



European Parliament

Brussels, 27 September 2023

To President Charles Michel

President Ursula von der Leyen

Minister Fernando Grande-Marlaska Gómez

High Representative / Vice-President Josep Borrell

Dear President of the European Council,

Dear President of the European Commission,

Dear Minister of the Interior of the Spanish Government,

Dear High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Vice President of the European Commission,

Irina Dolinina and Alesya Marokhovskaya are two investigative reporters from the iStories news outlet, one of the most significant independent Russian press organisation and they currently reside in the EU. As reported by an article from the Italian newspaper La Stampa¹, Dolinina and Marokhovskaya have received serious threats via intimidating messages aimed at attacking their commitment to upholding press freedom and fundamental principles. It is likely that, behind these acts, there is the Russian Security Services (FSB) involvement.

The first threat message arrived in March 2023, they then suffered another attack in August 2023, and finally on September 19 when they were supposed to travel to Gothenburg, Sweden, for an international conference for investigative journalists. The organizers of the conference received anonymous messages referring to the booking details of the two reporters (flights, hotels, travel information) and warning the reporters not to go to the conference.

iStories regularly receives intimidations and threats, but these pressures go beyond the mere work dimension and touch on reporters' private life. By interviewing a former employee of one of the European intelligence services, it seems that these intimidation tactics arguably correspond to those used by the Russian security forces (FSB) in order to exert psychological pressure on journalists through the violation of personal data within the European Union.

Irina Dolinina and Alesya Marokhovskaya have been fighting against Putin's regime for years, also suffering retaliation: in September 2021, they were arrested following a demonstration held in Moscow for the free press and, in the same year, their phones were targeted by several attacks.

1

https://www.lastampa.it/esteri/2023/09/20/news/alesya_e_irina_le_due_reporter_russe_di_istories_minacciate_d_a_mesi_dai_servizi_di_mosca_vivono_in_europa_ma_lue_non_le_-13364197/.



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This case becomes of considerable importance since, first of all, more and more Russian journalists and activists abroad, particularly on EU soil, are receiving threats and intimidation, suggesting the start of a renewed repression by Moscow². Secondly, these acts take place on EU soil, violating the security, privacy, and rights enjoyed by these people and calling into question key European principles.

In light of this worrying situation, any EU actions can no longer be postponed. Accordingly, we ask to ensure protection for Russian dissident journalists on the territory of the EU who are targeted by intimidations and threats. Regulatory fragmentation among the 27 has allowed Russia to attack Russian journalists residing in Europe, thus undermining freedom of the press, individual rights, European values, and the principles enshrined in the Geneva Convention.

Firstly, it is crucial to implement a full harmonization of the criteria for accessing refugee status. In the long term, the European Commission's proposal for the Asylum Procedures Directive represents a key step towards ensuring effective protection for Russian dissident journalists. However, there is an urgent need to act now and quickly to ensure immediate special protection for dissident Russian journalists facing threats on EU soil.

Secondly, we ask to guarantee the necessary security measures, hence ensuring the lives of Russian dissident journalists who fight for upholding rule of law and press freedom do not see their lives and their commitment in danger. We cannot allow to leaving dissident journalists alone and we ask the Member States and the European Commission in collaboration with EUROPOL and EUROJUST to implement joint protection tools and ensure effective and effective cooperation between national authorities in order to strengthen the exchange of information and protection programmes.

Yours sincerely,

Pina PICIERNO
Andrius KUBILIUS
Pietro BARTOLO
Tiziana BEGHIN
Brando BENIFEI
Malin BJÖRK
Mercedes BRESSO
Katalin CSEH
Bernard GUETTA

² Galina Timchenko was targeted by spyware attacks - Pegasus - on February 2023 while in Berlin (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2023/09/19/ramifications-spyware-targeting-russian-journalists/>; <https://meduza.io/en/news/2023/09/19/two-russian-investigative-journalists-living-in-europe-worry-they-re-under-surveillance-after-receiving-threats-with-personal-information>); Elena Kostyuchenko received threats and she was alleged poisoned in Germany (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/sep/12/you-may-have-been-poisoned-how-an-independent-russian-journalist-became-a-target>); Maria Chashchilova, resident Riga, targeted by several intimidations (<https://storage.googleapis.com/istories/stories/2023/09/19/pust-ne-spyat-spokoino-vashi-gnidi/index.html>).



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