war time and had a hard time in finding meaning of such work.

In 2022, several amendments to different laws came into force that toughen legal liability for a negative attitude towards the conduct of a special military operation by the authorities in Ukraine. These new provisions are stated in the following laws: in the Code of Administrative Offences of the Russian Federation (Article 20.3.3) and the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation (Article 280.3), punishing statements against the actions of the authorities and the army.

Additional laws were also adopted establishing responsibility for calls for imposing sanctions against the Russian Federation by Western countries (Article 20.3.4 of the Code of Administrative Offences of the Russian Federation and Article 284.2 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation). This means that a person can be held criminally or administratively liable if he or she asks to apply sanctions from Western countries against certain companies or people in Russia. For example, if someone asks for sanctions against Russian investigators, prosecutors or companies, he or she will be tried under these laws.

The Criminal Code has also been supplemented with criminal liability for calls for acts of sabotage on the territory of Russia and their financing (Article 281.1). This means that if a person on social networks can be said to argue for damage to the army property or military industry, such a person could be sent to prison. So far, this law has been used against critics of the military, we have not seen the law being

used against environmentalists criticising the industry.

Immediately after the Russian full-scale invasion in Ukraine on 24. February 2022, many Russian environmentalists condemned the attack. Friends of the Baltic was the first to publish a statement against the war. Later, the Russian Social-Ecological Union and many of its members also issued their statements. Because of the following soon restrictive legislation forbidding to call the war "a war" some groups and activists had to remove their statements. Those who didn't do that, for example the RSEU member group in Komi republic - Save Pechora Committee - received a fine for its chair. The fine was later repealed.

Several environmental activists participated in public protests, and some of them, including RSEU members and activists, were arrested and detained for several days.

We don't claim that the whole environmental movement openly condemned the war. To openly condemn the war is also posing a risk of fines and criminal persecution, therefore those activists who want to keep their work in Russia have to increase their self-censorship.

Much can be said about Russia's war in Ukraine, but the focus of this report is how the war impacts the Russian environmental movement. Obviously, the difficult situation for activists is linked to the war in several ways:

A. Russia's development in totalitarian direction has been one of the prerequisites for starting the full-scale invasion in February 2022.

The human rights situation in Russia has been worsening for a long time. The regime's fight against journalists and media,

civil society and opposition politicians paved the way for the full-scale invasion.

People are leaving Russia because of the war, but people also were leaving before the war. If previously activists were mostly escaping persecution, in 2022 many left before the possible pressure. We know at least about 100 environmental defenders that left Russia, first because of the invasion from February, and later because of mass mobilisation to the army in September. Only a few declared their emigration publicly, many kept that in secret and still keep working on the environmental issues, because the Internet is allowing them to do so. Some travel in and out when it seems less or riskier, maintaining their work and contacts with colleagues and communities.

B. Even more than before, the regime is more afraid of critics. The regime prosecutes people for speaking about the war.

In connection with military operations in Ukraine, the norms of administrative and criminal liability for discrediting the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, as well as state bodies exercising their powers abroad, appeared.

During the first six months of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, at least 37 environmental human rights defenders (EHRDs) were prosecuted for their anti-war actions or expressions of anti-war stance in Russia.

One activist has already been given a suspended sentence, and five others are facing criminal prosecution. At least five activists emigrated from Russia because of criminal prosecution. Six received administrative arrests (73 days in total). The total amount of fines imposed was 755 thousand rubles.

Five people are being prosecuted in criminal cases. Proceedings under an article on distribution of “fakes” about the

Russian army (Article 207.3 of the Criminal Code) were initiated against Raisa Boldova, an environmental activist from Bashkortostan; Boris Romanov, a St. Petersburg environmental activist and human rights activist; and Mikhail Afanasyev, editor-in-chief of the online publication Novy Fokus (the publication covers problems related to activities of gold and coal miners in Khakassia). Andrey Boyarshinov, Kazan activist, candidate of biological sciences, was prosecuted under part 2 of Article 205.2 (“Public calls to terrorist activities”) of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation.

Roman Taganov, an environmental activist from Adygea, was already sentenced to 3 years on probation under Part 1 Article 318 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation – for violence against a policeman, not dangerous for life or health. The reason for the case was the attack on Taganov himself when he and his son, dressed in yellow and blue clothes, were walking along the street. The man was attacked from behind by an unknown man, who later turned out to be a police officer. Taganov’s self-defence was recognized by the court as aggression against the enforcer.

Six environmental activists received administrative arrests: Ilya Lukhovitsky, defender of Troitskiy Forest — 30 days, climate activist, volunteer of the local Greenpeace group Lyubov Samylova — 6 days, head of Friends of the Baltic programs on microplastics, marine debris, waste and sustainable consumption, co-chairwoman of Russian Socio-Ecological Union Elizaveta Merinova — 5 days; Alexey Dmitriev, defender of the Grachevka river in Khimki — 10 days; Oksana Vladyka, human rights defender, defender of the Shies — 7 days; Mikhail Lobanov, professor of Moscow State University — 15 days.

The total amount of fines imposed on anti-war environmental activists amounted to 755 thousand rubles. Most often the court imposed fines under Article 20.3.3 of the Administrative Code “On discrediting the army”, which came into force in March 2022.

In May 2022, Chelyabinsk environmental activist Nadezhda Vertyakhovskaya posted a video about the war in Ukraine on YouTube. After the statement of local military personnel, the police opened an administrative case against the environmental activist. The court found Vertyakhovskaya guilty and ordered to pay a fine of 40,000 rubles (about 600 Euros).

Alena Smyshlyayeva, the defender of the square near the Drama theatre in Yekaterinburg, was fined a total of 230,000 rubles — six times under Article 20.3.3 of the Administrative Code and once under Article 20.1 of the Administrative Code on disrespect for authority.

Five environmental activists emigrated from Russia, fearing criminal prosecution¹: Sverdlovsk activist Alyona Smyshlyayeva, Shies defenders Anna Stepanova and Dmitry Sekushin, Vologda activist Evgeny Domozhirov, and Omsk eco-activist Richard Roman King.

Later labelling of Friends of the Baltic as Foreign agent could be connected to its statement condemning the war or to its members participating in anti-war protests.

C. Western sanctions and hostile sentiments can impact.

Without criticising the necessary sanctions towards Russia after the full-scale invasion, it is worth noticing the effects of the sanctions and changed sentiments against Russia, on the environmental movement.

Environmental activists, some of which were opposing Putin’s anti-ecological undemocratic policy for 20 years, are now losing finances and cooperation possibilities. Travelling to events abroad as well as visiting fellow co-environmentalists have become more difficult. Visa sanctions made it much more difficult for Russians to get Schengen and other visas, and impossible to get them abroad. The activists experience serious difficulties with obtaining the visas, and those who were forced to leave Russia must go back to apply for their visas, despite the danger for them.

In addition, hostile sentiments abroad can be a burden. Civil society activists are being harassed by the Russian regime, and it can feel unfair to be punished for the politics of this regime. Those activists who left Russia are often feel forced to have an anti-Russian position under threat of being expelled from European countries back to Russia.



Protest against port construction in the Finnish bay.

¹ <https://foeasiapacific.org/2022/08/25/pressure-on-anti-war-ehrds-in-russia/>

New foreign agents and undesirable organisations in 2022

As shown in the previous chapter, there has been a substantial change in the foreign agent listing. Entering into force from 1. December 2022, the foreign agent lists are merged into one.

In December 2022, the Russian Ministry of Justice published a unified list of foreign agents.

Organisations, media, non-registered groups and individuals are now all in the same list, under the same provisions. Moreover, this list contains all organisations and individuals who have ever been recognized as foreign agents.

Changes in listings of Foreign Agents

The pressure on environmental organisations has increased significantly. Five environmental organisations were labelled as foreign agents in 2022: Arkhangelsk environmental movement "42", "Friends of the Baltic," "Sakhalin Environmental Watch," "Center for the conservation and study of salmon species and their habitats," and the Altai organisation "Tuba Kalyk." For comparison, in 2021, two environmentalists were included in the register of media outlets acting as foreign agents.

In total 36 environmental NGOs have been labelled as foreign agents since 2012, including both officially registered and unregistered NGOs. Most of the labelled groups have closed their organisations.¹

Currently, 6 environmental NGOs and an unregistered environmental group are listed in the List of Foreign Agents. The first two are old in the register; Ecodefense was labelled in 2014 and Silver Taiga in 2017. Both decided to continue their operations as "foreign agents", although in different ways. Silver Taiga follows the regulation. Ecodefense ignores it completely, which resulted in the criminal persecution of its director Alexandra Korolyova. In addition, two individuals were labelled as "media foreign agents" in 2021 and continue to remain in the register: Eugeny Simonov and Elena Solovyova. For details, please see our last year's report "Not silent before the storm - status of Russia's foreign agent laws and implications for environmentalists in 2021" page 14.

Environmental NGOs entered in the List of Foreign Agents in 2022 were Tuba Kalyk and Sakhalin Watch, and Friends of the Baltic. The unregistered environmental group 42 was also labelled as a foreign agent. All 4 are presented below.

The full list of "foreign agents" is available in the web page of the Russian Ministry of Justice. As mentioned, Russian government pages are accessible from outside Russia only when using a Russian VPN, but unofficial lists can be viewed in the web pages of the Ecological Crisis Group and Wikipedia.²

¹ [Список НКО и физлиц, внесённых в реестр иностранных агентов в связи с природоохранной деятельностью](#) (in English List of NGOs and individuals included in the register of foreign agents in connection with environmental activities).

² [Link to the list by Ministry of Justice](#)

Link to the [Ecological Crisis Group's list of NGOs and individuals](#) included in the register of foreign agents in connection with environmental activities

Link to the [Wikipedia list of foreign agents](#)

Labelled in 2022: Tuba Kalyk

Tuba Kalyk is an indigenous rights organisation labelled in February 2022, they decided to try to appeal the label in court.

Labelled in 2022: NGO Friends of the Baltic in St.Petersburg

Friends of the Baltic were labelled in March 2022 but were formally removed from the register in September 2022 because the organisation was dissolved. Actually, this NGO is still in the register with the note that the entry is no longer valid.

Friends of the Baltic was the first NGO to be labelled Foreign agent after February 2022. The organisation was the first to issue a statement condemning the war. In addition, persons affiliated with the NGO took part in anti-war rallies right after the invasion. Although the Ministry's reasons for labelling were not made known to them, it is likely that the opposition towards the war was the reason behind.

Actually, the record of the name of an

register has been made. Only the note is added in the register about the exclusion.

Labelled in 2022: unregistered group "42" in Arkhangelsk

In December 2022, an unregistered group named 42 was entered in the Register of Foreign Agents. Six of its members are mentioned in the register but so far it is unclear if they are listed as "affiliates". Information about the labelling was provided by the media, similar to when another Arkhangelsk group was labelled in 2017.

In October 2022 a critical article about the Arkhangelsk environmental activists was published in Echo Severa, claiming they received enemy money through muddy grey schemes. The ecologists are described as a "swarm of parasites" that don't care about nature, only about money. Movement 42 is provided as an example, with names of individuals and Norwegian NGOs who provided money. The

In Arkhangelsk, after the announcement of being labelled a "foreign agent, the environmental movement "42" was closed. Photo: page "42" in VK



organisation or a person is left in the Register of Foreign Agents even after the decision to exclude it or him/her from the

article called for tax inspections. The activists consider that this article was a push for their labelling.

The unregistered environmental group 42 was one of two main drivers of the Shies protests, along with the group Pomorie - No Dumpsite. More than 30 groups were involved, along with several non-affiliated individuals. The Shies protest in 2018-2020 was the biggest one in Russia in 10 years, with 148 rallies and 570 pickets in the two regions of Arkhangelsk and Komi. People protested against a landfill of Moscow waste, to be situated in Arkhangelsk region close to the Komi border. Allegedly, the waste would be sorted at the Shies facility, but there was little realism in this, considering the waste would be shredded from its place of origin. The protesters reached their goals and the landfill project was stopped. By this work, 42 had shown that they were capable of gathering popular support as well as organising protests that worried the regime.

As usual in cases of foreign agent labelling, information on the reasons for labelling is scarce, the group just received a document stating that the group is included to the list, without reasons or argumentation from the Ministry of Justice. Reasons for labelling will be heard in court, as 42 chose to go to court to fight the labelling.

42 chose to publish a statement right away after being labelled. This statement on Vkontakte reached 15 000 views and 1 500 likes, and gained the group 100 new subscribers in VK. Perhaps sparked by this support, the state-media RusNord provided a long-read with detailed information on cooperation of 42 group with Norwegian NGOs, and a general description of NGOs as traitors and agents for other countries, even illustrated with a cute cartoon implying that NGOs get money to do foreigners' bidding.



“Dad, give me money!” “For what?” “I won’t say, I’m an NGO!” Illustration from RusNord-article.

We include the link to these two articles to show the tone of hatred towards NGO that appear in Russian media, so it is possible to imagine the difficulties for those mentioned in such articles.³

42 started the process of closing down in January 2023. However, it is not clear how to close a not formally registered group.

Labelled in 2022: NGO Sakhalin Environmental Watch

The environmental organisation Sakhalin Environmental Watch was labelled in December 2022.

Sakhalin Environment Watch (SEW) was an independent, non-partisan, non-government organisation whose mission was to protect the natural ecosystems of the Sakhalin region in Russia. SEW’s activities included public environment monitoring, defending ecological rights and legal interests of citizens.⁴

Attempts to label Greenpeace and WWF

During the year 2022, several attempts were made to get Greenpeace Russia and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) recog-

³ [Link to the article](#) (collected 9. January 2023)

⁴ [More here: See link from BBC](#)



Representatives of the Altai organization "Tuba Kalyk", now labelled foreign agents

nized as foreign agents or "undesirable organisations".

On 28. March 2022, the deputies of the Chukotka Autonomous Okrug announced the need to terminate the activities of the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) in the region. On 29. March 2022, Alexander Dyatlov, a deputy of the Arkhangelsk Regional Assembly, appealed to the Russian Prosecutor General's Office, asking them to close "useless unfriendly organisations." On 11. April 2022, in Moscow, a representative of the Russian Ecological Society asked the Russian Ministry of Justice to check Greenpeace and WWF for compliance with the status of a foreign agent. On 14. April 2022, the Prosecutor General's Office announced the start of a check by Greenpeace and WWF for "undesirability". On 10.

May 2022, the Ministry of Justice, following an audit, refused to consider Greenpeace and WWF as foreign agents.

On 8. November 2022, a State Duma deputy Alexander Yakubovsky announced his decision to apply to the Russian Prosecutor General's Office with a proposal to recognize Greenpeace's activities in Russia as undesirable. He justified this decision by the fact that Greenpeace is funded by "unfriendly countries" and advocates blocking "investment projects."

All these attacks brought results in 2023.

On 10. March 2023, the Ministry of Justice entered WWF Russia in the Register of Foreign agents. According to the Ministry of Justice, the WWF Russia received funding from foreign sources and, under the guise of protecting nature, the en-

vironment and the biological diversity of species, hindered industrial development. "Representatives of the fund tried to influence the decisions of the executive and legislative authorities of the Russian Federation, hindered the implementation of industrial and infrastructure projects," the Ministry stated. The Ministry added that the fund shed a negative light on the decisions made by government agencies and their policies.

WWF Russia made the decision to continue its operation, despite the status of a foreign agent.

On 19. May 2023, the Prosecutor General's Office recognized Greenpeace as an undesirable organisation. As a rationale for the decision, the Office indicated that the fund financed the activities of organisations-foreign agents in Russia and was engaged in anti-Russian propaganda. The Prosecutor General's Office stated, that "... it was established that the activities of the international non-governmental non-profit organisation Greenpeace International ... pose a threat to the foundations of the constitutional order and security of the Russian Federation." The Office claimed that after the outbreak of hostilities in Ukraine, Greenpeace activists called for "further economic isolation" of the country and tougher sanctions. In addition, Greenpeace's efforts were aimed at destabilizing the situation in the country and attempting to change the government.

The status of undesirable organisation actually means that the organisation is prohibited and has no right to operate on the territory of the Russian Federation. That also means that all its employees lose their jobs.

The status of undesirable organisation also means that any references or internet

links to its information materials are illegal and can cause administrative and criminal penalties. Such reality causes huge problems to the NGOs which continue their activities in Russia, because they have to eliminate all such references and links from their websites and social networks, as well as to get rid of all the printed materials and everything with the Greenpeace logo.

Extremist organisations

The term extremist is used by authorities to discredit and stop critical voices. Extremist and terrorist organisations are shown in several lists.

The Federal Financial Monitoring Service of the Russian Federation, Rosfinmonitoring, has a list of "organisations and individuals with regard to which there is information about their involvement in extremist activities or terrorism". This list contains a large number of targets that seem extremist only in a narrow domestic sense, such as Aleksey Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation (abbreviation ACF or FBK). Also Meta/Facebook is listed there.

A list of organisations recognised as terrorist in Russia is published by the FSB of Russia.⁵

The list shows mainly islamist groups, but also white power groups.

The Russian Ministry of Justice also publishes a list of publications and materials recognised as extremist. This list contains extremist materials and their authors (individuals and organisations), as well as sources of publication of materials.⁶

Undesirable organisations

The Ministry of Justice maintains the List of foreign and international non-governmental organisations whose activities are

5 <http://www.fsb.ru/fsb/npd/terror.htm>

6 <https://minjust.gov.ru/ru/extremist-materials/>

recognised as undesirable on the territory of the Russian Federation. Currently, in June 2023, this list has 90 entries. Russian official governmental websites are accessible from outside Russia only using Russia VPN. However, this list is available in Wikipedia.⁷

Chapter 2 of this report gives more details about the law on undesirable organisations.

On 12. October 2022, the Prosecutor General's Office of Russia declared Germany based NGO "Dekabristen" undesirable. This group was implementing the project "Laboratory for Sustainable Development" and arranged webinars on environmental journalism.

In 2023, more environmental organisations and organisations where many Russian NGOs were involved in have been already declared "undesirable." These include EU – Russia Civil Society Forum (10.04.2023), Miljøstiftelsen Bellona (17.04.2023), Greenpeace International (18.05.2023) and WWF/ World Wide Fund for Nature (20.06.2023).

The international environmental association Bellona announced the cessation of its work in Russia and the closure of legal entities in St. Petersburg and Murmansk.

Other pressure toward NGOs

On 18. July 2022, the Ministry of Justice of Russia suspended the activities of the Vologda public movement Vmeste (Together), which was engaged, among other things, in protecting the green zone on Yaroslavskaya Street in Vologda. The reason was the failure to provide the Ministry with documents on the "expenditure of funds and the use of other property" from 2018 to 2021.

The Russian Ministry of Justice demanded the liquidation of the Moscow Helsinki Group, which is an applicant of the first climate lawsuit in Russia and also was raising issues of EHRD.

Possible to defend rights

In two cases NGOs managed to defend their rights. One organisation was excluded from the Foreign Agents Register. Also the European Court of Human Rights ruled on the complaint of Ecodefense and Others v. Russia against the Foreign Agents Law, but Russian authorities already declared that they won't implement this ruling.

In January 2022, the organisation Civil Initiative Against Environmental Crime from the Krasnodar region was removed from the Foreign Agents Register, where it remained since 25. October 2019. On 8. February 2022, the Krasnodar Regional Court cancelled the fine against Dmitry Shevchenko, the head of the organisation. Earlier, the environmentalist was fined for 100,000 rubles due to the lack of a "foreign agent" marking on the materials of the Civil Initiative posted on a third-party Internet site.

On 14. June 2022, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ruled on the complaint "Ecodefence and Others v. Russia" on the foreign agents law implementation: the court found a violation of Article 11 on freedom of association of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. The ECHR ordered to pay for each applicant (including 73 Russian NGOs, 12 of them environmental) 10,000 euros. Among the applicants are such NGOs as Ecodefense!, Sakhalin Environmental Watch, Siberian

⁷ [Link to the Ministry of Justice list](#)
[Link to Wikipedia list for readers without a Russian VPN](#)

Ecological Center, Baikal Ecological Wave, Educational Center for Ecology and Safety, Chelyabinsk Charitable Public Foundation "For Nature", Chelyabinsk Public Movement "For Nature", Public Ecological

Organisation "Green World", "Center for Assistance to Indigenous Peoples of the North", Ozersk Public Organisation "Planet of Hopes" and others.

A defender of the Troitsky forest in Moscow.



Suppression of environmental activists in 2022

In Russia, there are many different ways to put pressure on environmental activists for their work to protect nature and people's rights to a healthy environment. Pressure is exerted by both the authorities and companies that violate environmental laws. The forms of the pressure are very different. These are criminal cases against activists, physical attacks and property damaging, forced placement in a psychiatric hospital, charges of administrative offenses, media campaigns, and others. Below we present statistics and examples of such pressure.

During 2022 experts of the Russian Social-Ecological Union (RSEU) recorded 177 new episodes of pressure on more than 186 environmental activists and 19 organisations in 25 regions of Russia in 2022. Two more regions witnessed the development of pressure on criminal episodes.¹

19 activists were attacked and received injuries of varying degrees of severity. The property of at least five people was damaged. One activist committed suicide, probably as a result of pressure.

Criminal cases against **16 environmental activists** were developed, **nine activists received sentences** (seven people received real imprisonment, one person received a suspended sentence, one person received restricted freedom).

One ecoactivist was released from prison.

In 2022, at least **161 protocols regarding administrative offences were drawn up** for environmental activists, 102 of them regarding the defenders of the Troitsky forest in Moscow. The total amount of fi-

nes imposed on activists under the administrative protocols was at least **1,050,000 rubles (one million fifty thousand rubles)**. Of these, **710,000 rubles** was imposed on defenders of the Troitsky forest.

15 people were subjected to administrative arrests (a total of **161 days**).

Five environmental associations were included in the register of foreign agents.

The leading regions in terms of the number of episodes of pressure on environmentalists were Moscow (84 episodes), the Moscow region (12), the Krasnodar region (9), the Arkhangelsk region (7), the Kemerovo region (7), the Komi Republic (6), Bashkortostan (5) and St. Petersburg (5).

Pressure regions (according to the number of pressure episodes):

Moscow - 84

Moscow region - 12

Krasnodar Territory - 9

Arkhangelsk and Kemerovo Regions - 7 each

Komi Republic - 6

Bashkortostan, St. Petersburg - 5 each
Chelyabinsk Region, Novosibirsk Region, Sverdlovsk Region, Volgograd Region - 4 each

Tatarstan - 3

Stavropol Territory, Sakhalin Region, Leningrad Region, Voronezh Region - 2 each

Republic of Adygea, Altai Territory, Republic of Altai, Belgorod Region, Bryansk Region, Buryatia, Vologda Region, Murmansk Region, Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Area,

¹ [Review of pressure on environmental activists from RSEU for 2022](#)

Chuvashia, Chukotka Autonomous Area - 1 each.

The hottest spots of environmental conflicts were

- the activists' opposition to construction work in Troitsky forest (at least 42 episodes)
- the "improvement" of the protected area Bitsevsky forest (19 episodes) in Moscow,
- protection of the Grachevka River in Khimki, Moscow Oblast (10 episodes),
- the struggle against the landfill in the village of Poltavskaya in the Krasnodar region (11 episodes),
- protection of green spaces in St. Petersburg (4 episodes), Novosibirsk (4 episodes), Chelyabinsk (4 episodes),
- the struggle against coal mines in the Kemerovo region (6 episodes)
- and construction of a silicon plant in the Sverdlovsk region (5 episodes).

Compared to 2020 and 2021, the number of sentences in criminal cases with real terms in colonies has increased. In 2022, 9 environmentalists were convicted, 7 of them received real terms. Convicted eco-activists were sentenced to terms ranging from 2 years to 5 years and 6 months in penal colonies. In 2020, 2 environmental activists received suspended sentences, in 2021, 8 activists were sentenced, 3 of them with real terms.

The number of administrative arrests increased: in 2022 the courts assigned 19 arrests to 15 activists (for a total of 161 days). In 2021, 10 people received administrative arrests (for a total of 79 days).

Fatal pressure cases

On 5. October 2022, Andrey Garyaev, activist, chairman of public movement "Poltavskaya against dumping" committed suicide in Krasnodar region. Garyaev's



One of the protectors of the Bitevsky forest, Yegor Baranov received two administrative arrests in 2022. Photo: ROD "Protection of the Bitsevsky Forest"

company Kamavtoresurs received a fine of 32 million rubles for allegedly failing to build a sports complex in the town of Abinsk. In the opinion of Natalia Garyaev's wife and co-owner of Kamavtoresurs, the fine could be revenge on the part of Yuri Vasin, head of Krasnoarmeisky district, and his deputy Sergei Zavgorodny, unhappy with the struggle of residents of Poltavskaya village against the landfill.

Criminal cases

Nine environmental activists and ecologists received criminal convictions:

On 12. January 2022, in the Komi Republic, Arkhangelsk activist and Shies defender Drevarch Enlightened (Andrei Khristoforov) was sentenced to a year of suspended imprisonment with a one-year suspended sentence. The Ust-Vymsky District Court of the Komi Republic found

an activist guilty in the case of violence against a representative of authority (Article 318 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation) for the incident on the train to the Shies station.

On 17. February 2022, the Presnensky District Court of Moscow sentenced Roman Sebekin, defender of the Volga-Akhtuba floodplain, to 2 years in a minimum security prison. The owner of unique waste recycling patents was charged under Part 4 of Article 159 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation "Fraud on a particularly large scale" and found guilty of "embezzlement" of 5 million rubles for the implementation of these patents: Roman was unable to fulfill the conditions of the grant for objective reasons - due to the sharp rise in the dollar exchange rate in 2014. Sebekin actively opposed the destruction of the Volga-Akhtuba floodplain, witnessed the destruction of a tent camp of activists defending a unique natural park.

On 1. June 2022 in the Samara region, the former director of the national park

The ex-director of the national park "Samarskaya Luka", Alexander Gubernatorov was sentenced to 5 years in a penal colony. Photo: Igor Gorshkov / Samara Review



"Samarskaya Luka" Alexander Gubernatorov was sentenced to 5 years in a minimum security prison. The prosecutor requested a sentence of seven years imprisonment in a minimum security prison and a fine of 150 thousand rubles for Alexander Gubernatorov. Alexander Gubernatorov was accused of fraud and abuse of power. At the trial in this criminal case, the prosecution witnesses did not confirm the facts of fraud allegedly committed by Gubernatorov — the sponsoring companies of the National Park explained that they had no complaints to the events they financed. In his last word, Alexander Gubernatorov noted that he considers the case "custom-made". On 21. October 2022, the Samara regional court approved the sentence to Alexander Gubernatorov.

On 15. July 2022 in the Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky city court, employees of the Kronotsky Reserve received real prison sentences: Head of the scientific department Daria Panicheva - 4 years and 6 months, Deputy Director for Science and Cognitive Tourism Roman Korchigin - 5 years, Deputy Director for Financial and Legal Support Oksana Terekhova - 5 years and 6 months, former employee of the reserve Nikolai Pozdnyakov - 3 years. They were accused of embezzlement of more than 450 million rubles (Part 4 of Article 160 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation - embezzlement using official position, organized by a group, on a particularly large scale). The employees of the reserve were taken into custody in the courtroom.

On 18. October 2022, in Chelyabinsk, environmental and human rights activist Vladimir Kazantsev was found guilty of fraud and sentenced to 4 years of imprisonment in a minimum security prison, with compensation of 500 thousand rubles to the victim Maxim Shein. Vladimir



Employees of the Kronotsky Reserve were taken into custody in the courtroom. Photo: IA Kamchatka

Kazantsev took part in courts on the side of the StopGOK environmental movement against the construction of the Russian Copper Company's mining and processing plant. He was accused of allegedly taking 500,000 rubles from a client, promising "to influence the judicial process". The defense believes that the victim's statement has signs of false accusation and will appeal the verdict.

On 13. December 13, 2022, Sergei Kechimov, custodian of the sacred Lake Imlor, was sentenced to six months of restricted freedom in the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Region. The court found Kechimov guilty of threatening to kill (Part 1 of Article 119 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation). According to the verdict, Sergei Kechimov will not be able to leave the territory of Surgut city and Surgut district municipal entities and change his place

of residence without the consent of the supervisory authorities.

The criminal cases against Moscow environmental activist Olga Kuzmina and defenders of Kushtau Shihan, defendants of the so-called "Karmaskalinsky case," continue:

On 22. November 2022, the investigation into the case of environmental activist Olga Kuzmina, prosecuted because of her protest against the renovation program and tree felling program in the north-east of the city, ended in Moscow. Since 2021, Olga Kuzmina has been under house arrest, on 8. November 2022, the court changed the activist's measure of restraint to a written pledge not to leave.

On 12. December 12, 2022 in Bashkortostan, at the Karmaskalinsky interdistrict court, after the end of the debates, the prosecutor asked the court for real terms



Kolomna eco-activist Vyacheslav Egorov was released. Photo: SOTAprject

for the defendants in the "Karmaskalinsky case".

In **Bashkortostan**, Farit Rakhmatullof, a defender of the Kushtau Shihan, and activists Sergei Sheremetiev and Vladimir Gorenkov, who oppose coal mining in the Kemerovo region, were searched; the status of ecoactivists in criminal cases is still unclear.

Andrey Borovikov, the defender of Shies, and Valeria Studenikina, an animal rights activist from Rostov-on-Don, continue to be in custody. The Arkhangelsk Regional Court upheld the verdict of Andrei Borovikov, pronounced in 2021.

On 8. August 2022, ecoactivist Vyacheslav Yegorov, who fought against the construction of a landfill in Kolomna, was released after serving his sentence in a colony in the Orel region. He was prosecuted under Article 212.1 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation on repeated violations of the legislation on mass public events, despite the existence of a Consti-

tutional Court ruling limiting the application of this article.

Attacks and damage to property

In 2022, at least 19 activists were attacked and injured to varying degrees. Some cases:

On 25. February 2022, in the village of Sakhaevo, Karmaskalinsky district of Bashkortostan, armed men attacked the house of the head of the Bashkir branch of the All-Russian Society of Nature Protection. On the evening of 25. February, around 9:30 p. m., more than 10 bandits armed with guns, knives, and brass knuckles climbed over the fence of Sergei Burlakov's plot. They threatened people on the territory of the house with murder and inflicted bodily injuries on them. Burlakov's brother was shot in the head with a traumatic gun and had 9 ribs broken, and the farm worker had her nose broken. The owner himself was not on the property at the time of the attack. Sergei Burlakov suggests that the raid is connected with his eco-activist activities (Burlakov is a public inspector of Rosprirodnadzor and a forensic expert on environmental issues, engaged in the fight against illegal quarries).

On 4. July 2022, in Moscow, in the Bitsevsky forest, builders attacked a journalist of "Green Moscow" Ivan Shchekin and hit him 4 times with a shovel. The police arrived on the scene and detained Ivan and tried to get an explanation from him. The journalist managed to get the police to accept a complaint under Article 144 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation ("Obstruction of the legitimate professional activities of journalists"), but a criminal case was never initiated.

On 27. July 2022, ten people attacked ecoactivist Dmitry Privalov at the exit from Bitsevsky forest in Moscow, severely beat

him and took away his phone. According to Dmitry Privalov, he suffered a closed craniocerebral injury, concussion of the brain, cervical spine distortion, and contusion of soft tissues of the head. Three attackers were identified. Presumably, two of them are workers of the contractor of the Moscow Department of Capital Repairs, the construction company StroyStandart LLC, another is a native of Belarus, Denis Parhim, who had conflicts with defenders of the Bitsevsky forest in May. Privalov filed a police report.

On 21. August 2022, in Moscow, at an action in defense of the Bitsevsky forest, guards of a construction company attacked Elena Medvedeva, an activist and candidate for municipal deputies of the Yasenevo district. One of the men grabbed her by the hair and threw her to the ground. Elena Medvedeva filed a complaint to the court against the actions of the guard under Article 6.1.1 of the Administrative Code (beatings). On 19. December 19, 2022, the court found the guard guilty and fined him 25 thousand rubles.

Dmitry Privalov. Photo: Activatica



The property of at least 5 people was damaged:

On 29. July 2022, Olga Dubey, a resident of **Kiselevsk in Kemerovo region**, who criticised coal miners, had her house burned down. This happened three days after Olga Dubey took part in public hearings on the expansion of TALTEK's coal mines and expressed her position on the activities of industrialists.

On 23. August 2022 in Myski, Kemerovo region, environmental activist and lawyer Maxim Andrianov had his car tire slashed. Andrianov suggests that this may be related to his public activities: he is fighting against the construction of the Kravinskaya HPP on the Tom River and the construction of a road to the Kuznetsky Yuzhny coal mine through the forest park zone.

On 19. November 19, 2022, at the village of Glazenka near Bryansk, unknown people set fire to the volunteer animal shelter "The Tramp's House", which was organised by a local volunteer Gennady Palchukovsky.

Also, during clashes with construction workers in Troitskiy forest and Bitsevsky forest, at least two activists had their phones smashed.

Forced placements in psychiatric hospitals

In 2022, two activists were forcibly placed in psychiatric hospitals in connection with criminal prosecution:

Olga Kuzmina (Moscow), start of prosecution: August 2021, a criminal case of hooliganism (part 2 of Article 213 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation). She was in a psychiatric hospital from 1. to 7. July 2022.

Marat Sharafutdinov (Bashkortostan), start of prosecution: January 2021, involved in the so-called "Karmaskalinsky

case” (Sharafutdinov’s case was isolated in a separate investigation), charged with hooliganism, and acquisition, storage and carrying of weapons (part 2 of Article 213, part 1 of Article 222 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation). He was in a psychiatric hospital from 2. August 2021 to 2. February 2022, and was re-admitted to the hospital on 13. December 2022.

Media pressure

On 21. October 2022, after a rally against the construction of a silicon plant in **Verkhnyaya Salda, Sverdlovsk region**, police began putting pressure on the city’s only independent newspaper covering protests against the plant, “The News Exchange”. The newspaper editor Svetlana Buzunova was detained “for participating in the rally in violation of the procedure established by law” and released only after it was discovered that she represented the media at the rally. After that, the police came to the newspaper’s office twice. They said that there was a car bomb near the building, so an urgent evacuation was required. This was done so that the issue of the newspaper criticizing the silicon factory would not come out, the activists believe.

In December 2022, the police began threatening the News Exchange with foreign agent status. Helge Buzunov, editor-in-chief of the newspaper, said that the police intimidate entrepreneurs who provide space for distribution of the newspaper. The formal basis for the threat of recognition as a foreign agent was Buzunov’s address in Germany, which he gave in 2011 when registering the newspaper.

Pressure within the framework of civil law mechanisms (from the companies)

In 2022, two new cases of pressure on environmental activists within the framework of civil legal mechanisms were recorded.

In the **Kemerovo region**, LLC “Razrez Apanasovsky” sent a pretrial claim of 4 million rubles to activist Sergei Sheremetiev, who opposes the coal mine.

In the **Chelyabinsk region**, Alexei Denisenko, a deputy of the Legislative Assembly from the United Russia, filed a lawsuit against the activist Vladimir Konev in the Kyshtym City Court for protection of honour, dignity and business reputation. The activist told in his program on his YouTube channel that Denisenko has a bathhouse on a pontoon in the middle of Lake Uvildy, which is a natural monument, and accused the deputy of violating environmental laws. Denisenko demands to remove the “defamatory” videos of him from the Internet, publish a rebuttal and recover 200 thousand rubles from the activist as compensation for moral damages. The court of first instance partially satisfied Denisenko’s claims, requiring Vladimir Konev to remove the videos about Denisenko’s bathhouse within three days, as well as collecting 5 thousand rubles from the activist as compensation for moral damages. As a result of consideration of Konev’s appeal, Chelyabinsk Regional Court ruled to cancel the court decision against the activist Vladimir Konev and recognized the facts stated in the videos about deputy Denisenko as true.

On 26. April 2022, in Moscow, the Second Court of Cassation of General jurisdiction considered the case of the claim against the well-known environmental expert Igor Shkradyuk for the recovery of 300 thousand rubles from him and made a ruling on Shkradyuk’s appeal. The cassation instance did not satisfy the complaint and left the rulings of the courts of the

first and appellate instances in the case of Shkradyuk, issued in 2021, unchanged.

Cases of administrative offences

In 2022, at least **161 protocols regarding administrative offences** were drawn up for environmental activists, 102 of them regarding the defenders of the Troitsky forest in Moscow.

Most often, protocols were drawn up under Article 20.2 of the Code of Administrative Offences of the Russian Federation (violation of the established procedure for organising or holding a meeting, rally, demonstration, march or picketing) - 109 protocols (67.7%). More than half of them were drawn up by Part 5 of Article 20.2 of the Code of Administrative Offences of the Russian Federation - 86 protocols (53.4%).

In the second place is Part 1 of Article 19.3 of the Administrative Code of the Russian Federation (disobedience to the lawful order of a police officer) - 24 protocols were drawn up on it (15%), of which 16 were in relation to the defenders of the Troitsky forest.

12 protocols (7.5%) were drawn up under Article 20.1 of the Administrative Code of the Russian Federation (disorderly conduct), in one case the court reclassified the case to Part 5 of Article 20.2 of the Administrative Code of the Russian Federation.

Expert anti-nuclear Russian campaigner and public figure Andrey Ozharovsky was accused in August 2022 of discrediting



Arshak Makichyan is an activist of the climate movement Fridays For Future. Photo from Arshak Makichyan's page

Russia's state atomic energy corporation, RosAtom. An administrative legal case is being filed against him. In the meantime, Ozharovsky has repeatedly made public statements and continues to serve as a regular expert guest in mass media, including on official Russian channels.²

In 2022 the first deprivation of citizenship of an environmental activist took place in the history of Russia. On 31. October 2022, Shatura city court of Moscow region deprived Arshak Makichyan of his only citizenship - citizenship of the Russian Federation. Along with him, his brothers and father were stripped of their citizenship. Arshak Makichyan organised the Fridays For Future climate movement in Russia and advocated an embargo on Russian fossil fuels. This precedent can be used by the authorities to deprive other activists of citizenship who were not granted it by birth right.

² More about this case here: <https://uwecworkgroup.info/russia-prosecutes-activist-for-citing-iaea-report/>

Trends and possible actions

One might imagine that the war overshadowed environmental issues for the entire year, which was the case the first weeks after the full-scale invasion started in February 2022. Does it make sense to work on environmental issues when there is a war? Yes, it does, according to Russian environmentalists. Nature and the environment are still at risk, perhaps even more than before.

Already in the first weeks of the war, the industrial lobby started asking for another weakening of environmental legislation and prioritisation of the economy over the environment, justifying this because of Western sanctions. The result was multiple legal changes.¹

70% of the population in Russia is concerned about the environmental situation, a poll from the Levada Centre showed in October 2022. Levada writes: "Respondents were asked to evaluate their attitude to certain problems of Russian society. Among the proposed problems, the respondents are primarily concerned about environmental problems: "bad environment, environmental pollution, garbage disposal" (79% of respondents consider these problems to be serious problems in society), "denser construction of buildings, cutting down parks, destruction of green spaces" (74 %) and the problem of domestic violence (64%). Also, slightly more than half (56%) of the respondents perceive the arbitrariness of law enforcement agencies as a serious problem."²

While international co-operation between state institutions have been paused because of the war, environmentalists have continued to cooperate as much as pos-

sible. For instance, Norwegian authorities paused co-operation with Russian authorities and institutions, except for fisheries and emergency issues such as search and rescue and nuclear incident warning. Contrary to this, most Norwegian environmental NGOs have continued their co-operation with Russian environmentalists.

Even though environmental groups from other countries wanted to continue cooperation with Russian environmentalists, some projects were stopped because of the full-scale invasion. As such, Russian NGOs lost some support. It is understandable that other countries consider pausing cooperation as a reasonable sign to Russian authorities, stating their disapproval of Russia's actions in Ukraine.

But as a consequence, Russian environmentalists have been more isolated following the sanctions and policy changes and feel abandoned at a difficult time. And our common environment is suffering.

Cooperation with authorities has changed

There is a desire among Russians to continue environmental work in the age of the global environmental and climate crisis. However, the work of environmental NGOs towards Russian authorities has changed. There are of course differences between groups and regions, but generally, cooperation with authorities is limited to formal requests and demands from the responsible institutions and informal talks with personal contacts. Here, it is necessary to point out that personal contacts have always been more important in Russia

1 See for instance <https://rusecounion.ru/ru/deecologicalization> and this <https://za-prirodu.ru/page/vremja-beskontrolnogo-potreblenija-prirodnih-resursov>

2 <https://www.levada.ru/2022/10/06/obshhestvennye-problemy-i-yuridicheskaya-pomoshh/>

than, for instance, in Norway. But whereas personal contacts previously have been used out of necessity, now contact with officials is avoided in order to not risk legitimising the regime. Some environmental experts stopped their participation in public councils and started avoiding “sitting together” with the authorities in the common spaces.

An example is Rosatom public council, an institution that, on the one hand, has provided information to NGOs and to some extent a possibility to share views, and, on the other hand, has been a tool for Rosatom to claim of openness and involvement. Rosatom had a national public council and a regional public council for Murmansk. After having been on pause since its last meeting on 25th February, Rosatom wanted the public council to start up again. In the autumn, nuclear independent expert Mr. Oleg Muratov helped set up a meeting in Murmansk, inviting the former participants. After some internal discussions, all environmental groups decided to stay away.

Some activists decided to cease any cooperation with Russian authorities. Others decided to keep contact in order to be able to solve local environmental issues. In fact, much environmental work is not possible without cooperation with authorities. It is difficult to stop destructive projects without participating in public hearings or initiating public environmental assessments, as well as to stop dangerous laws without sending your criticism to parliament. Some local work, like recycling, can be seen as practical more than political,

but it also helps to keep a network and engage new activists in the movement.

In addition, as this report shows, working for change has become increasingly difficult, also on issues that have been considered neutral or even positive by the regime, such as energy efficiency measures. Thus, environmentalists must balance not only non-cooperation with authorities, but also security issues.

Inside and outside

As previously mentioned, several environmental activists have left Russia, both before and after the invasion of Ukraine. Some of those who left in fear of mobilisation have later returned. While there are personal reasons for choosing to stay or leave, location matters for what kind of environmental work can be done. It goes without saying that those who stayed in Russia need to be more careful than those who live abroad.

Success is still possible

Despite increased pressure, it is still possible to achieve results: both to defend persecuted activists and resolve environmental problems.

As mentioned previously in this report in chapter 5, it is possible to defend rights. The Environmental Crisis Group has documented at least 18 successful cases of defending defenders in 2022.³

Furthermore, the Environmental Crisis Group reports 50 big and small environmental successes in 2022.⁴

In some cases, activists managed to bring a fight for saving a natural territory to a successful conclusion. In oth-

³ СЛУЧАИ УСПЕШНОЙ ЗАЩИТЫ ЭКОАКТИВИСТАМИ СВОИХ ПРАВ В 2021-2022 ГОДАХ” (in English CASES OF SUCCESSFUL PROTECTION OF THEIR RIGHTS BY ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISTS IN 2021-2022). Report from Environmental Crisis Group. Link <https://help-eco.info/success-2021-2022/>)

⁴ 50 ЭКОЛОГИЧЕСКИХ ПОБЕД В 2022 ГОДУ (in English 50 ENVIRONMENTAL WINS IN 2022). Link <https://help-eco.info/50victories2022/>

er situations, activists were able to halt development, and even initiate criminal prosecution against businesses violating environmental legislation or win a trial.

Another major example from 2022 is the victory over the initiative about depriving environmental groups of the right to organise independent environmental expertise regarding potentially environmentally hazardous projects. The initiative suggested to change the terms of the public environmental review, but the environmental community protested loudly. In May 2022, more than 70 environmental groups signed a demand to stop these changes, as they were confident that the bill in this form "threatens Russia's environmental security" and could lead to massive violations of citizens' right to a favourable environment.⁵

This resulted in the Duma's environmental committee not supporting the change. One of the reasons given was that the public chamber and public organisations opposed the changes.⁶

What can you do to help improve the situation?

As this report shows, the conditions for Russian civil society continue to worsen. Restrictions from authorities make it increasingly difficult to work on environmental and other issues. Cooperation with fellow environmental groups outside of Russia also faces increased difficulties.

Naturvernforbundet nevertheless believes it is important to support Russian civil society in the time ahead. Russia's civil society works for democratic participation,

openness, international cooperation, and sustainable development. Ending cooperation and support will contribute to the end of civil society, and will thus stifle independent opinion formation and discussion, which is just what the authoritarian regime wants.

For readers wondering what can be done to help Russian environmental activists, we suggest several actions that could be done individually or together in an environmental group, as well as with authorities and politicians.

1. Pressure: The necessary isolation of Russia should not extend to civil society.

Sanctions towards Russia should, as much as possible, be directed towards the ruling and economic elite, not the general population, nor civil society.

2. Help: Helping activists that need to flee Russia.

In understanding the dangers that civil society activists face in today's Russia, it is necessary to help environmentalists and other human rights defenders, should they decide that fleeing from Russia is necessary. This includes allowing travel visas for civil society activists and others who need to leave for political reasons, who now face difficulties travelling.

Norwegian readers can contribute to a support fund for Russian activists, set up by the environmental organisations Natur og Ungdom and Naturvernforbundet.⁷

3. Cooperate: Maintain people-to-people cooperation with Russian civil society.

After successful international cooperation over several decades, it is crucial to

⁵ Зеленые просят оставить экспертизу экспертам (in English: Greens ask to leave expertise to experts), article in Kommersant newspaper: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/5380309>

⁶ В Госдуме отложили рассмотрение законопроектов об общественной экоэкспертизе (in English: The State Duma postponed consideration of bills on public eco-expertise), article in Federal city: <https://federalcity.ru/13799-v-gosdume-otlozhili-rassmotrenie-zakonoproektov-ob-obschestvennoj-jekojekspertize.html>

⁷ "Samler inn til russiske miljøaktivister", web page of Naturvernforbundet. Link: <https://naturvernforbundet.no/internasjonalt-miljovern/samler-inn-til-russiske-miljoaktivister/>



Locals protesting against a recreation center construction next to the Oredezh river in Leningrad region.

maintain contact even during an uncertain period and times of trouble. Civil society cooperation should not need to start entirely from scratch when the situation in Russia improves.

There should be a different approach towards civil society activists, who should be allowed travel visas that allow cooperation to continue. This means quicker visa procedures and possibilities for multi-visas.

4. Monitor and participate: Allow for civil society participation.

If authorities decide to cooperate with Russian authorities on specific areas, civil society should be offered participation and possibilities for monitoring. This has been a demand from NGOs for a long time, but is even more important now.

5. Inform: Help spread information about the human rights situation in Russia.

Without in any way comparing the suffering of the Ukrainian people from Russia's war to the issues faced by Russians, it is important to pay attention to the worsened human rights situation in Russia. You can help by following and distributing information about violations and organising information events to spread awareness about the persecution environmental activists are facing. Remind people around you that Russian civil society is also a target for Putin's fight against democracy.

6. Support: Supporting Russian grassroots activists' work.

Consider supporting environmental groups that cooperate with Russian counterparts.

Engage by organising solidarity events, if possible, cooperating on common environmental issues, and helping to make their voices heard by amplifying their opinions and campaigns.

Conclusions

This report has illustrated how the Russian environmental movement faced both the consequences of the invasion of Ukraine and mass mobilisation to the army, and acceleration of the repressive state in wartime; how it was damaged; and how the movement survived and continued its struggle.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has shocked most participants in democratic civil society in Russia. Environmentalists weren't an exception here. Many of them have opposed the invasion both in their statements and by protesting in the streets. Several of them had to face consequences for their position: either big fines or several days of arrest. Some had to remove their anti-war statements because of new legislation.

Soon after the invasion, new repressive legislation was introduced that basically imposed wartime censorship, which forbids calling the war a 'war' or talking about the damage and atrocities of Russia's army. Most of the independent media were either blocked or closed down in the first weeks of the invasion. Accessing independent media became more difficult. This also affected the ability to spread environmental information and have an open dialogue with the state and the society.

Several dozen environmentalists had to flee Russia facing persecution or willing to keep expressing their criticism openly and calling for a coal, oil, gas, and nuclear embargo. Nonetheless, most environmental defenders remained in their territories to be able to keep protecting them.

Pre-existing legislation on designating NGOs and activists as 'foreign agents' was significantly strengthened. The new version of the legislation replaced the condi-

tion of receiving foreign funds to become a 'foreign agents' with just 'foreign influence.' This means that absolutely everyone could be labelled a 'foreign agent' and the consequences are even higher. The first group to experience these new changes in December 2022 was environmental movement '42' from Arkhangelsk. Soon after, Sakhalin Environment Watch was also declared a 'foreign agent,' becoming the only organisation that was declared a 'foreign agent' twice. Both groups had to close down because of the new, more severe legislation.

Most international human rights groups have been expelled from Russia, but despite several calls from pro-Kremlin activists to forbid WWF and Greenpeace or declare them 'foreign agents,' they remained untouched in 2022. As we know now following events in 2023, this did not last long.

At the same time, environmental problems didn't go away. In fact, they have increased. We show in this report how industry is once again using a crisis to weaken environmental regulations and destroy even more nature for profit.

Local activists didn't go anywhere either. Many kept protesting both the war and their local environmental issues. Since the institutionalised environmentalist community was damaged during the years of the 'foreign agent' law implementation, local activists and angry citizens had to act on their own by blocking roads or illegal construction sites. This has resulted in even bigger and more severe repression, but this hasn't stopped the activists.

Struggle isn't pointless. The Ecological Crisis Group has documented 50 local environmental successes during 2022. It

seems that environmentalists are becoming not only well organised, but one of the most visible political forces in Russia. This situation could become a repeat the Soviet period, when environmental movements were at the basis of democra-

tisation and movements for independence in the Soviet republics. This is one of the reasons why democratic anti-war civil society movements in Russia should be further supported for change and transformation.



Eco-prisoner Andrey Borovikov, the defender of Shies



Naturvernforbundet ble grunnlagt i 1914 og er Norges eldste natur- og miljøvernorganisasjon. Vi er en demokratisk medlemsorganisasjon med over 36 000 medlemmer og rundt 100 fylkeslag og lokallag i hele landet.

Lokallagene omfatter ofte flere kommuner, og arbeider med natur- og miljø saker i sine områder. Fylkeslagene jobber med miljø saker på fylkesplan, bistår lokallagene og koordinerer deres arbeid.

Naturvernforbundet (Friends of the Earth Norway) was founded in 1914, and is the oldest nature and environmental organization in Norway. We are a democratic membership organization with more than 36 000 members, and around 100 local groups all over the country.

**Naturvernforbundet
Mariboës gate 8
0183 Oslo**



Naturvernforbundet