

# Association of Schools of Political Studies of the Council of Europe

## STRASBOURG ASSOCIATION TO CHALLENGE PUTIN'S ANTI-NGO LAW IN RUSSIAN COURTS

STRASBOURG 07.04.2021: The Strasbourg-based Association of Schools of Political Studies of the Council of Europe (ASPS) has filed a complaint in Moscow's Tverskoy District Court challenging the decision of the Office of Russia's General Prosecutor to categorise the ASPS as an "undesirable organisation" under a Russian law which aims to silence dissenting voices, NGOs and human rights defenders.

This decision is totally arbitrary because the ASPS which promotes human rights, democracy and the rule of law could never be a threat to Russian national security and what's more it will hinder the cooperation of Russia's citizens with the Council of Europe, of which Russia is a member, said the Association's President, Nils Muižnieks.

The consequences of the decision, including prohibition of activities, blocking the ASPS website and Twitter account etc. are unjustified and breach ASPS rights under Article 10 (freedom of expression) and Article 11 (freedom of assembly and association) of the European Convention on Human Rights which the Russian Federation voluntarily pledged to respect when it joined the Council of Europe 25 years ago.

This unprecedented and unacceptable decision is the first time any member state has wilfully tried to stop its citizens from engaging with the Council of Europe since any Russian national involved with the ASPS could be liable to criminal prosecution, the President added.

### NOTES FOR EDITORS

- ◆ The Association of Schools of Political Studies (ASPS) was set up in July 2008 by the Directors of the Schools of Political Studies of the Council of Europe to enable them play an enhanced role in the management of their programme, to strengthen links between the Schools and to promote their activities which are based on Council of Europe values.
- ◆ The first School was established in Moscow in 1992 by the then Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Catherine Lalumière. Other Schools followed in Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Georgia, Greece, Kosovo, Moldova, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Morocco, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Tunisia, Turkey, and Ukraine
- ◆ Nils Muižnieks, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights from 2012 to 2018 and former Latvian Minister for social integration, was elected ASPS President in November 2018.
- ◆ Russia joined the Council of Europe on 28 February 1996 but has had a troubled relationship with the Organisation. Russian parliamentarians boycotted the Council's Parliamentary Assembly until 2019 following the 2014 annexation of Crimea and Russian operations in Ukraine. It also refused to pay its contribution to the Organisation's budget for a number of years. More recently it has defied the European Court of Human Rights with a controversial law allowing the Constitutional Court to disregard rulings of the Strasbourg Court.

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