



# Human rights in Russia: Challenges in the 21st century



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**Published by** | Institute for Cultural Relations Policy

**Executive Publisher** | Csilla Morauszki

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HU ISSN 2064-2202



Institute for Cultural Relations Policy



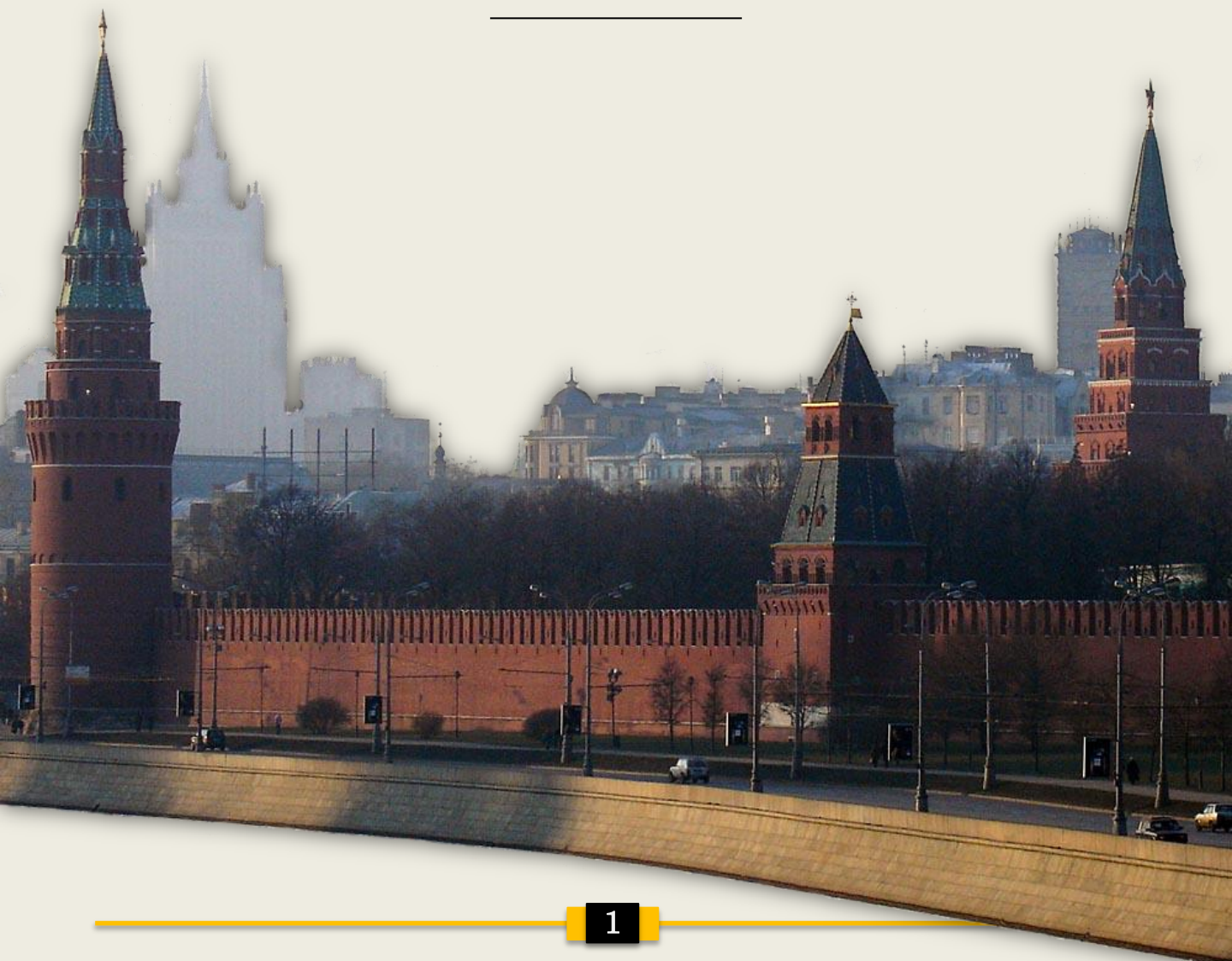
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# Foreword

Before presenting the human rights situation in Russia, it is important to note that the Institute for Cultural Relations Policy is a politically independent organisation. This essay was not created for condemning, nor for supporting the views of any country or political party. The only aim is to give a better understanding on the topic.

On the next pages the most important and mainly most current aspects of the issue are examined, presenting the history and the present of the human rights situation in the Soviet Union and in Russia, including international opinions as well. Bringing together such views can help to understand this complex issue that can provide basis for future improvement.



# Introduction

Russia is probably one of the most controversial countries of the 21st century. Mainly because of its history thorough tsarizm and socialism, it became the country of rich and poor, modern and old, religion and secularism. During all this time it worked as an independent country, finding its own way and following its own rules – that were mainly formed by the current demands of the leaders and citizens. This way Russia developed particular methods in almost every area such as the questions concerning human rights policy. But in the era of globalisation it seems that the very own method is almost impossible to enforce.

As in the modern age it cannot be totally independent from the rest of the world, the political spectrum is becoming wider and gets more international attention. The world and even some Russian citizens want the government to join the wave of democratic changes, to follow their standards and of course to respect human rights to which all humans are entitled.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union there has been a huge positive progress in the enforcement of human rights but the situation is still very far from the target. Moreover it is extremely hard to see the whole situation as Russia cannot be forced to give out any kind of information – not being a part of the European Union or NATO. But with the strengthening of the opposition and non-governmental organisations the solution is more important and urgent than ever if the government wants to continue possessing the power and the support.

Many recent events have attracted the attention of human rights defenders on Russia in the past years. Only in 2013 we could hear about the huge corruption

scandal of Moscow's mayor, Sobyenin, the gay question in connection with the Sochi Olympics and about journalists and Green Peace activists that got into jail because of protesting or publishing opposition thoughts. But there are conflicts and problems that have been going on for years or decades like the situation of homosexuals, the Caucasus atrocities or the xenophobia of which thousands of immigrants are exposed to every year.

Many human rights organisations have made studies and examinations on the situation in Russia. In most of the world-wide rankings the country is between the last ones or at least in the second half. According to Transparency International – that examines the aspects of corruption – Russia is on the 133th place, while the International Human Rights Rank indicator put it on the 19th with 52 percent of enforcement of human rights. The American Freedom House also ranks each country, but contrary to the previous ones not only by numbers but by categories as well. It says that in Russia the internet is partly free, the press is not free, the whole Russian Federation is not free and is 41th on the world list. Besides other international organisations expressed their disapproval as well, like Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, or the Reporters Without Borders.

All these events and rankings indicate that a big progress is needed to solve all these problems. As it is an enormous country with huge population and many different nations, the usual Western methods can turn out to be inefficient as well as ranking according to the European or US approach may not be effective and feasible for finding solutions. Because of this Russia has to find an own process to enforce human rights as it is the only way to be a part of international politics and to benefit from globalisation.

# Human rights in the Soviet Union

To understand the current human rights situation in Russia, it is essential to have a look at the 20th century history of the country as according to many experts the policy of the USSR still has a huge influence on the current politics. From the fall of tsarism in 1917 until the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 the communist ideology and the Communist Party determined almost all the steps of political leaders.

Freedom, equality and other “Western values” were part of the ideology, but while in the USA and in Western Europe these concerned individuals, in the USSR it was explained in the frames of society. This way human rights mainly meant social and economic rights that were supposed to keep the society content and help in enforcing state interests.

At the same time it would be inaccurate to say that the USSR did not have its own human rights policy apart from social and economic rights, as even Stalin’s Constitution in 1936 recognised them. Later Brezhnev published a new version (1977) that served as a basis for the current Constitution of the Russian Federation. In its 7th chapter – that is called “Basic Rights, Freedoms and Obligations of the citizens of the USSR” – we can find basic human rights, such as the right to work, the right to leisure, the right to health care, the right to social security, the right to housing, the right to education and the right to culture. As it can be seen from the list, more emphasis was put on the economic and social rights but according to the USSR approach human rights were assured to everyone.

But even if these rights existed, they were not implemented during the political decision-making process. Every town had a cultural house, a school and it was not hard

to find a job, these elements were not enough for a decent living. Several times there was a lack of food and social security that took away all the legitimacy from the system.

There were several steps from the government that violated basic human rights. One of the most memorable cases – like in most post-Socialist countries – were the operations of the secret and violent police. As the Communist ideology was the only acceptable one, those who were thinking differently could easily get arrested and even into jail or camps. Those who did not accept the political decisions or wanted to leave Russia were caught by the Cheka, OGPU or NKVD and later became the “enemies” of the Soviet system. These steps and the whole strong police control were obviously against the freedom of thought and speech.



One of the numerous statues of Lenin in Moscow



Moreover the censorship on the press was really strict, this was why “Samizdats” were published and spread all around the country outside the control of the Soviet government. All these regulations concerned also science, education and culture. Because of this the only acceptable views were based on historical realism and Marxist dialectics. This meant the strong dominance of natural sciences and economics, while such fields as history or literature were just tools of the political leaders.

As the teachings of the Orthodox Church were against this methodology and way of thinking, the Communist Party tried to discredit it in every possible way. Violating the right of thought and the freedom of religion, the church was persecuted by the government. They closed religious schools, confiscated church property and tried to propagate atheism. Priests were exposed to public humiliation, sent to camps, prisons or mental hospitals. Because of the public opinion, for religious people it was impossible to participate in politics. This way it became extremely hard to change on the public treatment of the church.



“Flag of peace – flag of creation” Soviet propaganda poster from 1977.

Between all these regulations moving to another country was not an option. Leaving the Soviet Union was strictly regulated that violated the right to free movement. As in those times was constantly said, people who came home from abroad were treated like “astronauts” – similarly to the chances of getting out of the USSR it was considered as the same as getting to the Moon. To get out of the country a permit was needed from the government that was extremely hard to obtain. Those who left and refused to return could be punished for 10-15 years of prison, or in more serious cases for death with the confiscation of property.

Moreover, not only moving out of the country, but moving inside of it was difficult and for most people unreachable. Without getting the needed certifications and permits – that was of course an extremely difficult and long administrative process – it was forbidden to move from one town to another, or even to visit relatives for a shorter time. In a longer period of Soviet times peasants were not allowed to have these passport at all that was an evident sign of discrimination between citizens.

Of course the voting system was also an instrument that could strengthen the power of the Communist leaders. Guaranteed by the state, there were “free” elections, secret ballots and different candidates, so the popular representation was realised. But in practice all the candidates were given by the Communist Party, limiting political plurality.

Fortunately the political system and with that the human rights policy has changed a lot since then. The Soviet Union in its last months adopted several declarations and conventions, such as the Declaration of the Rights and Freedoms of Man and the Declaration of Rights and Freedoms of the Person and Citizen. These important documents were later adopted by the Russian Federation and became a part of the 1978 Constitution that still defines the human rights policy of the country.



## Laws and conventions on human rights

In spite of the popular view, Russia is a member of several human rights conventions and fulfils its commitments in almost every case. It became a part of the international human rights community for the first time in 1968, signing the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Since then, the list has become extremely long and now apply to almost every sphere of human rights.

There can be found regulations concerning women's rights, anti-discrimination and anti-slavery, ones that protect from torture, ill-treatment or illegal disappearance. They also assure the rights of children, the freedom of association, work, education, asylum, and the proper punishment in cases of war crimes and terrorism.

Being a member state of the Council of Europe, Russia also signed the European Convention of Human Rights. This way in cases of human right violations it has to take responsibility at the European Court of Human Rights. It proved to be an effective tool for the right enforcement as the number of cases from Russia is really high. Only in 2013 the Court dealt with 24,102 applications, 257 of which were found admissible and brought to the judges. In 119 of the 257 cases Russia was found violating at least one part of the Convention.

In cases of violating the international commitments, Russia usually has to bring off an appropriate juridical procedure or pay compensation to those who sustained loss. Even though these requirements are nearly always fulfilled, Russian authorities and courts are often accused of unfair treatment and of letting the suspects away, not providing adequate investigation.

Important international conventions on human rights	
1954	Convention on the Political Rights of Women
1954	Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others
1969	International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination
1976	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
1976	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
1981	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
1983	International Convention against Taking of Hostages
1987	Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment
1990	Convention on the Rights of the Child
1993	Convention relating to the Status of Refugees
1998	Protocol to the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms
1998	Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms
1998	Protocol No. 4 to the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, securing certain rights and freedoms other than those already included in the Convention and in the first Protocol thereto
1998	Protocol No. 7 to the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms
1998	European Convention for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment
2000	European Convention on Extradition
2001	European Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism
2001	International Convention for the Suppression of Terrorist Bombings
2001	Convention on Laundering, Search, Seizure and Confiscation of the Proceeds from Crime
2002	International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism
2003	UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime
2004	Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, supplementing the UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime
2004	Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime
2007	International Convention for the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism
2007	CoE Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism
2007	Convention on the Transfer of Sentenced Persons

## Juridical system of Russia

Russia's juridical system is one of the main issues that has to be improved in the future. Even if human rights violations occur, in most cases there are injustices during the trials and the punishments and well. The problem concerns the biased jurisdiction, the manipulation, the large prison population and many other areas. These defects can lead to broad mistrust towards the system and to more violent, individual solutions in certain cases.

second time, there is no chance to turn to another national juridical body.

According to many organisations, the juridical system is not independent and often manipulated by the authorities. Currently, Russia has been keeping in prison approximately 60 political prisoners as well as victimized businessmen. The highly media-reported Pussy Riot punk band was also a part of them until they were released on amnesty in late 2013. The



Elements of the juridical system of Russia

Russia's juridical system consists of the Russian Federation's Supreme Court, republic supreme courts, okrug courts, regional courts, Moscow and Saint Petersburg city courts, district and military courts. From all of these, the Supreme Court is the higher juridical body that deals with civil, criminal, and administrative cases. The system is built on two main principles. Firstly, decisions can be appealed only once, immediately to the superior court. Secondly, the higher courts' decisions cannot be appealed or protested. This way, if someone's case fails for the

three members of the band were arrested in 2012 when they performed a "punk pray" in Moscow Christ the Saviour Cathedral, asking Virgin Mary to remove Vladimir Putin from the country's leadership. Two members out of three were sentenced to two years of prison that was considered by many foreign courts an excessive detention. Apart from the political influence the level of corruption is one of the highest in these spheres.

The courts are frequently accused of not being fair towards religions. The Russian Constitution provides the freedom of

religion, the equality of religions and the separation of church and state. Currently, more than two third of the population identifies with the Orthodox Church, while there are significant minorities such as Muslims and Jews. Apart from the fact that they often have to face prejudices and discrimination in their everyday lives, even the courts prefer the Orthodox religion. For example the religious literature of Jehovah's Witnesses and Scientologists is declared extremist by regional courts.

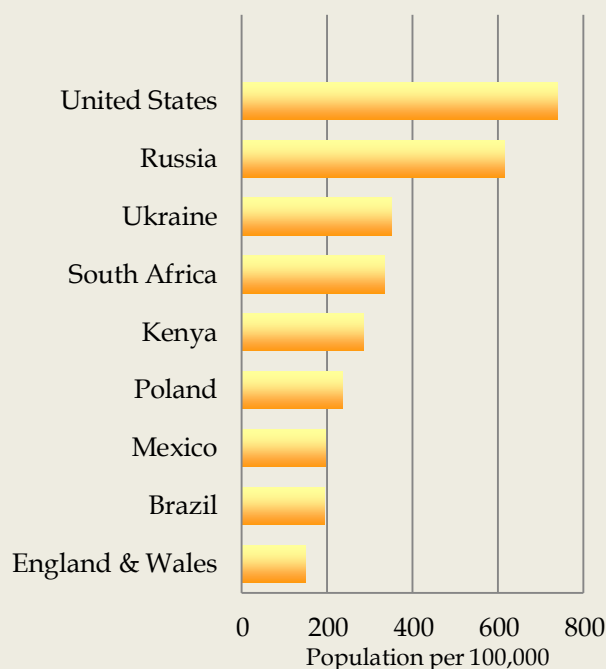
The length of detentions is extremely high in international rankings, this is why Russia has got one of the biggest "prison population" in the whole world. According to some estimations, nowadays about 613 of 10,000 people are in prison on a regular day. The prison life is also really tough. Even though in 2008 in a law Russia agreed to prison monitoring, there are institutions that simply do not cooperate with the inspectors. This may be a main reason of the death of Sergei Magnitski who died in 2009 in pre-trial detention because he did not have the necessary access to health care. His case was a big push for Russia to improve the monitoring system by further regulations.

Torture is also an issue that often gets international attention. Even if Russia has got four conventions on the ban of torture, there are still reported cases. In 2012, the 52-year-old Sergei Nazarov was brought to the Kazan police station with charges of hooliganism. Later, he was sodomized and beaten to death. Even the United Nations raised its voice, emphasising that there are

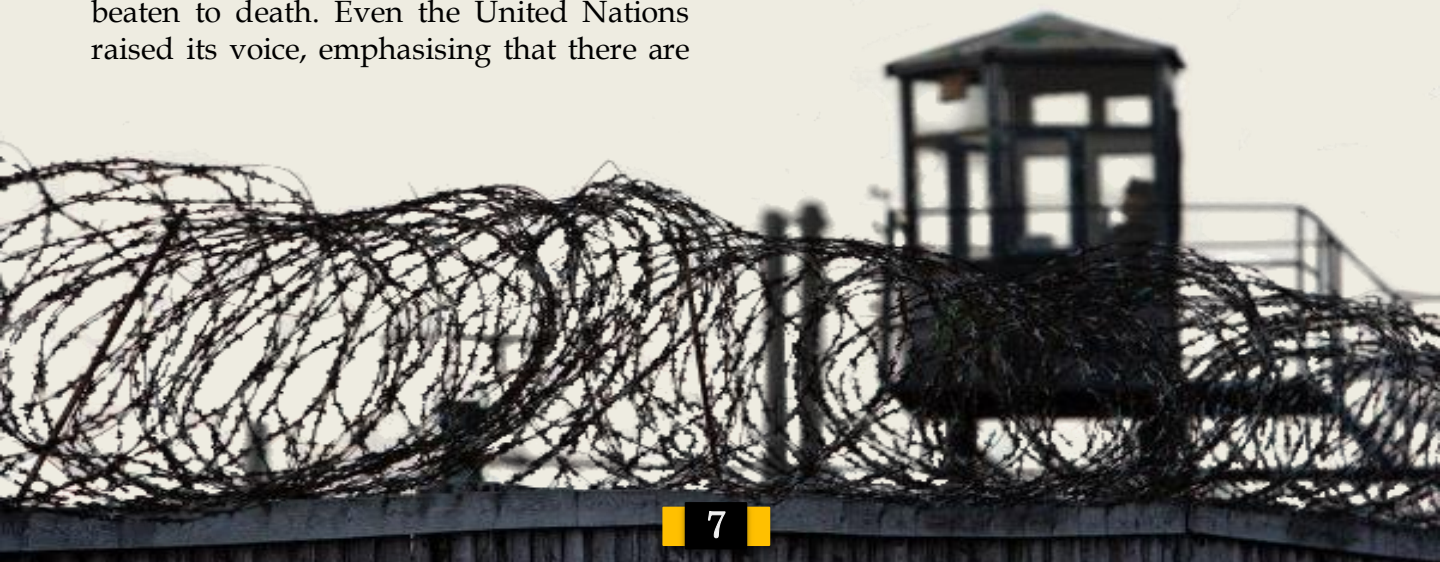
still problems apart from torture, such as threats and deaths of human rights defenders.

To give a proper role for human rights in the system, the Duma introduced the position of human rights ombudsman in 1997. The Presidential Human Rights Commission serves as an advisory capacity. The ombudsman's responsibility is to bring off regular researches on the country's human rights situation and to review the letters of citizens who apply with complaining for human rights violations.

### Worldwide prison population



Source: International Centre for Prison Studies





# Human rights policy of the Putin regime

Vladimir Putin, Russia's current president came to power in May 2012 but before that he had been in power for more than a decade. From 2000 to 2008 he served as the President of the Russian Federation and as the Prime Minister from 1999 to 2000 and again from 2008 to 2012. During all this time he has been one of the most polarising political leaders in the world. He has been constantly criticised and praised at the same time. One thing is for sure: he has a strong position towards every kind of situation and by participating in new international conflicts – as in Syria or in the Snowden-case – there is no doubt that he wants to play a significant role on the international stage.



While in many fields his job is widely recognised, he is almost always criticised for his human rights policy. According to Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch the country's human rights situation has not been worse since the fall of the Soviet Union. They explained it mainly by political imprisonments, the hostile attitude against foreign companies and by the inconsequential treatment in inspection procedures.

What can still be a reason for the huge support of Vladimir Putin? The answer is in the complex history of Russia than resulted

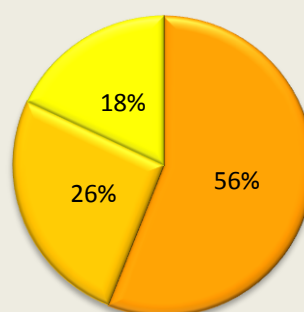
in special demands from the society. After the fall of the Soviet Union almost every citizen lost the feeling of security. In the era of President Boris Yeltsin (1991–1999) the whole country was exposed to a huge shock: fast capitalisation, transition to market economy, liberal democracy. By one big step from centralised to market economy it was easy to feel insecure. As all these values that worked fine in Western countries had no significant root in Russia, the fast changes were mostly not welcomed.

Of course without this early shock many things would not have been created as Yeltsin reformed almost every segment of the state. He gave a whole new law system to Russia by increasing political participation. Concerning human rights, in this era many NGOs and human rights groups were created on national and international level as well. Meanwhile, providing total freedom to the press, everyone could know how the changes were going.

But in the chaos the Russian society had to face many new phenomena: organised

## Putin's support in January 2014

- Supports Putin
- Wants Putin to leave his office
- Not interested



crime, corruption, immigration, and so on. Because of the unequal privatisation the social and material differences were increasing. Many remembered the “good old Soviet times” as the ages of security and happiness and those hard years got a nostalgic view. Between these circumstances the majority of the society did not want more than order. They simply cared less about human rights and more about having a secure job and proper way of living, claiming their social rights and the respect of their traditions.

And in this political and public environment came to power Vladimir Putin. Between the frames of globalisation it seems that most citizens still do not consider human rights as important as a decent living – a job, education, healthcare and pension. All the things that were guaranteed by the Soviet system.

This can be a basis for a deal between the society and Putin: as long as he ensures economic growth and international power, people will be content and be less concerned about human rights violations. As Putin is getting stronger on the international stage and the oil prices are high enough to give secure financial background to Russia, the deal seems to be fulfilled by the president.

But as many new think tanks, NGOs and other organisations work in Russia, it is impossible to ignore the events of the 21st century. On the next pages the most important and most well-known human rights violations are presented since Vladimir Putin is near to power to give a better sight on what bothers human rights groups all around the world.



Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin, President of the Russian Federation

# Corruption

According to Transparency International – probably the most recognised organisation engaged in the fight against corruption – Russia is the 127th most transparent country out of 177. With its 28 percent it has got the same points as Azerbaijan, Comoros, Gambia, Lebanon, Madagascar, Nicaragua or Pakistan. There had been a progress, as in 2012 Moscow had the 133th place, but the ideal situation is still far. And as anti-corruption and better transparency are now global demands, the issue has got a worldwide attention.

possessions of these 100 billionaires equal to the quarter of Russia's annual GDP. Of course, the remaining sum is distributed in other sections of the society, 13.8 percent of which lives under the poverty line. The deficiencies of the system are shown by the fact that the Russian middle class practically does not exist.

According to Transparency International, currently elected officials, civil servants and the police are considered the most corrupt. The Russian Interior Ministry's research shows that an average sum of bribe in these

**Minimum wage: 156 USD**

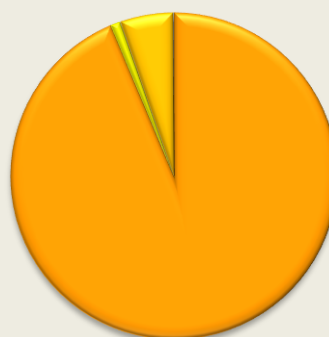
**Average cost of living: 209 USD**

**Number of people living below the poverty line: 18 million**

The roots of contemporary Russian corruption can be found in the regime change. When the Soviet Union collapsed, a fast capitalisation was brought off, with even faster privatisation. Those who were closer to the necessary information, could get huge possessions – like state companies or real estates for almost no money. But who did not have any acquaintances close to economic power, lost even more than before. This was the era when modern Russian oligarchs were created, who still have got great influence on every area of the economy, industry and international trade. As a consequence of non-controlled privatisation, Russia lost almost 1.7 trillion dollars, which made impossible for the state to help the poor. It is important to note that the corruption was done not only by Soviet-alleged owners, but by young reformists and Western companies as well. As a consequence, today there is a huge wealth gap in the Russian society. There are about 100 billionaires in the country, the richest is Vladimir Lisin steel tycoon. He owned 24 billion dollars in 2011. The

positions is more than nine thousand dollars. Apart from them it seems that traffic policemen make the “biggest business”. The New York Times wrote in 2009 that just in one day they get 1,000 dollars corrupt money – even though half of this sum goes to superiors. It seems that their official salary is just some kind of “tip” to their real income.

**The wealth of Russia's adult population**



■ The wealth of Russia's adult population

■ Less than \$10,000 in wealth

■ Between \$10,000 and 100,000 in wealth

■ Between \$100,000 and 1,000,000 in wealth

■ Other



But not only the state and the industrial sector is corrupt: as some analysts see it, it became a part of the everyday Russian person too. During the years, citizens accepted the fact of bribe in the public life, in health care, and in police services. In 2009, 20 percent admitted that they offered bribe, which number was 29 percent in the next year – so it is constantly growing. It seems that it is simply impossible to avoid corruption: without bribe there is no chance to get a child into nursery, to get an operation on time and to get into higher education – or even simply to get into a night club.

of these only 8 percent was sentenced to prison, while most of them could get away with fine, or even without that. According to the President with this level of liberalization the deterrent effect will simply disappear and they will not be able to efficiently handle the situation anymore. An utmost interesting decision was made also by Putin in the same year. Trying to bring back the reputation of state and public institutes, he banned officials from using “corruption-inducing” language, that had been forming for centuries. This language includes sentences like “Thank you does not butter my bread”, “What are

### Major steps against corruption

- 1992:** first anti-bribery law
- 1997:** public servants have to declare their assets
- 2000:** Vladimir Putin’s anti-corruption campaign
- 2003:** a commission is created against corruption
- 2008:** Russian officials can accept gifts only under 91 dollars
- 2012:** Putin’s new anti-corruption campaign; first dismissal of an official because of corruption since 1991; civil servants and their family members cannot have overseas assets
- 2013:** government officials have to explain their source of income if something they buy exceeds the family’s official income

Reacting to the statistics, the government has already taken many steps. The first law concerning corruption was accepted in 1992, and in 1997 Yeltsin made public servants declare their properties. But the fight became intense with Vladimir Putin. In 2013 he founded a new department in the presidential administration that is devoted to fighting corruption – even though he did not give any power or role to the civil society, ignoring NGOs and different organisations.

Putin declared zero tolerance against corruption as this can be a main reason why citizens lose their trust in the government. He wants to change first of all the communal services, the consumer market and government tenders. During his debates and speeches he often emphasises the inappropriate juridical system. In the first half of 2013 700 people were convicted for taking bribes. From all

we going to do?”, “The question is difficult to solve, but possible” or the classic “We will sort it out” (“Dogovorimsya”). Officials also have to avoid certain topics when talking to the public, such as low wages, relatives’ unemployment, a desire to get something or a wish to travel somewhere they cannot afford from public salary.

In 2012 Russia also joined the OECD Anti-Bribery Convention as its 39th member. With this the government expressed its engagement in the fight against corruption and in upholding all the international standards.

In spite of all these steps there are still huge corruption scandals. In 2013 the biggest ones were the constructions of the Sochi Olympics and the highly-media covered real estate case of Moscow’s mayor, Sobyenin. As in another part of this issue the Sochi scandals are discussed, let us have a closer look at the mayoral affair.

In the middle of the electoral campaign an opposition candidate, Aleksei Navalny stated that Sobyanin's 16-year-old daughter owned a luxury flat in a state house where only public officials were supposed to live. It was against the law from two aspects: it is hardly questionable, whether a mayor can afford such an expensive flat – worth more than five million dollars – and such easy privatisation is simply illegal. Sobyanin told later that it was not against the law and the flat was not that expensive. As he said, the prices vary on many aspects, such as design or location, and his accusers only speculate on the numbers.

Such incidents can easily take away the public trust. According to Levada Sociology Center, 30 percent of Russians consider corruption an inevitable evil, 22 percent blamed the “Russian character” and 18 percent claimed that there should be more control and transparency in public spheres and authorities. And the mistrust does not characterize only the society, but the economic life as well. As because of the corruption the economy is totally unpredictable, foreign investors are not likely to come to Russia that can mean a threat for future developments.

### The Putin's regime's corruption by the numbers

**4,800,000 rubles (about \$145,000)** The difference between the annual salary of Marina Yentaltseva, the Head of Presidential Protocol, and the amount she spent on her Bentley.

**495,000 rubles (about \$15,000)** Amount of state budget money officials in the Krasnodar Krai spent on the NTV+ cable bundle which included erotic entertainment networks *Playboy TV*, *Hustler TV* and *Russian Night*.

**126,000** The reported annual death rate among people aged 15–34, due to drug abuse.

**1,073,000,000 rubles (about \$32,500,000)** Larissa Belobrova's income of 2010. Belobrova is an actress at the Primorsky Drama Theater and the wife of Sergei Darkin, former governor of the Primorsky Region.

**21,936,628 rubles (about \$660,000)** The initial price of the patrol boat ordered by Sochi military base #55056, which is overseen by the Federal Security Service (FSB). Technical requirements for the boat included two toilets, 1 19-inch LCD TV, LED accent lighting and closet lighting.

**5,500,000,000,000 rubles (about \$166,700,000,000)** Amount to be spent on development in the Northern Caucasus by 2025. The initial budget was set at half this amount.

**21,000,000,000 rubles (about \$637,000,000)** Amount to be spent on the celebration of the 700-year anniversary of the birth of Saint Sergey Radonezhsky. Thus, every year that has passed since the saint was born is worth 30 million rubles. This amount is sufficient to cover seven annual budgets for the municipal district of Sergiyev Posad.



The cover of the report “Putin. Corruption”

# Freedom of press and suspicious death cases

The Constitution of the Russian Federation provides the freedom of speech and religion, however, there is a huge amount of regulations in this sphere. After examining the level of abuses, the extent of pluralism, the media independence, the working-environment and self-censorship, the legislative framework, the transparency and infrastructure of press, the Reporters Without Borders ranked Russia the 148th out of 179 countries in 2013 concerning the freedom of press. At the same time, other organisations are not positive neither: the Freedom House in its annual evaluation also rated it as “not free”. Their arguments are usually the strict control and the lack of pluralism.

Novaya Gazeta, Radio Ekho Moskvyy and Radio Svoboda are considered independent news broadcasters. Even though it must be noted that only approximately ten percent of journals is owned by the government.

The national and international concerns raised in 2013 when Vladimir Putin announced that the RIA Novosti news agency – that had already been state owned – would be restructured and given a new pro-Kremlin and anti-Western leader. The decision came after RIA Novosti gave a huge media coverage to anti-Putin protests in 2012 and the case of the struggles of opposition Alexei Navalny in 2013. This news agency was one of the biggest ones considering the number of readers.

## State-owned media

### News agencies

ITAR-Tass , RIA Novosti

### Print media:

Rossiyskaya Gazeta , Parlamentskaya Gazeta , Krasnaya Zvezda , Moskovskiye Novosti

### Radio and TV:

VGTRK Holding , 89 regional television and radio stations , Zvezda Media Group

The main root of the problem is that a large part of the Russian media is state-owned or their owners are state-supported companies – such as the energy business giant Gazprom. As still the main sources of information, all the six national TV channels and the two biggest national radio news channels are in the hand of the state. There are ones that are private properties but they have to face radically restrictive regulations and editorial policies. Even though the Article 29 of the Russian Federal Constitution and the Article 1 of the Russian Law on Media ban censorship, they must take into account the opinion of different research and information departments – that are provided by the government. Currently the newspaper

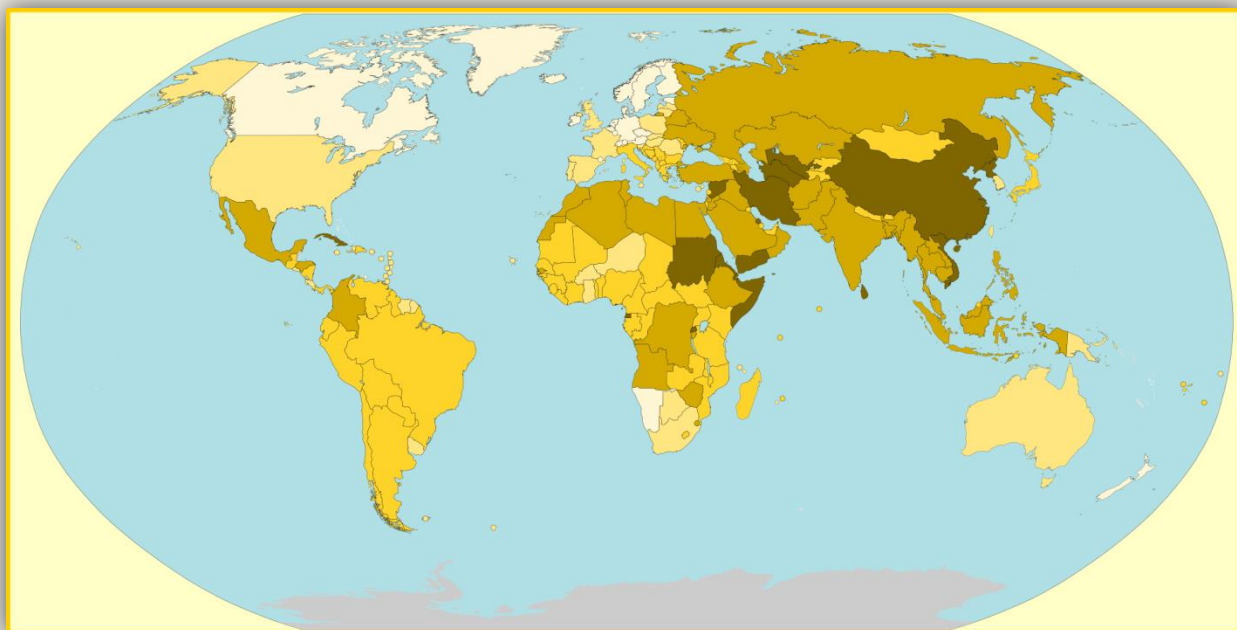
The protests got other forms of attention as well from the government media. After the demonstrations ended a documentary was presented on television, called “Anatomy of a Protest”. The protesters got a really negative light and the government seemed extremely glorious in the movie. They even claimed that the protesters were paid to go to streets. Before the premiere, Putin publically asked Echo Moskvyy to stop accusing him with different charges and in the after-elections period Novaya Gazeta, Kommersant and television channel Dozhd also experienced denial-of-service attacks from the authorities.

Apart from protests there are two other topics the government wants to hide from the public or to distract their attention from:



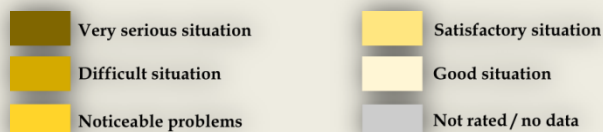
the terrorist attacks and the difficulties of the Russian economy. But the publicity is just one part of the free press issue, the other one is the access to information. Even if some governmental documents are theoretically available for everyone, the process is really difficult even on governmental websites.

Union and only 21 of these cases had been solved. This shows that these kind of charges often stay unsolved and unpunished. The history of “politically motivated suspicious deaths” has always been a popular stereotype for the Soviet Union and Russia. Some say it is a conspiracy theory, some others treat it as a fact. Probably there



A world map showing countries' Press Freedom Index classification based upon the report Press Freedom Index 2013 from Reporters Without Borders.

In Russia currently there are about 400 daily newspapers with many different topics that are supposed to bring everyone the actual news. Most of them support the Kremlin or companies close to them. Being a pro-governmental journalist in Russia is the least problematic choice, but there are oppositionists as well. They usually write about the country's wrong human rights policy, the wars in the North Caucasus and in general about all the wrong steps of the administration. There have been several cases recorded when these journalists mysteriously injured or died. The most media covered was the one when in 2006 journalist Anna Politkovskaya was shot in an elevator of a block of flats by an unidentified suspect. Before that she wrote a lot about the Chechen conflict and about Vladimir Putin as a president. At the time of her death no less than 261 journalists had been killed since the collapse of the Soviet



will never be certain information on the issue but considering the amount of attention it gets, it can be an interesting topic to examine the public opinion. As Moskovskij Komsomolets, the Moscow-based daily newspaper wrote: “For some reason, it is those journalists who are disliked by the authorities who die in this country”.

Having a look at the different cases it can be seen that mostly human rights activists, journalists and politicians are exposed to the threat after expressing some opposition ideas. According to many journalists, the number of these incidents has enormously increased since Vladimir Putin is near to power, however it is hard to know exactly, how many victims did the KGB get in USSR times.

**Galina Starovoitova** (1998): being an opposition Duma deputy who often stood up for democracy, Galina Starovovita was murdered in her apartment in Saint Petersburg.

**Sergei Yushenkov** (2003): the co-chairman of the Liberal Russia political party was shot in Moscow. He was also a leader of group Kovalev Commission. This group tried to prove that Vladimir Putin planted bombs to get support for his attack in Chechnya.

**Yuri Shchekochikhin** (2003): the opposition journalist, member of the Russian Duma and the Kovalev Commission died in mysterious illness after he published an article with the title "Are we Russia or KGB of Soviet Union?" As his friends and relatives told Shchekochikhin complained about rashes and a few days later his organs collapsed one by one. As no autopsy was ordered there is no proof of murder.

**Nikolai Girenko** (2004): the human rights defender was shot in his home in Saint Petersburg. He had significant role in the fight against discrimination and racism as he tried to declare crimes against minorities to be hate crimes.

**Paul Klebnikov** (2004): the Forbes magazine's journalist was shot in Moscow. According to his colleagues at that time he was investigating in a huge money laundering scandal in connection with a Chechen reconstruction fund. During his investigation he found possible link to the Kremlin.

**Anna Politkovskaya** (2006): the 45-year-old writer in her many books openly criticised the Putin regime and expressed personal dislikes against the president, even claiming that he is a dictator. Later, she was shot in her home in Moscow.

**Natalia Estemirova** (2009): the leading human rights activist and journalist was kidnapped in front of her house. Later she was found buried in a roadside gutter. As many experts and the press say, she was one of the most prominent critic of the war in Chechnya.

As it can be seen from the examples above, the reason of these deaths are not evident. They could be committed by non-governmental groups, political extremists, or by someone from the victims' private life. But the fact that they were opposition critics will always give a reason for further thinking as probably the truth will never be known by the public. However, Putin does not usually answer to the accusations concerning him and his responsibility. Dmitry Medvedev is more responsive and has meetings with the press, but it seems that he is not powerful enough to take effective steps to stop this phenomenon.

Physical abuse is also common on journalists who represent not popular opinion. According to Reporters Without Borders, only in 2010 there were at least 58

attacks on them. Because of this some journalists do not get censored, they censor themselves to prevent abuse. To achieve it, they usually do not write about sensitive topics, such as environmental issues, abuses by security forces or the violations of different rights. Only in this year so far (1 March 2014) two journalist got imprisoned according to Glasnost Defence Foundation.

The Sochi Olympics were also influenced by the restrictions of press. David Satter American journalist was refused to get his visa to Russia even if he provided all the needed documents. Before the travel, he often gave critical reports about Russia. A Norwegian TV crew was also detained six times for three days and questioned about its sources. Similar case happened to Czech reporters.

Compared to previous media, internet is still the most reliable tool of getting neutral information. However, in 2012 Putin adopted a law which allowed to block certain websites that contain information or pictures that are harmful for children. The authorized Roskomnadzor blocked 4,640 websites only in its first month after the law came into force. According to several opposition leaders, this law has become a new tool of blocking anti-government sites and opinions. With the improvement of technology, the number of cyber-attacks has also increased.



Alexey Navalny, Anna Vedula and Ilya Yashin at a Moscow rally in 12 June 2013

After the amendments of a 2007 law, authorities also have the right to eliminate certain kinds of content from the internet if they refer to "extremism" on these sites. Bloggers are often victims of this rule, usually opposition politicians or simple citizens who express their negative opinion that can be regarded exaggeration.

The most well-known example of it is the case of Aleksei Navalny, who was a strong candidate for the 2013 Moscow mayor position. In 2012 on his blog he wrote about different allegations concerning government corruption. Previously he used his blog to attack the government, Putin, to call people to protest and to promote his campaign. A little later he was detained and three investigations had been launched against him by the end of the year. In July 2013 he was sentenced to five years in prison. One day later the detention was suspended but on 28 February 2014 he got into trouble once again, when he had to start his house arrest.

Despite the regulation, the internet is still the most significant factor for opinion exchange. Currently, more than one third of Russians use it mainly for entertainment and social purposes, but the number of those who search for information and news is constantly growing. Now the number of people who use the Russian search engine, Yandex, exceeds the number of those who watch news on state television channels. Apart from the everyday use, it can give a chance to Russian journalists to express their opinion by publishing on Facebook whatever they want. The internet can give a new basis for the civil society as now everybody can share their experiences and criticism about the government and the state.

The President's official position has not changed significantly in the recent years. In 2006 he stated that there used to be a huge threat on free press in the 1990s but today there are more than 3,500 television and radio companies and the participation of the state is decreasing. Dmitri Medvedev Prime Minister commented in an interview that more media platforms could solve the problem as it is impossible for one single actor to be present on so many stages at the same time. He also finds it important to improve the access to television and internet, giving everyone better chances for getting the necessary information.



Anna Politkovskaya





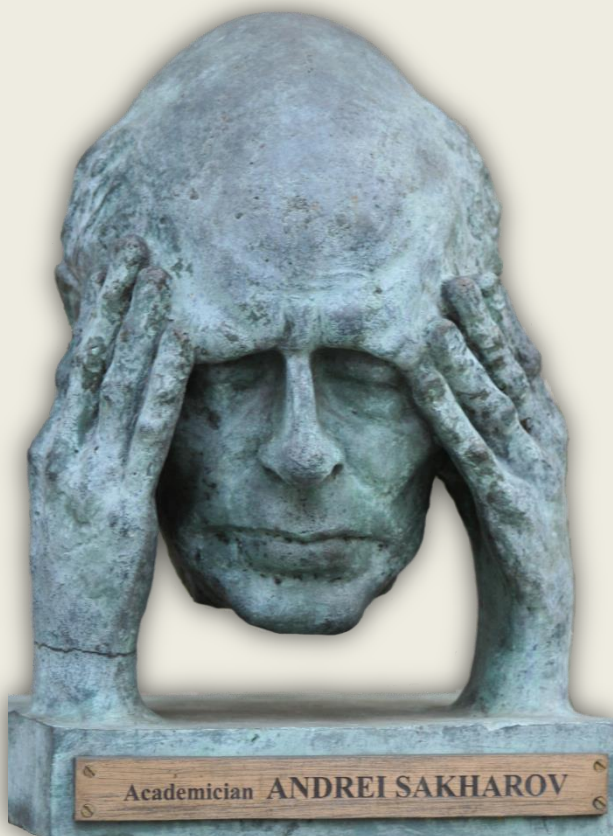
Map of the freedom of press in Russia according to the Glasnost Defense Foundation (Фондом защиты гласности) as of 2006.

### Andrei Dmitrievich Sakharov

(May 21, 1921 – December 14, 1989) He was a Russian nuclear physicist, anti-Soviet dissident and human rights activist. He became renowned as the designer of the Soviet Union's Third Idea, a codename for Soviet development of thermonuclear weapons. Sakharov was an advocate of civil liberties and civil reforms in the Soviet Union. He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1975.

### Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought

Established in 1988 in honour of Russian nuclear scientist and human rights activist Andrei Sakharov, the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought is the highest tribute to human rights endeavours the European Union accords. It is awarded to those who carry the spirit of Soviet dissident Andrei Sakharov. With this in mind, the Parliament selects Laureates who, like Sakharov, dedicate their lives to peaceful struggle for human rights.



## Foreign agent law

The Russian President in July 2012 signed the *Introducing Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation Regarding the Regulation of Activities of Non-commercial Organizations Performing the Function of Foreign Agents*. The so-called “foreign agent law” is a great example of Vladimir Putin’s steps that try to reduce or to eliminate every kind of foreign power from Russia.



Under the new regulation, every non-profit organisation that got foreign funding and was engaged in political activities, was declared a “foreign agent” and had to be officially registered this way. The bill did not have significant opposition, 374 deputies supported, three opposed and only one abstained.

The word “foreign agent” (*Иностранный агент*) is a really strong one in Russian as it can be easily connected with the spies of the cold war- that is still one of the most sensitive topics of the past. According to Amnesty International it was made up because the government wants to stigmatize and discredit all the NGOs that had protected democratic elections and the enforcement of human rights.

To give power to the new rules, the step was followed by a huge inspection campaign to fine or suspend those who missed the registration. Since then, there is a constant control on organisations and they are liable to give every necessary records and documents to the authorities. The raids are often joined by journalists and

TV presenters to give a bigger publicity to the issue.

The law evoked many opinions worldwide, the majority considers it one of the biggest steps of Russia against human rights. During the inspections proceedings were launched against many major organisations, such as the Perm Regional Human Rights Center, the Side by Side LGBT Film Festival, or the Coming Out (also an LGBT group).

Only one year after the entry into force 1,000 NGOs had already been inspected, many of them received fine or warning, while some of them were closed because they refused to be registered as foreign agents.



Graffiti on the building used by the Memorial human rights group.  
It reads: "Foreign agent love USA."

By filing these cases Russia violates its international commitments concerning human rights: the protection of freedom of association and expression. Moreover, according to Human Rights Watch the law’s definition on political activities is so broad that it could include any organised activity relating to public life. This way it can be extended later and more public actors can be “foreign agents”.

**So far (5 February 2014) the following organisations have been filed:**

**I. Civil law suits**

- 1, Anti-Discrimination Center “Memorial”
- 2, LGBT group “Coming Out”
- 3, Women of Don
- 4, Center for Social Policy and Gender Studies

**II. Suspension of activities**

- 1, Association of NGOs in Defence of Voters’ Rights “Golos”
- 2, Regional Public Association in Defense of Democratic Rights and Freedoms “Golos”

**III. Administrative Court Cases**

- 1, Association of NGOs in Defense of Voters’ Rights “Golos”
- 2, Kostroma Center for Support of Public Initiatives
- 3, Anti-Discrimination Center “Memorial”
- 4, “Coming Out”
- 5, “Side by Side” LGBT Film Festival
- 6, Regional Public Association in Defense of Democratic Rights and Freedoms “Golos”
- 7, Center for Civic Analysis and Independent Research / GRANI
- 8, Perm Civic Chamber
- 9, Perm Regional Human Rights Center

**IV. Official Notices of Violations**

- 1, Center for Civic Analysis and Independent Research / GRANI
- 2, Baikal Environmental Wave
- 3, Center for Social Policy and Gender Studies
- 4, Information and Human Rights Center
- 5, Regional Public Association in Defense of Democratic Rights and Freedoms “Golos”
- 6, Human Rights Center “Memorial”
- 7, Women of Don
- 8, Center for Support of Democratic Youth Initiatives / Youth “Memorial”
- 9, Interregional Human Rights Association “AGORA”
- 10, “Panorama” Center
- 11, “Lawyers for Constitutional Rights and Freedoms”
- 12, “Public Verdict” Foundation
- 13, Independent Council of Legal Expertise / NEPS
- 14, Moscow School of Political Studies
- 15, Yaroslavl Regional Hunters’ and Fishermen Society
- 16, Perm Civic Chamber
- 17, Perm Regional Human Rights Center
- 18, Foundation for Social and Legal Assistance “Sphere”
- 19, “Freedom of Information” Foundation

**V. Warnings Not to Violate the Law – other 53 NGOs**

## The homosexual question

ILGA-Europe – the European Region of the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association – in 2013 brought off an evaluation in 49 European countries. Considering all the aspects from social hate to family recognition, according to their results Russia is the hardest place for gay people to live in.

The issue got into international spotlight last year when the Russian government passed amendments for a child protection law, which also included the ban on “the propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations among minors”. The wording clearly refers to gay people and by this it forbids giving information to children under 18 about homosexuality. Those who violate the regulation, can get an almost 30-thousand-dollar fine. As practically the word “propaganda” can mean several things, it is possible for authorities to step up against any gay programme or public gay rights event.

Before the federal measure was taken there have been regional regulations with almost the same content. From all these, the Saint Petersburg legislation is considered to be the direct precedent that had the biggest influence on it. In 2012, the Saint Petersburg government banned “public actions aimed at propagandizing sodomy, lesbianism, bisexuality, and transgenderism among minors”. The law also included stricter punishment for pedophilia. The decision was highly welcomed by the church who claimed that it was an extremely important step to protect young Russians from the bad influence and recommended to extend the scope of it to the whole country.

Western countries and the civil society was not as content with the law. International protests and internet campaigns were launched and different countries and organisations also expressed their disapproval. US State Secretary Hilary Clinton said that Russia openly ignored human rights as they are inalienable from everyone – including homosexuals. Making difference between heterosexuals and



LGBT activist attacked in Saint Petersburg during a demonstration in 2013. Original photo: Roma Yandolin [http://www.flickr.com/photos/madv/9007646435]



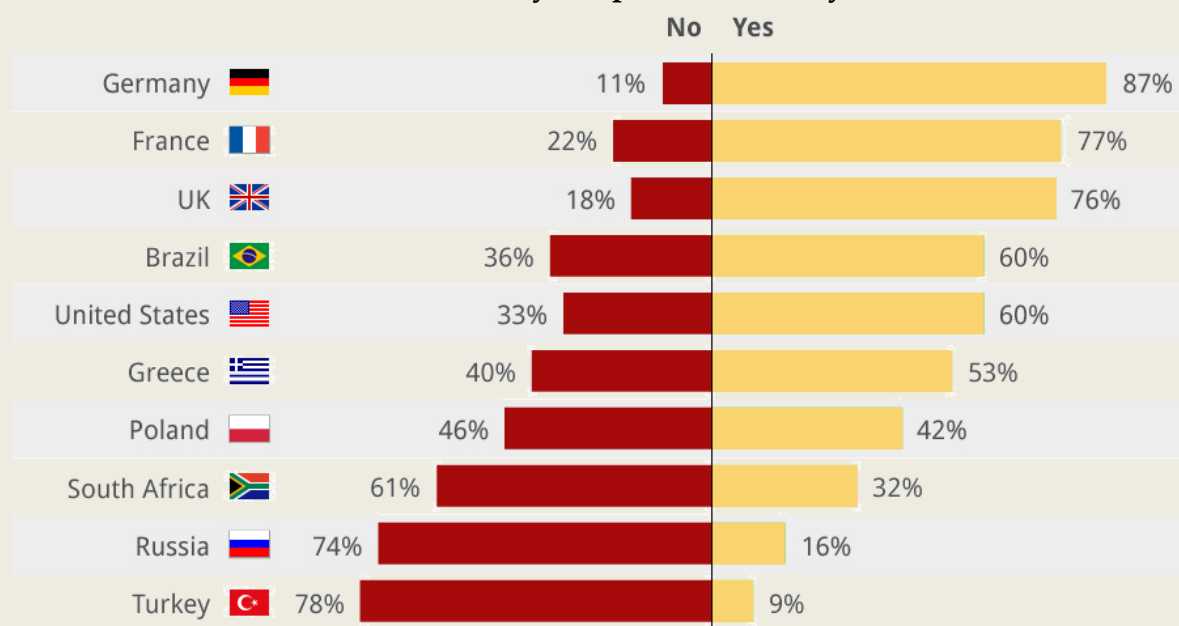
homosexuals is discrimination that is against all democratic values. Russian authorities reacted calmly, claiming that they do not make any difference, every right concerns all the citizens of the country.

While many claim that homophobia is the fault of the Putin government, it is important to note that he was not the one who brought it to Russia. During Soviet times homosexuality was forbidden in the country, the only change came with the 1989 revolution when life for gay people became much easier and was officially decriminalised in 1993. The first law came into force in 1997, when equal treatment was assured for homosexuals and heterosexual offences as well.

This way, the main obstacle of homosexual integration can be found rather in the public attitude. Most Russians do not accept gay people and the whole gay phenomenon. A 2010 poll by Levada Center showed that 74 percent of Russians consider homosexuality a sign of bad moral choices and not something one is born into. These statistics often raise questions about the society and the right decision making: is it a duty for the government to guarantee total freedom for gay people or it should satisfy the public opinion as its power comes from their authorization?

The question will probably never be answered, but because of the public hostility many gay people suffer from discrimination. Last year more than one-

### Should society accept homosexuality?



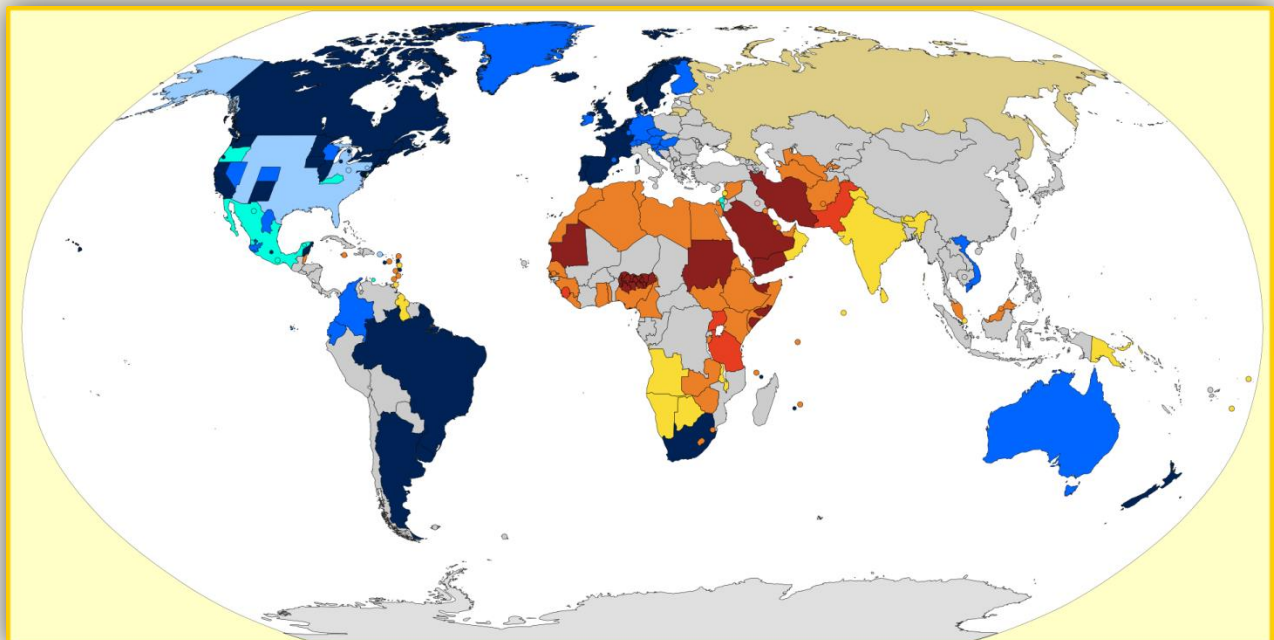
Surveys conducted in Spring 2013. Around 1,000 respondents per country, only yes and no responses taken into account.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, during the past 25 years a huge progress was made. Gay discos, bars, saunas, websites were opened, and even gay travel agencies were launched. But while there is a sufficient legal guarantee for the enforcement of their rights, the practice does not show the same. The acceptance in urban areas is becoming better, but in the rural areas the situation is still similar to the Soviet one.

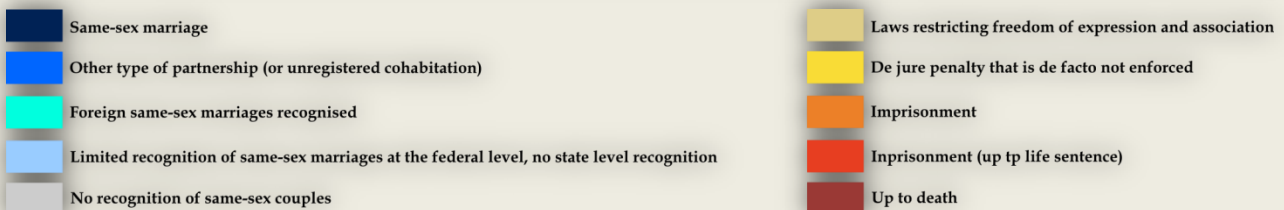
half of Russian gays reported psychological abuse, while 16 percent experienced physical assault and 7 percent were raped. The public approach could be seen last year as well, when Russia's Constitutional Court refused the proposal of Nikolai Alekseeiev. He claimed that the Saint Petersburg "anti-propaganda law" was against the whole law system of Russia and this way it cannot be in effect anymore. But according to the Court, no right was violated and the

regulation serves the interests of children and does not prohibit having a “non-traditional” sexual attitude. Two years earlier Nikolai Alekseev was fined also under this law after protesting at a children’s library with a sign: “There’s no such thing as gay propaganda, you do not become gay, you are born gay”.

propaganda of homosexual love not only to their own citizens, but also to other countries like Russia. It notes as well that in Europe there is a widespread of xenophobia, racism and neo-Nazism. As the report says about LGBT rights and its European Union policies: “*The European Union and its Member States consider, as*



Laws regarding same-sex sexuality



Putin usually does not react to the accusations and the opinion of human rights activists. According to him, in Russia everyone has human rights, regardless to sexual orientation as the law binds each person exactly the same way. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov also noted that contrary to USSR times, nowadays gays can do everything absolutely freely, without any punishment. But in his opinion aggressive propaganda on the majority and on children is simply not acceptable.

Representing these views, a Russian report in January 2014 on the current situation of human rights claimed that the European Union is trying to force an aggressive

*one of their priorities, the dissemination of their neo-liberal values as a universal lifestyle for all other members of the international community. This is particularly evident in their aggressive promotion of the sexual minorities' rights. Attempts have been made to enforce on other countries an alien view of homosexuality and same-sex marriages as a norm of life and some kind of a natural social phenomenon that deserves support at the state level."*

As a reflexion of this policy, in February 2014, as its most current step concerning LGBT rights, Russia banned the adoption of Russian children by same-sex couples and by unmarried citizens of countries where same-sex marriage is legal. With this,

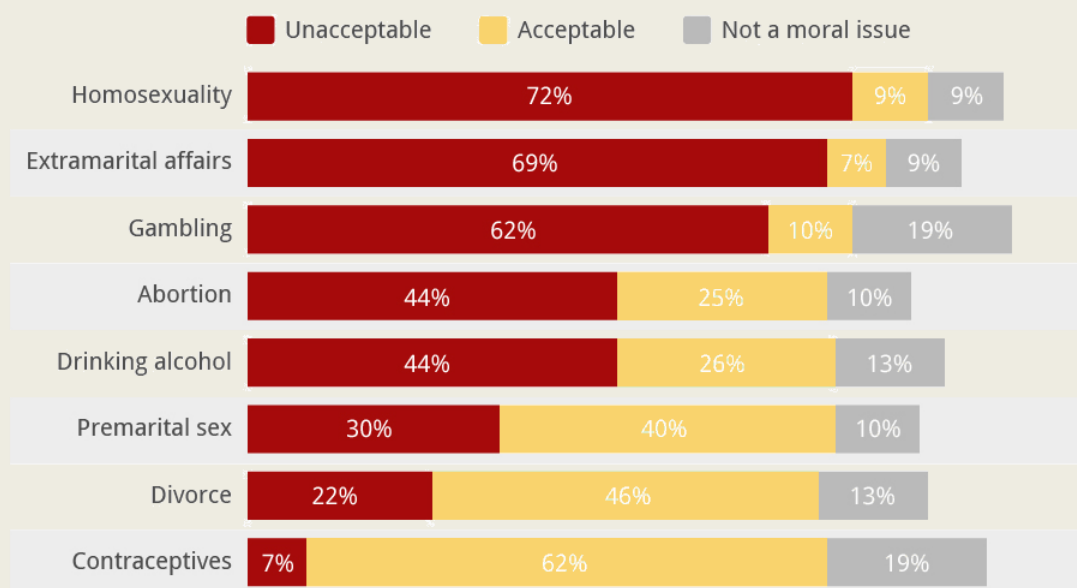
Russia is aiming “to guarantee a full and harmonious development for adopted children”. The law was signed by Dmitriy Medvedev and can be considered also the part of the child-protection legislation of Russia.

The plans for the future are still unclear, but it seems that Putin is not likely to change his gay rights policy. There are rumours about possible HIV-test of every Russian

is probably just some guess. prostitute and homosexual even though it But there are steps that are easy to predict: the President will not legalise gay parades and same-sex marriages neither. Such legislations according to Putin would lead to outbreaks of violence against homosexuals that would be the thing that is really against human rights.

### Russia's moral barometer

Share of acceptance/unacceptance of the following in Russia



A protest organised in the center of Strasbourg, France, on February 14, 2009 calling for the EU to protect the right of LGBT people in Russia

## Greenpeace activists arrested

On 18 September 2013 thirty Greenpeace activists – including two freelance journalists – launched an action against the Russian energy giant Gazprom in Arctic waters. They claimed that drilling in this area is illegal and strongly harmful for the environment so they tried to protest and stop the whole process. But the plan did not go the way they expected and all of them got arrested for more than two months by the Russian authorities.

As Greenpeace told, the whole protest was supposed to be peaceful. They just wanted to get close by their boat – the Arctic Sunrise – to an oil rig called Prirazlomnaya, climb it, and express their disapproval there without any action against the law. At this point, there is a little controversy, as on its Twitter page Arctic Sunrise wrote that “we’ve got 4 boats in the water heading against Gazprom’s Arctic rig. We’re going to try and stop this rig.” So there can be further debates about the background of all the events, whether if it was meant to be just a protest or an action that harms state property.



But no matter what the intentions were, the action was followed by a fast and intense reaction. As soon as inflatables left the Arctic Sunrise and the passengers tried to climb Prirazlomnaya, the nearby Russian Coastguard in balaclavas launched an action with warning shots.

Even after all these events – seeing the guns of the Russian Coastguard – the boat did

not leave. The next day a helicopter landed on Arctic Sunrise and in a commando-style action all the crew members got arrested and brought to Murmansk where they could wait for the decision of the Russian authorities. As it turned out, they got accused by piracy and were supposed to face a juridical procedure. To get a better view on the gravity of the charges, in Russia pirates can get 15 years in prison.

During the action a few of the activists closed themselves into the radio room so they could notify Greenpeace about the events. On the same day Russian state media announced that the boat would be taken to Murmansk where the legal process against the detainees could be continued.

Meanwhile, protests were started in Washington in front of the Russian Embassy and later in thirty other countries, claiming the release of the activists. According to them there was no legal basis for the arrest. Even The Netherlands expressed its disapproval, as the Arctic Sunrise had a Dutch flag on it and they should have been notified about the Russian boarding before any action. Many claim that the Russian step was illegal as they acted on a territory that is not a part of the Russian Federation, but its exclusive economic zone.

While there were intense international debates about the legal situation of the arrest and about the accusations, Vladimir Putin in the end of September on the Third International Arctic Forum said that the activists are “obviously not pirates”. This way the very serious charges of piracy were later transformed to hooliganism. But even if it was something better, hooliganism still can be punished for seven years of prison that clearly did not satisfy the pro-activists.

During weeks a whole international





indignation could be observed. The arrested activists were named the “Arctic 30” and major human rights groups with many countries – like Brazil or the United Kingdom – expressed their disapproval with Russia. On 18 October, more than 100 events were held involving 10 000 people who expressed their solidarity. By 24 October, one million #SaveTheArctic30 letters were sent to Russian embassies all around the world asking for support or amnesty.

Even the European Union gave weight to the international voices while it drew attention not only to the activists, but to their aim. As European commissioner Janez Potočnik, said: “While our immediate preoccupation is the continuing detention and the manifestly disproportionate charges brought against those detained, we should not lose from sight the issue that they were attracting attention to. It is one that we should all take very seriously – how to ensure that economic activities in the Arctic do not endanger the region's fragile environment.”

Later the EU also claimed that even if the activists do not have to face piracy charges,

the accusation of hooliganism is still against the rule of law and in long term can endanger democracy and the freedom of expression.

As the international voices became louder it was important to deal with the issue as soon as possible. Because of this the activists were moved to Saint Petersburg where the negotiations and hearings continued. When the Court announced that it will try to keep in detention the defendants, the international community became active again. On 16 November there were peaceful protests held in 263 cities, 43 countries. The event was named the “Two Months of Injustice”.

### Crew members of Artic 30

**Peter Henry Willcox** (Crew Member, United States of America), **Miguel Hernan Perez Orsi** (Crew Member, Argentina), **Camila Speziale** (Activist, Argentina), **Colin Russell** (Crew Member, Australia), **Ana Paula Alminhana Maciel** (Crew Member, Brazil), **Phil Ball** (Activist, United Kingdom), **Kieron Bryan** (Freelance Videographer, United Kingdom), **Alexandra Harris** (Activist, United Kingdom), **Frank Hewetson** (Activist, United Kingdom), **Anthony Perrett** (Activist, United Kingdom), **Iain Rogers** (Crew Member, United Kingdom), **Alexandre Paul** (Crew Member, Canada), **Paul D Ruzyski** (Crew Member, Canada), **Faiza Oulahsen** (Activist, Netherlands), **Mannes Ubels** (Crew Member, Netherlands), **Anne Mie Roer Jensen** (Crew Member, Denmark), **Sini Saarela** (Activist, Finland), **Francesco Pisanu** (Crew Member, France), **Cristian D'Alessandro** (Crew Member, Italy), **Jonathan Beauchamp** (Crew Member, New Zealand), **David John Haussmann** (Crew Member, New Zealand), **Tomasz Dziemianczuk** (Activist, Poland), **Roman Dolgov** (Activist, Russia), **Denis Sinyakov** (Freelance Photographer, Russia), **Dima Litvinov** (Activist, Sweden), **Marco Weber** (Activist, Switzerland), **Gizem Akhan** (Crew Member, Turkey), **Ruslan Yakushev** (Crew Member, Ukraine), **Andrey Allakhverdov** (Activist, Russia), **Ekaterina Zasp** (Crew Member, Russia)

After weeks of legal fight and demonstrations the result could be seen on 22 November: the International Tribunal for Law of the Sea (ITLOS) ordered Russia to release the 28 activists and the two freelance journalists. As this regulation binds Moscow, it released all of them.

Later Russia dropped all the criminal charges against Greenpeace activists so they do not have to fear the prison anymore. The amnesty was proposed by Vladimir Putin himself to the State Duma that approved it immediately. This amnesty also applied to two members of the feminist punk group Pussy Riot who got arrested in 2012 when they protested in a cathedral in Moscow. It meant the freedom of Russian oligarch, Mikhail Khodorkovski as well, who got into prison ten years ago after Putin condemned him in a public

programme of the Russian state television channel.

The amnesty steps in December 2013 are rarely considered a sign of goodwill. The international reactions strongly harmed the reputation of Putin just two months before the Sochi Olympics while he also had to deal with other human rights accusations.

As Putin said, the Greenpeace-case can be a lesson for everyone that Russia will always take the necessary steps when someone wants to harm its interests and the process of development in the region. He claims that the Greenpeace activists violated several laws: endangered lives and got onto a state property without any permission. Gazprom's Prirazlomnaya platform plays a key role in the development of the Arctic and this should not be interrupted by any organisation or individual.



Vigil for the release of the Arctic 30 in front of the Russian Embassy on the Unter den Linden in Berlin, on 4 November 2013.  
Original photo: Oren Rozen [[http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Arctic\\_30\\_Berlin\\_041113\\_04.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Arctic_30_Berlin_041113_04.jpg)]

# Xenophobia

Russia is the second one in international rankings considering the number of immigrants – which is around 15 million. The first one is the USA with more than 48 million, but there are basic differences between the immigrant policies of the two countries: while the US government takes several steps to integrate the new arrivals, in Russia the xenophobia and the social exclusion are constantly growing.

This phenomenon can be explained by many historical reasons. First of all, immigration is relatively new in Russia; while in Europe and in the European Union it has existed for many decades, Moscow has to face it only since the fall of the USSR. During the Soviet times there were no such things as “ethnic” conflicts as everything was strongly controlled by the police and the state. And clashes between the majority and the minorities would have meant the fall of the principle “friendship of nations”, the whole internationalism was built on. While civil racism did not officially exist, the state often eliminated such groups for political reasons. But after the transformation to Russian Federation, with the weakening of the police power everything has changed.

## Ethnic groups in the Russian Federation

Ethnic Russians:	81 %
Tatars:	3.9 %
Ukrainians:	1.4 %
Bashkirs:	1.2 %
Chuvashs:	1.1 %
Chechens:	1 %
Unidentified:	3.9 %

The topicality of the issue is shown by many recent polls. According to a research of Higher School for Economy, one out of five Russians agree with the statement “Russia is for Russians+, while 43 percent thinks that any measure taken to “protect my people” is something good. As the Levada Center’s survey indicated, the xenophobia reached its peak in 2013. According to the results, approximately 70–80 percent of the citizens can be considered xenophobic. Studies also show that the xenophobia is notably higher in the highly educated part of the population. Such negative attitude in a country where the proportion of non-Slavs is 20 percent can be extremely dangerous.





The main root of the problem can be that Russians tend to treat all immigrants as one community with the same attributes, religion, attitudes, and so on. But the reality could not be further from this view. These communities are not a state within the state. They consist of people from totally different cultural backgrounds and nations: there are Vietnamese, Azerbaijani, Korean, Armenian, Uzbek, and many others. And usually they do not live in closed communities, their place of residence is mainly defined by the location of work. By treating them as one entity, the feeling of individual responsibility can be replaced by the principle of collective guilt- that can mean a huge threat concerning future xenophobia, unequal treatment, crimes and in long term the rule of law.

#### **Immigrants (2010)**

- I. CIS countries (686,993)
  - Ukraine: 93,390
  - Kazakhstan: 28,060
  - Belarus: 27,688
  - Uzbekistan: 131,062
  - Azerbaijan: 67,947
  - Georgia: unknown
  - Armenia: 59,351
  - Kyrgyzstan: 44,611
  - Tajikistan: 87,123
  - Moldova: 33,884
  - Turkmenistan: 5,575

II. Other countries: 106,245

III. Stateless: 178,245

**Total:** 971,483

**Rate in the population:** 0.6%

It can be seen in the statistics that there is a large number of "stateless" immigrants. These people lost their citizenship after the fall of the USSR as they could not register to any new-born state. Thanks to different NGOs, human rights organisations and better regulations of the country, their number has significantly decreased as in 2002 there were 429,891 stateless persons residing in the Russian Federation.

Many events have called national and also international attention to the problem of immigrants in the past years. Two years ago there was a Congolese man stabbed on the metro and a Muslim girl who was beaten by Russian young boys because she did not leave her city as she was told. In October 2013 an ethnic Russian young man was stabbed to death by someone from the Caucasus because of a personal dispute – and it was a turning point. The event was followed by huge riots, claiming that "Russia is for Russians" and "White power" should rule the whole country.

#### **Russia is for Russians:**

The political slogan or doctrine originates from the 19th century. The aim of the movement is to give exclusive rights to ethnic Russians and to expel all others from the country. The slogan is widely used during demonstrations in contemporary Russia.

Of course these are just extreme examples, there are xenophobic atrocities almost every week. Only in 2012, 18 people were recorded to be killed in such incidents, but probably the number is much higher. It is really hard to identify an ethnic conflict and even if it can be done, most people do not report it fearing of the possible legal and personal consequences.

One of last year's most media-covered xenophobic events was the annual beauty pageant, where a half-Tatar woman, Elmira Abdrazakova was named Miss Russia. After the contest, social network sites were flooded with hostile comments, such as she is not "Russian enough" and with this look she should be qualified rather to be Miss Kazakhstan or Uzbekistan. After so many insults, she was forced to shut down all her media accounts. Some even claimed that only Slavic women should be qualified for the title of Miss Russia in the future.

As it can be seen, this rising xenophobia usually concerns immigrants who are non-Slavs. Most of these workers come from "near abroad" – from the Caucasus and



from Central Asia. According to many experts the hate against them can be explained by the stagnation of the Russian economy as Russians usually blame these immigrants for the economic difficulties and for the growing corruption, claiming that they take “their jobs”. The fact that some of them get the worst jobs and work illegally – in order to avoid taxes – makes the dispute even more intense.

As most immigrants come for the better work opportunities, a vast majority of xenophobic atrocities happen in Moscow and in the most urbanised areas. Being the most populated territories in the Russian Federation, in 2013 seven people died and 53 got injured in Moscow, while in St. Petersburg three died and 26 got abused.

Before arriving to Russia, all immigrants must have a card and permits valid for 90 days that must be obtained in the native land or the previous state of residence. As this is a long process and there are cases when someone is not compatible with the regulations, the number of illegal immigrants has risen in the recent years. Currently there are about 4 millions of them only from the post-Soviet states. Attempting to cross the borders illegally can be punished for 10 years ban on entering the country according to a 2012 law.

The actuality of the racism issue is seen not only in the high numbers, but in the political and civil changes. Many “ultra” organisations have occurred in the past years with the common vision of Russia’s Slavic future. As a result, according to Amnesty International, the number of neo-Nazis could reach 85,000 in 2008. The calculations of SOVA Center showed that this might be a smaller group, but the number of active members is still around ten or twenty thousand. Concerning politics, third of Russians admit that they would vote an ultranationalist party in parliamentary elections if they were legal.

Taking advantage of the growing hostility, politicians often use anti-migration rhetoric during electoral campaigns. In 2013 Aleksei

### **RNU: Russian National Unity**

The ultranationalist far right paramilitary organisation was founded by Alexander Barkashov in 1990. It raises its voice for the expulsion of non-Russians and calls the Orthodox Church to play a bigger role in the society. The RNU is unregistered in Russia.

### **Russian All-People Union**

Former nationalist party, founded in 1991 by Sergei Baburin. In 2001 with three other similar organisations it joined the Norodnaya Volya.

### **National Bolshevik Party**

The organisation is banned in Russia and has never been registered. Its political program was based on National Bolshevism, representing the main nationalist political party.

Navalny, a strongly oppositional candidate in one of his speeches for Moscow’s mayor position tried to use the mass emotions. He promised that he will “stop the migration orgy”. The promise was followed by huge ovation and applause, one of the biggest ones during the whole campaign. He could reach 27.4 percent in the elections which fact also shows the huge frustration that comes from the inappropriate problem-management.

Dealing with ethnic violence, Russian authorities often rely on police measures or on tightening migration policy. Frequent police abuses can also discredit people’s trust in the ability of the government in solving the problem. In a 2013 poll Russians were asked: what is all police effort aimed at? Only 23 percent said at “ensuring public security”, while one third said “the interests of the government”. Also one third claimed that they serve only “their own interests”. This can make people to get more involved into the question, looking for their own solutions – in the form of mass protests or xenophobic actions.

Russia can suffer different damages as well if it continues imposing new regulations against internal immigration – especially from the Caucasus. By claiming new documents or even visa, Moscow can give up its plans about the Eurasian Union and joint forces as these countries and regions would not cooperate anymore. Moreover, there would be atrocities against ethnic Russian citizens in these regions and neighbouring countries as well, considering the fact that there is a huge Russian population in these areas. For example 3 million Russians live in Kazakhstan, 1 million in Uzbekistan and 120,000 in Azerbaijan.

Moreover, the Russian population without immigrants would fall dramatically. Currently about 143,700,000 people live in the country and there is a stagnation in the growth. This huge number without immigrants would be no more than 130,000,000,

not providing enough workforce for the growing needs of the economy.

On the other hand, growing racism can give a new wave for separatist movements and fights in different parts of Russia, especially in the North Caucasus. Such events would not only destroy the economy and the political ties, but it would put an end to the country's territorial integrity as well.

Apart from international organisations – such as Amnesty International – there are Russian initiatives as well for the fight against racism and xenophobia. The most important one is the Moscow-based SOVA Center for Information and Analysis that does regular researches on nationalism and racism in post-Soviet Russia. Such organisations can give a better understanding on the problem and in long term Russia can become able to integrate immigrants, creating a better functioning society.

Country	Number of immigrants	Percentage of total number of immigrants in the world	Immigrants as percentage of national population
United States	45,785,090	19.8	14.3
Russia	11,048,064	4.8	7.7
Germany	9,845,244	4.3	11.9
Saudi Arabia	9,060,433	3.9	31.4
United Arab Emirates	7,826,981	3.4	83.7
United Kingdom	7,824,131	3.4	12.4
France	7,439,086	3.2	11.6
Canada	7,284,069	3.1	20.7
Australia	6,468,640	2.8	27.7
Spain	6,466,605	2.8	13.8
Italy	5,721,457	2.5	9.4
India	5,338,486	2.3	0.4
Ukraine	5,151,378	2.2	11.4

## North Caucasus

From the Russian Federation's eight federal district the North Caucasian is the smallest and the most problematic one at the same time. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union the region has seen two major wars: the first (1994–1996) and the second (1999–2009) Chechen war. Even if at the moment there is no state of war, there are constant clashes between the Russian authorities and the North Caucasian minorities that violates the basic human rights of the region's and whole Russia's residents.

The problematic North Caucasus consists of six nominally autonomous republics: Dagestan, Chechnya, Ingushetia, North Ossetia, Kabardino-Balkaria and Karachay-Cherkessia. As it is Russia's most south-western area, the neighbouring countries are Georgia and Azerbaijan. Sochi, where the 2014 Winter Olympic Games were held is also a part of the region.

After the fall of the Soviet Union many ethnic groups found suitable the historical time to create their own nation state, claiming their own territory from the motherland. Chechnya could reach its goal when it got a de facto independence from the then-President Boris Yeltsin. But as the war began with Russia, all the hopes of the region for the independent future gone away in no more than a minute. They realised that even if they ever get independence, that could not happen in the near future.

Many experts consider the conflict an ethnic separatist one, but further explanation is extremely difficult as it is a multicultural region. From all federal districts it is the only one where ethnic Russians do not form a majority by comprising only about 30 percent of inhabitants. Apart from them there are about forty ethnic groups, such as

Abkhazis, Laks, Nakh, Lezgis, Akhvakhs or Tsez people. All in all, the population of the whole region is around ten million.



Administrative divisions of Russian Caucasus

Contrary to the other parts of Russia where most people are Orthodox, the dominant religion in the North Caucasus is Sunni Islam. According to the prevailing local view, the Russian government and the pro-Russia regime of the region are corrupt and incapable of handling the whole country. Because of this the Islamic law should rule the whole region, not separating the state and the religion. As an aim they defined to create an Islamic state that is totally independent from Russia.

These Islamist groups are often associated with the ones who fought in the Chechen wars. Even if there can be certain connections between them, there are basic differences. Currently, the movement recruits members from many different regions and can act more autonomously than before. Also, their number has risen in the past years. According to many analysts during all these years the originally ethno-cultural and ethno-nationalist conflict has transformed into a primarily religious one. This change is mainly due to such leaders as Shamil Basayev or Amir Khattab who now do not fight only against the independence, they also declared some kind of broader jihad.



The current Islamist movement is represented by a major group called Imirat Kavkaz that operates with the leadership of Doku Umarov. He got into the spotlight when about the Winter Olympics he said that it was “satanic dancing on the bones of our ancestors” and called for further actions from those who also agreed to this view. The fact that so much revulsion surrounded even the potential Winter Olympics among locals, raised the international question if it was right to choose Sochi as a venue for the event. But as the Games showed, Russia took all the needed steps to prevent any attack or catastrophe.

practically there are no mobility chances the situation is not likely to change in the near future. Moreover, there are high unemployment rates, especially among the young generation so many of them do not have even the opportunity to start a career. Apart from specific steps – like the protection of the Olympics – there are permanently stationing troops in the region, trying to react quickly to every occurring conflict. There are also special



Areas in Russia with a Muslim majority

Islamist extremism and terrorist attacks are just parts of the problem as there are many factors that cause instability in the region. Still, a very restricted elite rules, excluding the mass from the decision-making process. These elites are often appointed by the Russian government and because of this they lack social trust as people feel that they do not have the power to change anything. Moreover, like in the whole country, the corruption makes the issue even more problematic.

Apart from political problems, the region has to face economic difficulties as well. The wealth gap is extremely huge and as

committees that try to facilitate inter-ethnic communication and cooperation. In spite of all the measures, Russian authorities do not seem to be solving the problem: security operations happen on a regular basis, endangering the life and basic rights of the residents. Most human rights violating cases are reported in connection with disappearance, unlawful detentions, torture, executions and other ill-treatments. These infringements are even more serious as the government rarely brings off profound and impartial investigations. According to Amnesty International's Report in 2013 cases accusing police

officials and authorities rarely resulted in real penalty, most of them were stopped by the courts even in the investigation process. They also write about the fact that not a single case of illegal execution or disappearance was solved even if the authorities were given enough information or evidence by family members.

Those who are not content with the procedures of the Russian courts, often turn to the European Court of Human Rights. There have already been thousands of applications coming from the North Caucasus mainly by family members or friends whose relatives got lost, tortured, killed, or mistreated by federal security units. So far, from the high number of applications the ECHR concluded more than 100 cases against Russia only in May 2009, referring mostly to the European Convention of Human Rights, which in its Article 2 guarantees the right to live and in Article 3 the prohibition of torture.

In spite of the fact that because of the ECHR's decisions Russia has to pay huge

amount of compensations, the punishment does not reach that level of deterrence as it should and as it is supposed to. Russia usually ignores the commitment of bringing off fair and impartial investigation and the task of catching the criminals. This attitude led to the current situation that security forces often ignore the laws and commit illegal actions.

Apart from the juridical difficulties, another very important factor of the problem is terrorism. According to a report of START US National Consortium, between 1 January 1992 and 31 December 2011 1,415 terrorist attacks were recorded that can probably be connected to groups or individuals from the North Caucasus. Most of them – more than 500 – occurred in Chechnya while sometimes big Russian cities like Moscow became the main target. The attacks mostly try to obstruct the police, the military forces and the government. But in many cases innocent civilians become the victims as they can be good basis for further negotiations. From these 1,415 cases 199 targeted private citizens and their property, 12 educational institutes and 6 airports and airlines.



First Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev visits the Islamic University of the Russian Federation in Kazan in 2007

An utmost interesting phenomenon about the suicide bombers is that in the North Caucasus most of them are women. The press named them “black widows” indicating that they might have lost their husband, cousin, brother or children in one of the previous attacks of the authorities. Most of them are not educated at all this is why it is relatively easy for Islamist groups to recruit and to train them. This issue got an international attention for the first time in connection with the 2010 Moscow metro attack but according to experts the issue is exaggerated by the media.



A Russian postage stamp depicting a mosque in Kazan, Tatarstan

Apart from human rights violations, a wide range of different factors make it important to resolve the situation by finding peaceful methods. First of all, the geopolitical advantages of the North Caucasus are unique for Russia. The region has got a huge strategic significance for Russia as it has got connection to the Caspian and the Black Sea, and borders with Georgia and Azerbaijan. Apart from this it is very rich in different natural resources, such as gas, oil and coal. There are also some pipelines crossing the area, providing notable support for the Russian economy.

From the other hand the demographic growth is much faster in the North Caucasus than in Russia, where the tendency has been nothing else but stagnation in the past years. The numbers show the same as in Europe, that the Muslim families have more children. In some decades the region can be proved to be a too small economic territory for the big population and residents from this totally different culture can flood Russia as a cheaper workforce.

But the North Caucasus is important not only for Russia, but for the European Union as well. Because of the Eastern Partnership Project with such countries as Ukraine, Georgia or Azerbaijan, the North Caucasus is closer to Europe than ever. The natural resources – Europe lacks – can be a reason to take responsibility in the peace process, making a new zone for future investments and developments.

Fortunately, the violence in the North Caucasus has declined in the recent years. As Caucasian Knot reports, there were 1,710 victims in 2010 but only 986 in 2013. The statistics still indicate terrible problems but if the good tendencies continue and the counterparts recognize that the current situation can just harms everyone, a mutually beneficial agreement can be negotiated in the future.



A mosque located in the village of Dzhalka, Chechenya  
Original photo: Саид-Эми Кайсаров



## **Terror attacks in Russia**

### **Vladikavkaz bombing (1999)**

In one of the most populous cities of the North Caucasus, Vladikavkaz, 62 people died in a car bombing. The action targeted a crowded market and apart from the high number of deaths many other injured.

### **Moscow theatre hostage crisis (2002)**

41 armed Chechens took into hostage 850 people in a big Moscow theatre, claiming the withdrawal of Russian forces from Chechnya and to stop second Chechen war. The crisis lasted for three days when the Russian authorities pumped into the building an unknown chemical gas. In the action 41 terrorists and 120 hostages died.

### **Beslan school crisis (2004)**

The Beslan attack will probably remain for a long time the bloodiest and most terrible terrorist attack in North Ossetia that could be defined rather as a massacre. On 1 September 2004 Islamic separatist militants occupied a primary school, claiming the independence of Chechnya and the withdrawal of Russian and UN forces. To give a voice to their claim, they took into hostage 1,100 people – including 777 children. After three days of hostage the forces entered the building. In the action more than 300 hostages got killed, many more injured and some disappeared. According to the media, not all of the terrorist got caught.

### **Nevsky express bombing (2009)**

The derailment of Nevsky Express train that carried about 600 passengers from Moscow to Saint Petersburg resulted in the death of 100 people. The attack happened near Bologoye, one of the busiest rail links.

### **Moscow metro attack (2010)**

On 29 March 2010, in the morning rush hour two bombs exploded in the metro station Lubyanka and Park Kultury. In the attack 38 people died and more than 68 injured. Similar events happened before in the Moscow metro – even though with much less victims – in June 1996, January 1998, February 2000, August 2000, February 2004 and August 2004.

### **Domodedovo airport bombing (2011)**

Moscow's busiest airport, Domodedovo, located only 40 kilometres from the city got attacked on 24 January 2011 by a suicide bomber. In the event 35 people got killed and more than 100 injured. The injuries were mostly critical.

# The Sochi Olympics

Almost all the aforementioned human rights issues can be summarized in connection with one event: the Sochi Winter Olympics 2014. Like other Olympics, this one also had a very important role in international life: it brought together people from different countries to do something big together. But even during the preparations it could be seen that many things did not go the way they should have. The event brought to the surface many problems, such as the corruption, the homosexual question, working and resident rights – and all of these in an international context.



First of all, in the history of modern Olympics, this was the most expensive one. Contrary to the originally planned 12 billion dollar budget – that was changed to 20 billion in the meantime – the final sum was more than 51 billion USD. For realising what huge number it is, it is much more than some European country's GDP in 2011– such as Slovenia, Lithuania or Estonia.

In spite of the enormous budget and the long preparation time not everything worked out the way it was supposed to. Some hotels were not ready for guests, a ski jump was incorrectly constructed and there were some technical troubles during the opening ceremony. The explanation for the mistakes is complex but there is one thing common in almost all of them: the corruption.

**Cost:** At least \$50 billion, including infrastructure work in and around Sochi

**Russia's original cost estimate for infrastructure:** \$12 billion

**How much of the cost that is sports-related, not infrastructure:** \$6.4 billion

**Athletes:** About 2,850 from 89 countries – with India being let back into the Games on February 11 – plus 1,650 Paralympians from 45 countries

**Sports:** 15

**Number of events:** 98, of which 12 are new

**Number of security officers deployed for the Games:** 37,000

**Days of competition:** 17, plus the opening ceremony

**Number of countries from which fans have come:** 124

**Number of media staff in Sochi:** 13,477

**Amount of borscht (beet soup) expected to be prepared and served during the Games:** 265,000 liters

**Average price of lunch for one at the Olympic Park:** \$15

**Number of chefs, sous-chefs, cooks, waiters, bartenders and cashiers working the Games:** 7,000

**Average temperature in Sochi in February:** 8.3 Celsius, the warmest ever at the Winter Olympics

**Number of people the Olympic Park holds:** 75,000

**Number of volunteers helping with the Games:** 25,000

**Distance the Olympic torch traveled to the Games:** 40,000 kilometers including into space, over 123 days

**Expected television audience:** 3 billion

Sources: CNN, Sochi Winter Olympic Games Organizing Committee, Russian Interior Ministry, Reuters

Many critics say that the bad quality is due to the fact that a high amount of money was used in bribes or got defragged. Their opinion may get proved as Putin's close friends won a lot on the tenders and constructions. For example, one of his childhood friends, Arkady Rotenberg got 7.4 billion dollars according to Bloomberg internet site. It is also interesting that more money was spent on a reconstruction of a road than on one of NASA's expeditions to the Mars. Apart from the fact of corruption, 51 billion dollars is a huge amount of money in a country where almost 20 percent of the population lives under the poverty line.

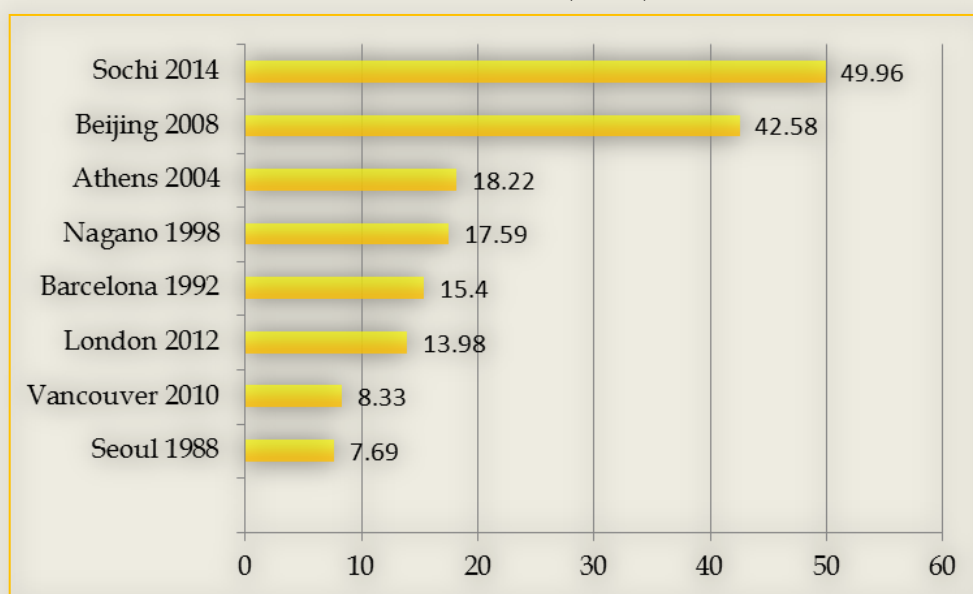
At the same time it must be noted that constructions are always shady businesses in Russia as the government plays significant role in this sector. It is responsible for the permits, inspections, and of course for the long process of paperwork. Because of this even from the beginning there was no doubt that some money will "disappear".

from the Balkan and from post-Soviet Central Asia. With the promise of earning around 4,000 euros for a two-month-long job, thousands of workers came to Sochi.

But after arriving almost all of them had to face exploitation: they did not get the necessary papers, nor the living conditions were adequate. Some even reported that they did not have bathroom at all to use or had to pay to have a shower. There were also problems with the visa as most of them got it only for 30 days and in the remained time had to dodge the police. In the end most of them did not get the promised salary and could not turn to legal steps without contract.

Not only immigrant workers, but even local residents suffered damages during the preparations. As all the sport sites were planned before, people who lived in these areas had to leave their homes and got resettled to the other part of the city. On the whole process the government spent 300 million dollars and built 482 private houses

**Cost in billion (USD)**



But not the corruption was not the only problem during the constructions. The transformation of Sochi, the small resort to a huge Olympic city needed a lot of workforce that Russia recruited mainly

with 518 apartments for those who had to change their location.

Probably the main problem of locals was not the fact of moving but the inappropriate distribution of the compensation. Those



who had more houses in the same area with the same conditions had totally different sums for each. The government responded that it is a really complex procedure to measure the value of a real estate and those who did it are competent enough to make good financial decisions.

During the resettlements, approximately 2,000 families were moved from their homes. Apart from the inadequate compensation many lost their living as their agricultural lands were taken or by moving to another part of the city got too far from that to continue the work. The complaints got so loud that even international organisations raised their voice for the basic rights of Sochi's residents.

Even if these are very serious issues, none of them got such a bright spotlight as the homosexual issue at the Olympics. During the preparations in 2013 when the anti-propaganda law was introduced, the international community stood up as one to express their disapproval.

The main basis for international resistance is the Olympic Charter, which declares that "any form of discrimination with regard to a country or a person on grounds of race, religion, politics, gender or otherwise is in-

compatible with belonging to the Olympic Movement". This way it is quite controversial to organise the Olympics in a country where a law against one of the main principles came into force just a year before the Games.

Human rights and LGBT organisations called athletes for boycott as a sign of demonstration but it did not happen. As many said, they did not want to give up their chances after years of hard work.

Of course nobody gave up that easy, there were other steps taken from almost each country. The Australian bobsleigh team displayed the aforementioned Olympics principle on their sled and used a six-finger salute during the competition to express their support. The USA sent two gay athletes to represent the country at the opening ceremony, while German President Joachim Gauck cancelled his official meeting, explaining his decision with his disapproval. French President François Hollande also did not participate but with no explanation so it cannot be directly connected to the events.

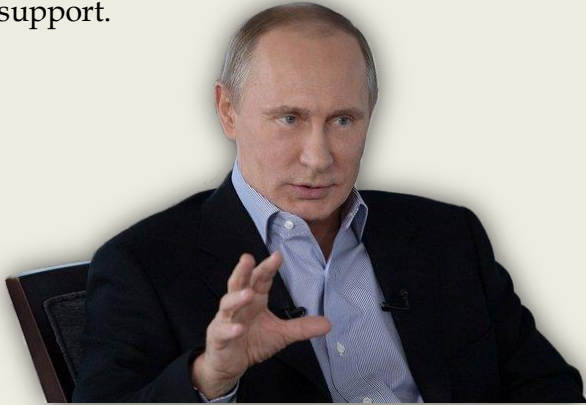
However, some of the international concerns do not seem to be fair as for example the USA does not treat the gay question that differently. In its eight states



Sochi Olympic Rings at Olympic Park. Original photo: Atos International [<http://www.flickr.com/photos/atosorigin/12568057033>]

and many other cities it is illegal to promote homosexuality in schools, that is almost the same as the Russian regulation.

Apart from international disapprovals there were local protests in different Russian cities as well. However, most of them was quickly stopped not only by the police and authorities, but by non-official homophobic gangs as well. As it was explained in connection with the LGBT rights in Russia, the society is basically conservative, and the anti-propaganda law has got 88 percent support.



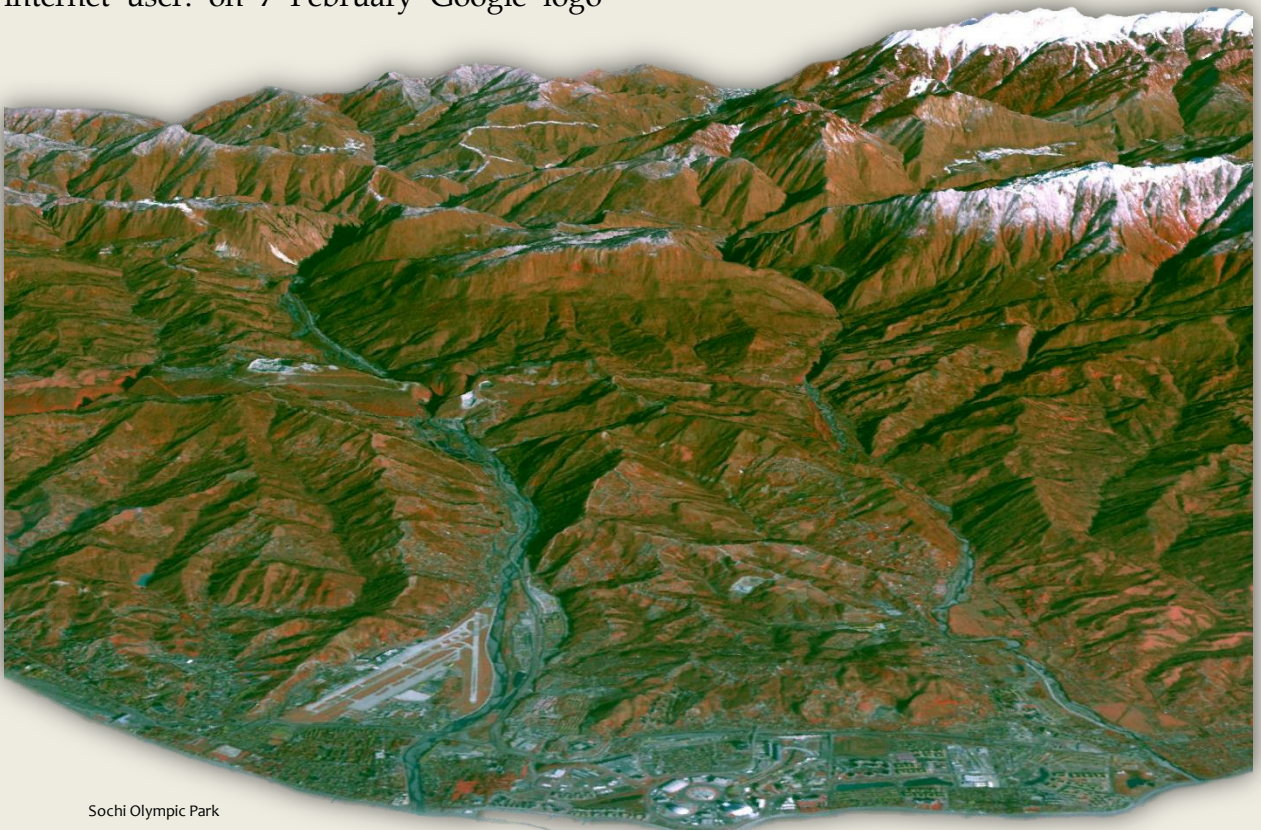
Vladimir Putin's interview about Olympics in Sochi

These protests did not get far but there was a campaign that got to almost every internet user: on 7 February Google logo

presented a rainbow-coloured Olympics sport montage. By clicking on it, users were redirected to the search of "Olympic Charter" and in the first results could find the anti-discrimination principle.

Even more interesting is the fact that the law in connection with the Olympics had internal opposition as well. On the opening ceremony Sochi Olympic Organising Committee President Dmitry Chernysenko in his speech said: "All of yours. Because when we come together in all our diversity, it is the Olympic Games that unite us". Even though it can mean many things, but considering the main atmosphere of the Ceremony, it directly referred to the whole gay propaganda issue around the Games.

In spite of the human rights violations, Sochi and the whole area was developed in many different ways. New hotels, restaurants, sport sites were opened, roads were reconstructed and Sochi had a generally modern character. Maybe in the future it can help to boost the economy of the region, creating better chances for economic and social rise.



Sochi Olympic Park



# 10 facts about Russia's human rights situation

## In the Russian Federation...

... there are about 2 million children in orphanages while other 4 million live on the streets.

... Wikipedia community protested against internet censorship.

... more than 170 ethnic groups live.

... 38% of citizens think that the solution for being gay is medical treatment.

... there were approximately 150 extremist groups were functioning in 2006.

... almost half of the immigrants is not registered.

... Moscow's local parliament banned gay parades for 100 years in 2011 and again in 2012.

... only 1% of the population is Catholic.

... annually about 11,000 detainees die because of the jail circumstances.

... it is illegal now to tell kids that homosexuals even exist.





## For further information

### Amnesty International

<http://www.amnesty.org>



AI is a worldwide movement of people who campaign for human rights. Its appeals on behalf of the victims of human rights violations are based on accurate research and on international law. The organization is independent from all governments and political ideologies. AI demands the release of prisoners of conscience, fair trials for political prisoners, an end to the death penalty, torture, and other cruel treatment, and a stop to extrajudicial executions and “disappearances”.

### Transparency International

<http://www.transparency.org>



Transparency International – as a global civil society organisation – is leading the fight against corruption, brings people together in a powerful worldwide coalition to end the devastating impact of corruption on men, women and children around the world. TI’s mission is to create change towards a world free of corruption.

### Reporters Without Borders

<http://rsf.org>



Reporters Without Borders defends journalists and media assistants imprisoned or persecuted for doing their job and exposes the mistreatment and torture of them in many countries. It fights against censorship and laws that undermine press freedom and gives financial aid each year to 100 or so journalists or media outlets in difficulty (to pay for lawyers, medical care and equipment) as well to the families of imprisoned journalists. Apart from these, the organisation works to improve the safety of journalists, especially those reporting in war zones.

### SOVA Center for Information and Analysis

<http://www.sova-center.ru>



SOVA Center for Information and Analysis is a Moscow-based Russian non-profit organisation founded in October 2002. SOVA Center conducts research and informational work on nationalism and racism, relations between the churches and secular society, and political radicalism. It is also interested in human rights issues, especially government misuse of counter-extremism measures.

## Freedom House

<http://www.freedomhouse.org>



Freedom House is an independent watchdog organization dedicated to the expansion of freedom around the world. It analyses the challenges to freedom; advocates for greater political and civil liberties; and supports frontline activists to defend human rights and promote democratic change. Founded in 1941, Freedom House was the first American organization to champion the advancement of freedom globally.

## Levada Center

<http://www.levada.ru>



Levada Analytical Center (Levada Center) is a Russian non-governmental research organization. The Centre regularly conducts sociological research. Levada Center is one of the largest Russian centres in the field. Staff of the centre brings together experts in the field of sociology, political science, economics, psychology, market research, public opinion polls and organization of data processing.

## Human Rights House Network

<http://humanrightshouse.org>



The Human Rights House Network (HRHN) unites established and emerging Human Rights Houses (HRH). 70 NGOs in 15 countries in Western Balkans, Eastern Europe and South Caucasus, East and Horn of Africa, and Western Europe are currently part of the Network. HRHN's aim is to protect, strengthen and support human rights defenders and their organisations.

## Minority Rights Group International

<http://www.minorityrights.org>



Minority Rights Group International campaigns worldwide with around 130 partners in over 60 countries to ensure that disadvantaged minorities and indigenous peoples, often the poorest of the poor, can make their voices heard.

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