

Human rights in Russia: the pressure is on

Human rights in Russia

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USPA NEWS - Deep concern over the pressure on civil society organizations and LGBT rights in Russia just two weeks before the Winter Olympics in Sochi was expressed by many participants at an EP hearing, Wednesday January 23 2014.

Earlier Members discussed communication surveillance in Russia, as part of Parliament's inquiry into the NSA scandal. All communication in Sochi will be "completely transparent to the secret services" [?], journalist Andrei Soldatov cautioned.

Russian surveillance "more effective" but "NSA has a natural advantage" [?]

The Russian approach is more flexible and effective in terms of surveillance because services have direct access to the information without needing to go through operators or legal channels, but "NSA has a natural advantage because everybody uses American software" [?], said Russian journalist Andrei Soldatov, when questioned by Civil Liberties Committee members on the differences between the Russian and US surveillance programmes.

Participating via videoconference, Soldatov said that the Russian System of Operative-Investigative Measures (SORM) has been used to spy on members of the opposition and that there is no parliamentary oversight of the country's security services.

Communications under surveillance at the Sochi Olympics

Rapporteur, British Socialist and Democrat Group MEP Claude Moraes reminded Members that there are concerns around Sochi Olympics safety and potential actions of the Russian secret services.

Soldatov believes that in Sochi "all communication will be completely transparent to the secret services" [?].

Civil society organizations in Russia under pressure

"We are very concerned about with the restrictive laws, including the foreign agents law and the controls performed abruptly by Russian officials on the office of several domestic and foreign NGOs and institutions" [?], stressed Human Rights subcommittee chair, German Green MEP Barbara Lochbihler, during a hearing on the Human Rights situation in Russia.

Under the Foreign Agent Law every no-governmental organisation that receives funds from abroad, have to register in the ministry as "foreign agents" [?]. "That means a spy in Russia, since the word's introduction in the 1930" [?] explained Mr. Kirill Koroteev, Senior lawyer, of the Sakharof laureate Memorial society.

LGBT rights

Human Rights MEPS also discussed the LGBT rights in the country and Michael Cashman (S&D, UK) attacked the new law in Russia forbidding "Propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations" [?]: "It is incredible to suggest that information is propaganda. Information protects. Information informs" [?], he said.

Mr. Wanja Kilder from Russian LGBT organisation Quarteera reminded that "homosexual and transsexual young people in Russia are 10 times as likely to commit suicide." [?] as others their age.

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