

URGENT ACTION

WEBSITES BLOCKED FOR WRITING ABOUT PROTEST

On 6 May, Taganskii court in Moscow will consider an appeal against the blocking of the Russian news website Grani.ru. The website was blocked on 13 March following an official request from the Deputy Prosecutor General which stated that Grani.ru published materials calling on people to take part in unauthorized protest actions.

Grani.ru was blocked 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) came into force. According to this law, Roskomnadzor (Federal Service for Supervision in the Sphere of Telecommunication, Information Technologies and Mass Communications), upon receiving an order from the Prosecutor General's Office, can compel, without any court decision, internet service providers to block access to websites with immediate effect. This is done if the Prosecutor General or one of his deputies believe that the website contains calls for unauthorized protest actions or extremist information. Access is only restored after the supposedly unlawful information is deleted, Roskomnadzor has been informed about it and has checked that this is true. Several other websites have been blocked together with Grani.ru. They include online political magazine *Ezhednevnyi Zhurnal* ("Daily Journal" at ej.ru), news site Kaspárov.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 and to be deleted, thus not giving the reasons for blocking the site. Grani.ru appealed the decision in court. The reasons for the blocking transpired only on 28 April when the Prosecutor General's Office sent its response to Grani.ru's appeal to the court. The response stated that its online 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. The Prosecutor General's Office concluded that the content of Grani.ru's publications about unauthorized protests implied that such "actions are an acceptable and necessary form of civic expression and, in essence, are a call to participation in such events". Grani.ru has little hope that their court appeal will be successful after a similar appeal against the blocking of Alexei Navalny's blog, was heard and turned down by the same court on 11 April.

Please write immediately in Russian or your own language:

- Expressing concern that access to websites in Russia is being blocked in connection to reports on 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 and its Constitution.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 12 JUNE 2014 TO:

Prosecutor General of the Russian Federation

Yuriy Yakovlevich Chaika
Prosecutor General's Office
ul. B. Dmitrovka, d.15a
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 of the Russian Federation

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.ru

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.

**AMNESTY
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 of 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 tried 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 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 people a day, and its monthly audience reached 1,500,000 people. There were about 5 million views of its channel on YouTube. 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 and demonstration 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>), and their criminal prosecution has been the focus of several public protests. Hundreds of people were arrested in Moscow on 21 and 24 February 2014 during their spontaneous peaceful protest against the sentence.