



## United States Mission to the OSCE

### **Political Repression in Russia**

As delivered by Deputy Chief of Mission Courtney Austrian  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
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The rise of totalitarianism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century demonstrated how regimes bent on total control over society could in fact methodically wipe out the entire stratum of non-governmental organizations, civic associations, and independent media that in most countries serve as a check on state power. Using the state's organs of repression – the KGB, the Stasi, the Securitate – these regimes sought to criminalize and silence every dissident voice within society. Every single one. *Gleichschaltung* was meant to be complete, total, and uniform. After the end of the Cold War, islands of totalitarianism survived in a few far-flung places like North Korea, and so many dismissed this phenomenon as a relic of the past, an ugly chapter in human history that could be witnessed on a visit to the KGB's former headquarters in Vilnius or Tallinn, where museums now preserve the instruments of torture and repression used by the Soviet police state. Or in the archives of Memorial, the famed Russian NGO and winner of last year's Nobel Peace Prize, which methodically cataloged the horrors of Stalinism and its devastating impact on the peoples of the Soviet Union.

But today Memorial has been deemed a “foreign agent,” and sadly all across the Russian Federation we once again are witnessing a totalizing effort to criminalize those voices – all voices – that deviate from the regime's propaganda machine, what Orwell sardonically called the “Ministry of Truth.” Even Western correspondents are not immune to the Kremlin's all-out attack on independent media. It is in this climate of repression that Kremlin operatives seized *Wall Street Journal* reporter Evan Gershkovich from a restaurant in Yekaterinburg and continue to wrongfully detain him for simply reporting on the facts of what is happening in Russia. The last time something like this happened to a Western correspondent was in the 1980s, when the Soviet Union still pretended to be a superpower. Let us be clear: locking up a journalist for no reason is wrong and a clear violation of Russia's OSCE commitments. The United States will not cease in demanding his immediate release. Journalism is not a crime.

We also join the many global voices calling for the release of Russian opposition politician Vladimir Kara-Murza, who was sentenced to 25 years in prison on April 17 simply for exercising his freedoms of expression and association, as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, OSCE commitments, and Russia's own constitution. Kara-Murza joins the ranks of other prisoners of conscience in Russia's history, such as Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Andrei Sakharov, who was arrested and banished to the closed city of Gorky for refusing to be silenced by the repressive forces of Soviet dictatorship, and the many Helsinki monitoring groups members who were consigned to the gulag for, in the words of the Final Act, “knowing and acting upon their rights.”

More than 550 political prisoners are currently in the Kremlin's custody, including Alexey Navalny, Ilya Yashin, and Alexei Gorinov. Dozens continue to be held in connection with

their accurate reporting on or criticism of the Kremlin's brutal war of aggression against Ukraine, and we call for the immediate release of all of them.

Many Russians have made clear that they oppose the Kremlin's war. We stand in solidarity with all of those who continue to make their voices heard in the face of a government that refuses to respect human rights or fundamental freedoms. We will always stand with the voices of truth against tyranny and repression.

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