

URGENT ACTION

COURT RULES WEBSITE SHOULD REMAIN BLOCKED

On 6 May, the Taganskii District Court in Moscow quashed an appeal against the authorities' decision to block the Russian news website Grani.ru. Representatives of the website intend to appeal the decision.

At the court hearing the lawyers representing Grani.ru pointed out that blocking the website is in violation of the Russian Constitution and laws "On media" and "On information, information technologies and protection of the information". For example, the Prosecutor General's Office failed to identify the specific publications available on the website which became the reason for blocking access to the website. Because of this Grani.ru were not given an opportunity to look into what had been deemed unlawful, and therefore potentially delete the offending items, perhaps resulting in the block being lifted. The indiscriminate indefinite blocking of the whole website and not just pages containing purportedly unlawful information means that the entire news resource is out of circulation. Russian legislation provides that this should be done only following a court ruling or decision of the media owner.

Representatives of the Prosecutor General's office continued to support their position stating that "the significant part of the website's content has calls to unauthorised actions". As an example they provided a screenshot of an article about an action in support of Bolotnaya prisoners. They said that while this particular publication did not directly ask people to take part in street actions, it could be interpreted in that way in the context of other publications of Grani.ru. Contrary to Russian legislation, the representatives of the Prosecutor General's office also stated that the website owner must prove that the website does not contain any unlawful information. They did admit, however, that there is no legal mechanism for "unblocking" websites. Grani.ru is going to contest the court's decision and if necessary will do so in the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR).

Please write immediately in Russian or your own language:

- Expressing concern that access to websites in Russia is being blocked in connection to publishing content about peaceful protests and stressing that this constitutes a manifest violation of the right to freedom of expression;
- Urging the Prosecutor General to immediately withdraw the order to block access to Grani.ru and other websites blocked on 13 March 2014;
- Calling on the Russian Duma to repeal the Federal law N 398-FZ, which contravenes Russia's obligations under international human rights law, its Constitution and legislation.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 18 JUNE 2014 TO:

Prosecutor General

Yuriy Yakovlevich Chaika
Prosecutor General's Office
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125993 Moscow GSP- 3
Russian Federation
Fax: +7 495 987 58 41;
+7 495 692 17 25

Salutation: Dear Prosecutor General

Chairman of the State Duma

Sergey Evgenyevich Naryshkin
1 Okhotny Ryad st
103265 Moscow
Russian Federation
Fax: + 7 495 697 42 58

Salutation: Dear Chairman

And copies to:

Head of Roskomnadzor

A.A.Zharov
7 Kitaygorodskiy Proyezd, Bldg. 2,
109074 Moscow
Russian Federation
Fax: +7 495 987 68 01
Email: rsoc_in@rsoc

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the first update of UA 106/14. Further information:
<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR46/032/2014/en>

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INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The Russian news website Grani.ru (<http://grani.ru>) was established in December 2000. The website is a popular source of information, including video reports, about protest activity and politically motivated trials, news about current affairs and opinion pieces by civil society activists and columnists.

In 2013 Grani.ru received two warnings from Roskomnadzor for publishing photos depicting t-shirts with the image of a “Pussy Riot icon” by Russian artist Artem Loskutov from Novosibirsk. Roskomnadzor requested an immediate removal of the photos and threatened the website with closure. Grani.ru attempted to contest the warnings in court, unsuccessfully, and had to abide by Roskomnadzor’s decision when a court in Novosibirsk included “Pussy Riot icons” in the official list of “extremist” materials.

In February and March 2014, Grani.ru covered the events in Ukraine – the “EuroMaydan” protests in Kyiv and the annexation of Crimea by Russia. According to Grani.ru, during this period the number of unique users visiting the website surged to more than 150,000 a day, and its monthly audience reached 1,500,000 people. There were about 5 million views of its YouTube channel.

On 13 March, less than two months after the Federal law N 398-FZ (better known as “Lugovoi’s law”, by the name of its author, MP Andrey Lugovoi) which allows blocking access to websites without court order came into force, the Prosecutor General’s Office issued an order that Grani.ru must be blocked. Several other websites have been blocked too. They include online political magazine *Ezhednevnyi Zhurnal* (“Daily Journal” at ej.ru), news site Kasparov.ru, and the blog by the Russian anti-corruption blogger and opposition activist Alexey Navalny.

Initially, the Prosecutor General’s Office refused to inform Grani.ru of what content was deemed unlawful. It only transpired on 28 April when the Prosecutor General’s Office sent its response to Grani.ru’s appeal to the court. The response stated that Grani.ru’s reports about a spontaneous public protest in Moscow (which was entirely peaceful) against the conviction of the “Bolotnaya protesters” effectively constituted a call to take part in unlawful activities.

After access to the website was blocked on 13 March, its traffic has gone down by a quarter but Grani.ru has managed to save its core audience by circumventing the block through the creation of mirror websites and by other technical means. Grani.ru has also been disseminating information on how to circumvent the block, and is starting a campaign for freedom of information and media freedom.

On 21 and 24 February 2014, the sentence was delivered in the case of several demonstrators (“Bolotnaya prisoners”) who had taken part in a protest march in Moscow on 6 May 2012, on the eve of Vladimir Putin’s inauguration as president for a third term, following disputed elections. The case against them has been politically motivated (see Russia: *Anatomy of injustice: The Bolotnaya square trial*, AI Index: EUR 46/055/2013, 10 December 2013: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR46/055/2013/en>). Hundreds of people were arrested in Moscow on 21 and 24 February 2014 during their spontaneous peaceful protest against the sentence.

Further information on UA: 106/14 Index: EUR 46/0035/2014 Issue Date: 7 May 2014