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## The situation of freedom of expression and freedom of assembly in Russia

### Written question No. 687 to the Committee of Ministers

by Ms Kerstin LUNDGREN, Sweden, Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe

The people of Russia should, as in all other member States of the Council of Europe, have the right to freedom of expression and freedom of assembly without fearing a crackdown by any authority. Although it is getting more and more difficult for civil society to act on issues looked upon as being connected to criticism of the authorities.

Recently, a new law was signed in by the president aimed at restricting civil society freedom even more. It is built on the law passed in 2012 to deem organisations as "Foreign agents" if they are in any way connected with someone outside of Russia, even with others within the Council of Europe. The new law brings in the term "undesirable" organisations and allows for the shutting down of any "foreign" or "international NGO" and introduces cash fines, restrictions on movement or jail sentences of up to six years. The law adds to the law on "Foreign agents" a new term vaguely defined and leaving room for broad interpretation. The law was passed even though it was criticised by Russia's human rights commissioner. She said that the lack of court proceedings or clarity over the criteria of what constitutes an "undesirable" organisation may contradict the constitution.

We have seen that the law on "Foreign agents" has sent the authorities to the doorsteps of many organisations such as Soldier Mothers, Memorial, Golos, Amnesty International and others. The new law makes it even more risky for people to make use of their freedom of expression or freedom of assembly. Even being part of or in contact with any organisation dealing with something that may be "seen" by the Authorities as "undesirable" could be very costly. That abuses the basic rights inscribed in the European Convention on Human Rights.

Ms Lundgren,

To ask the Committee of Ministers,

What actions has the Committee of Ministers already taken to ensure that the rights of the Russian people as members of the Council of Europe are not abused by the new Russian law? What are the actions to be taken to ensure that the rights of the Russian people are brought into compliance with the European Convention on Human Rights?

