

Ms. Ursula Von der Leyen

President of the European Commission

Sent via email to: Ursula.VON-DER-LEYEN@ec.europa.eu

Mr. Josep Borrell Fontelles

Vice President of the European Commission

High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy

Sent via email to: Josep.BORRELL-FONTELLES@ec.europa.eu

Mr. Charles Michel

President of the European Council

Sent via email to: pce@european-council.europa.eu

cc Luc Devigne - EEAS

Sent via email to: Luc.Devigne@eeas.europa.eu

cc David Cullen - DG NEAR

Sent via email to: David.CULLEN@ec.europa.eu

Brussels, 18 March 2022

Dear President Von der Leyen,

Dear HR/VP Borrell,

Dear President Michel,

The war against Ukraine is an absolute tragedy and the outcome of the conflict will have dramatic lasting consequences for Ukraine, for the European Union and for Russia.

Through our Ukrainian ally, Vladimir Putin is attacking our values and freedoms. He is ordering Russian forces to strike universities, hospitals, residential buildings and public squares. He is not fighting against an army, **he is targeting a social and political model that constitutes the biggest threat to his power: European democracy.**

Democratic forces and the liberal opposition in Russia fully understand this. They do not believe nor adhere to or support the Kremlin's propaganda. Fearless of the regime's violent crackdown on civil liberties, thousands of citizens have taken to the streets to peacefully protest against the conflict. Many were arrested and arbitrarily detained in recent days¹.

The Russian people's unprecedented opposition to the war in Ukraine is the most pressing danger for Vladimir Putin's survival as authoritarian ruler over Russia.

For this reason and in line with our values, we, Members of the European Parliament, ask you to ensure that the **EU urgently strengthens its support to Russian democratic opposition and Russian civil society**, which is now barely surviving Moscow's sweeping repression and is at risk of disappearing imminently.

¹ <https://reports.ovdinfo.org/no-to-war-en#1>

The ‘Colour Revolutions’ in Ukraine and Georgia had already prompted a harsh legislative assault on independent civil society in Russia. Over the past decade, the criminalized concept of “foreign agent” has extended from NGOs, to media outlets, to individual journalists and bloggers, and eventually to individual activists and non-registered movements. Today, it can basically be used to target every dissident voice in the country.

The “Foreign Agent” law has become the Kremlin’s weapon against most prominent opposition organisations. Alexey Navalny’s Anti-corruption Foundation was listed as a ‘foreign agent’ organisation and liquidated two years later as an “extremist organisation’. Earlier this year, a court in Moscow ordered to liquidate Memorial Human Rights Centre on the same oppressive legal basis.

The European Parliament has repeatedly condemned and demonstrated its opposition to this oppression²³.

On the ground, financial support channelled from abroad is almost entirely blocked and **Russian organisations and grass roots activists are now facing intense scarcity of funding.** On top of an extremely dire situation and a constant threat, their work suffers critically from this lack of financial aid. Many of them have been forced to escape the country and are trying to reach the EU, where they hope to continue their activities from the territory of Member States.

But, without funding, they will not be able to continue their crucial work.

We all know that **foreign aggression and internal repression are two sides of the same coin in Putin’s strategy.** Since the launch of Ukraine’s invasion, the horrendous situation has gotten even worse for the few remaining independent organisations. Providing support to the Russian opposition goes hand in hand with our unprecedented assistance to the Ukrainian resistance.

As an integral part of the EU’s broader outstanding response to the conflict, we urge you to:

- foster a responsible response from Member States through the **issuance of visas for Russian democracy activists** and human rights defenders, forced to leave the country to pursue their work safely;
- in the immediate future, **significantly enhance financial resources allocated to CSO partners on the ground and to existing mechanisms, such as the European Endowment for Democracy (EED)**, which are actively supporting Russian activists but urgently need more resources to help them create a critical and lasting change in the country;
- in the medium to longer-term, consider creating a dedicated **EU fund for Russian democrats in exile** fighting Vladimir Putin’s regime from EU territory.

These brave activists urgently need safe relocation and access to flexible funding.

² <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/headlines/eu-affairs/20211209STO19125/sakharov-prize-2021-parliament-honours-alexei-navalny>

³ https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2021-0509_EN.html

We are convinced that this extraordinary support from the EU and Member States is key to achieving our strategic objectives and vital interest in this fight against the Russian autocratic regime.

Yours sincerely,

1. Raphaël GLUCKSMANN, S&D
2. Marie ARENA, S&D
3. Bettina VOLLATH, S&D
4. Isabel SANTOS, S&D
5. Domenec RUIZ DEVESA, S&D
6. Nils USAKOV, S&D
7. Sylvie GUILLAUME, S&D
8. Radosław SIKORSKI, EPP
9. Nora MEBAREK, S&D
10. Marketa GREGOROVA, Greens/EFA
11. René REPASI, S&D
12. Robert BIEDRON, S&D
13. Manuela RIPA, Greens/EFA
14. Radan KANEV, EPP
15. Juozas OLEKAS, S&D
16. Andrius KUBILIUS, EPP
17. Petra KAMMEREVERT, S&D
18. Dimitrios PAPADIMOULIS, The Left
19. Miriam LEXMANN, EPP
20. Sergey LAGODINSKY, Greens/EFA
21. Bernard GUETTA, Renew
22. Jan-Christoph OETJEN, Renew
23. Attila ARA-KOVAC, S&D
24. Rasa JUKNEVICIENE, EPP
25. Viola VON CRAMON-TAUBADEL, Greens/EFA
26. Tanja FAJON, S&D
27. Eric ANDRIEU, S&D
28. Dace MELBARDE, ECR
29. Anna CAVAZZINI, Greens/EFA
30. Ausra MALDEIKIENE, EPP
31. Nicolae STEFANUTA, Renew
32. Hannah NEUMANN, Greens/ EFA
33. Pierre LARROUTUROU, S&D
34. Nikolaj VILLUMSEN, The Left
35. Mikulas PEKSA, Greens/EFA
36. Aurore LALUCQ, S&D
37. Włodzimierz CIMOSZEWICZ, S&D
38. Andrzej HALICKI, EPP
39. Thijs REUTEN, S&D
40. Eero HEINÄLUOMA, S&D
41. Saskia BRICMONT, Greens/EFA
42. Reinhard BÜTIKOFER, Greens/ EFA
43. Isabel WISELER-LIMA, EPP