



Resolution 2541 (2024)¹

The arbitrary detention of Vladimir Kara-Murza and the systematic persecution of anti-war protesters in the Russian Federation and Belarus

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Parliamentary Assembly is appalled by the arbitrary detention of Vladimir Kara-Murza and the systematic persecution of anti-war protesters in the Russian Federation and Belarus.
2. In regard to the Russian Federation, the Assembly recalls that judgments of the European Court of Human Rights concerning events prior to February 2022 already demonstrated a severe repression of the freedoms of speech, assembly and association, and the right to liberty.
3. Beginning in March 2022, the Russian Federation rapidly adopted a series of draconian amendments to the Criminal Code and the Code of Administrative Offences to silence criticism of its illegal, brutal, full-scale war of aggression against Ukraine. These legislative amendments are not consistent with international human rights standards and have effectively criminalised all forms of dissent against the war and against the actions of the Russian military. These actions form a part of Vladimir Putin's systemic war on democracy.
4. One of the first victims of this repression was historian, politician and winner of the 2022 Václav Havel Human Rights Prize, Vladimir Kara-Murza. Mr Kara-Murza was arrested and detained on 11 April 2022. He was subsequently charged with "spreading deliberate false information" about the actions of the Russian military in Ukraine, "participating in the activities of an undesirable organisation" and high treason. On 17 April 2023, Mr Kara-Murza was sentenced to twenty-five years in prison.
5. Mr Kara-Murza narrowly survived two previous poisoning attacks linked to the Russian authorities, which have had lasting negative effects on his health. As a result of his pretrial detention, Mr Kara-Murza's polyneuropathy, caused by these poisoning attacks, has deteriorated significantly. For the last six months, Mr Kara-Murza has been held in complete solitary confinement in a cell, first in a strict-regime prison colony and then in a Siberian "special-regime" prison colony, the harshest grade in the Russian Federation's penitentiary system. Since September 2023 he has not received any medical treatment and his polyneuropathy is slowly deteriorating.
6. There have been countless other examples of politically motivated prosecutions in the Russian Federation against individuals who speak out against the war. The most minor acts of peaceful speech or protest can now incur hefty fines, detention and lengthy prison sentences. There has been a significant rise in the number of political prisoners, as defined by [Resolution 1900 \(2012\)](#) "The definition of political prisoner". In [Resolution 2446 \(2022\)](#) "Reported cases of political prisoners in the Russian Federation", the Assembly stated that there were 478 political prisoners in the Russian Federation. The human rights organisation OVD-Info reports that there are now over 1 000. The organisation reports that almost 20 000 people have been detained for their anti-war stance in the Russian Federation and the occupied territory of Crimea since February 2022.

1. *Assembly debate* on 17 April 2024 (11th sitting) (see [Doc. 15967](#), report of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights, rapporteur: Ms Thórhildur Sunna Ævarsdóttir). *Text adopted by the Assembly* on 17 April 2024 (11th sitting).



7. Meanwhile, the Assembly notes that the anti-war movement in the Russian Federation has not been eradicated. Instead, it has gone underground. Russians who oppose the war have adapted their activities to the current situation so that they can continue some forms of anti-war dissent without exposing themselves to immediate arrest and indefinite imprisonment.
8. The Assembly reiterates that the persecution of individuals with an anti-war stance gives rise to multiple violations of the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5), to which the Russian Federation was still bound until 16 September 2022, and to breaches of other international human rights treaties to which the Russian Federation is party, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.
9. There has similarly been a widespread repression of anti-war protesters in Belarus. Credible reports suggest that, against a backdrop of generalised political repression in the country, more than 1 600 people have been detained for their anti-war stance. Most of these detentions occurred in the immediate aftermath of the full-scale invasion when anti-war protests were brutally dispersed. Subsequently, even the smallest expressions of sentiments against the war have been met with prosecution, often through the application of legislation on “extremism”, the terms of which violate international human rights standards.
10. Many Belarusians have taken a stand through actions such as disseminating information about military movements or infrastructure, damaging railway tracks to prevent movement of military equipment and personnel or sabotaging military installations. These actions have been met with a manifestly disproportionate reaction, through prosecutions under terrorism charges.
11. The Assembly is shocked by the numerous credible reports of torture being inflicted upon individuals with an anti-war stance in Belarus, alongside other repressive measures such as months in punishment cells (without any blankets, clothes, books or amenities), refusal of access to medicine and other forms of ill-treatment. The use of incommunicado detention, whereby political prisoners are completely cut off from the outside world, has become particularly common. This is an incredibly cruel and inhumane practice, punishing not only the prisoner but their loved ones too.
12. The Assembly draws a distinction between, on the one hand, the Governments of the Russian Federation and Belarus and, on the other, the people of these two countries. In this respect, it expresses its solidarity with the many Russians and Belarusians who speak out against the war of aggression, recognising that they do so in a context of severe repression and that they risk serious personal consequences.
13. The Assembly therefore calls on the Russian Federation and Belarus to:
 - 13.1. cease the threats, intimidation and prosecution of individuals who have been targeted due to their anti-war stance, and ensure the immediate release of those who are in detention;
 - 13.2. pending their release, ensure that the conditions of detention of all such prisoners are compliant with international human rights law (including access to adequate medical care and contact with their lawyers, families and others);
 - 13.3. ensure that prisoners are not subjected to torture or ill-treatment, that any such allegations are investigated promptly and effectively and that perpetrators are prosecuted;
 - 13.4. reverse the measures taken against media and civil society organisations that have been subjected to closure, liquidation, website blocking or registration as “foreign agents” or “undesirable organisations” as a result of perceived anti-war activities;
 - 13.5. repeal the laws enacted with the purpose of repressing anti-war sentiment;
 - 13.6. implement relevant recommendations and decisions issued by international organisations of which they are members, such as the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, and human rights treaty bodies which are competent to deal with individual communications against them.
14. Furthermore, the Assembly calls on the Russian Federation to:
 - 14.1. adopt without delay effective general measures to address the structural and systemic problems identified by the European Court of Human Rights and the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe with regard to freedom of assembly, freedom of expression, freedom of association and the right to liberty in the Russian Federation, including by repealing or amending relevant legislation, such as the laws on “foreign agents” and “undesirable organisations” and those designed to censor discussion about the war in Ukraine;

14.2. in accordance with the decision of the Committee of Ministers in the *Navalnyy and Ofitserov* group of cases at its 1492nd (Human Rights) meeting held in March 2024, ensure the release of all prisoners currently detained in the Russian Federation whose detention constitutes an abuse of power and is a means of silencing them and deterring other critics of the regime from protesting or speaking out;

14.3. co-operate with the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), as long as the Russian Federation remains a Party to the European Convention for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (ETS No. 126), thereby allowing for the monitoring of the reported political prisoners' state of health, conditions of detention pending their release and allegations of torture and ill-treatment.

15. The Assembly further recalls that the Russian Federation refuses to pay just satisfaction awarded by the European Court of Human Rights for both individual and interstate cases. The Assembly resolves to explore other possible avenues to secure the payment of such awards, and calls on member and observer States, as well as the European Union, to do the same.

16. Noting the need to provide the Russian and Belarusian anti-war movements with greater recognition and support, the Assembly calls on member and observer States of the Council of Europe to:

16.1. publicly highlight the continuation and ongoing work of the Russian and Belarusian anti-war movements;

16.2. implement programmes of international solidarity with the Russian and Belarusian anti-war movements, including by organising events, conferences and round tables, promoting media coverage and academic research and supporting artistic endeavours;

16.3. explore further steps to provide information to the Russian population by cutting through the Kremlin's information blockade, including by providing:

16.3.1. a welcoming environment for independent Russian news outlets, including their registration as legal entities and the facilitation of their ongoing work;

16.3.2. any necessary financial support to independent Russian news outlets;

16.3.3. facilitation of the entry and stay of independent Russian journalists and social media influencers;

16.3.4. financial and other support to Russian anti-war social media influencers;

16.3.5. free and stable virtual private networks (VPNs) for the Russian population;

16.4. support Russian and Belarusian civil society organisations located abroad in their efforts to legally and financially support anti-war protesters within the Russian Federation and Belarus;

16.5. prevent businesses from refusing to supply goods and services to independent Russian and Belarusian civil society organisations supporting anti-war causes or the defence of human rights, by enforcing relevant national laws and regulations and/or strengthening them as necessary;

16.6. prevent the application of international sanctions to independent Russian and Belarusian civil society organisations supporting anti-war causes or the defence of human rights, including financial and banking sanctions.

17. Alarmed by the dire conditions of imprisonment of Vladimir Kara-Murza and other individuals detained for their anti-war stance, the Assembly calls on:

17.1. member and observer States of the Council of Europe to deploy diplomatic efforts to secure the release of political prisoners in the Russian Federation and Belarus who have opposed the war of aggression against Ukraine, prioritising Vladimir Kara-Murza and others who have serious health conditions;

17.2. member and observer States of the Council of Europe to pursue prisoner exchanges in order to obtain the release of political prisoners in the Russian Federation and Belarus who have opposed the war of aggression against Ukraine, prioritising Vladimir Kara-Murza and others who have serious health conditions (noting in particular the potential role of Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States of America);

17.3. the United States of America to recognise Mr Kara-Murza as a “wrongfully detained person” under the Levinson Act, with a view to intensifying the activities of the Government of the United States to secure Mr Kara-Murza’s release.

18. The Assembly calls on member and observer States of the Council of Europe to intensify their efforts to hold the Russian Federation and Belarus to account at the United Nations, including by:

18.1. promoting the adoption of a resolution of the Human Rights Council and releasing a joint statement calling for the release of anti-war protesters in the Russian Federation and Belarus and an end to the political persecution of anti-war protesters in the Russian Federation and Belarus, and condemning the failure of the Russian Federation and Belarus to implement rulings of international bodies relating to the repression of anti-war protesters, including judgments and decisions of the European Court of Human Rights (in respect of the Russian Federation), the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention and the United Nations treaty bodies;

18.2. calling for a country visit to the Russian Federation and Belarus of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the Special Rapporteurs on the situation of human rights in the Russian Federation and Belarus and other relevant bodies, to visit prisons and meet with anti-war protesters subject to political persecution, prioritising those with serious health conditions, including Vladimir Kara-Murza.

19. Noting the highly precarious situation of Russians and Belarusians with an anti-war stance who are trying to flee their oppressive regimes, and recalling [Resolution 2446 \(2022\)](#) “Reported cases of political prisoners in the Russian Federation” and [Resolution 2499 \(2023\)](#) “Addressing the specific challenges faced by the Belarusians in exile”, the Assembly calls on member and observer States of the Council of Europe to:

19.1. support persons fleeing the Russian Federation and Belarus by facilitating their legal entry and stay, freedom of movement, safety and security, and access to education, culture, financial services and pursuit of economic activities. This should include appropriate measures relating to emergency entry, emergency passports, visas, temporary and long-term residence permits, socio-economic assistance and (where appropriate) refugee status;

19.2. examine the possibility of creating separate international frameworks or networks for those fleeing the Russian Federation and Belarus, to deal with the issues of entry and stay of these persons;

19.3. refuse extradition requests for Belarusian and Russian nationals that could be considered to be politically motivated;

19.4. refrain from deporting to their home countries Russian and Belarusian nationals who have demonstrated an anti-war stance concerning the aggression against Ukraine and who would thus be at genuine risk of political persecution or conscription to the Russian military;

19.5. take measures to address the refusal of the Belarusian authorities to issue passports in their consulates abroad (as well as prepare for the possibility of the Russian Federation doing so), through the recognition of *de facto* statelessness and the issuing of travel documents to allow Belarusian (and if necessary, Russian) individuals at risk of political persecution or conscription to remain in European States after the expiration of their passports;

19.6. take measures to protect Russians and Belarusians who have fled their States from transnational repression carried out by their governments, as highlighted in [Resolution 2509 \(2023\)](#) “Transnational repression as a growing threat to the rule of law and human rights”.

20. The Assembly further calls on member and observer States of the Council of Europe to introduce restrictive measures (in particular, sanctions under their “Magnitsky laws”) against individuals involved in the political persecution of Russians and Belarusians because of their anti-war stance.

21. Noting the harm caused to independent Russian and Belarusian civil society by the application of domestic and international sanctions, the Assembly calls on private businesses:

21.1. to continue to provide goods and services to independent Russian and Belarusian civil society organisations that support anti-war causes or the defence of human rights;

21.2. to refuse to comply with the orders of the Russian and Belarusian Governments to block websites, social media accounts or other online resources of independent Russian and Belarusian civil society organisations that support anti-war causes or the defence of human rights.

22. The Assembly invites the European Court of Human Rights to continue to examine pending and future cases against the Russian Federation in respect of alleged violations of the Convention committed until 16 September 2022, in particular and as a matter of priority those brought by applicants who have been persecuted for their anti-war stance.

23. The Assembly reiterates its call for INTERPOL to be particularly vigilant when dealing with requests for Red Notices from the Russian National Central Bureau that may be politically motivated, taking into account [Resolution 2315 \(2019\)](#) “INTERPOL reform and extradition proceedings: building trust by fighting abuse”.

24. The Assembly finally resolves to continue to exchange views with the Russian and Belarusian political anti-war movements and other opposition forces through its platforms for dialogue with the Russian and Belarusian democratic forces.