

**Mr Vladimir Putin  
The President of the Russian Federation  
23 Ilyinka Street  
Moscow 103132  
Russia**

Brussels, 14 October 2013

**Re: Concerns regarding the defamation campaign against Irina Khrunova, a human rights lawyer**

Your Excellency,

I am writing to you on behalf of the Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe (CCBE), which, through the national Bars and Law Societies of the Member States of the European Union and the European Economic Area, represents more than 1 million European lawyers. In addition to membership from EU bars, it also has observer representatives from a further eleven European countries' bars.

The CCBE, through its Human Rights Committee, places great emphasis on respect for human rights and the rule of law. The CCBE is particularly concerned by the situation of human rights defenders in the world.

The CCBE writes to express its serious concern over the defamatory declarations made against Ms Irina Khrunova who, after raising concerns about the ill-treatment of female prisoners in Penal Colony N14, has been publicly accused of instigating a plot against the prison administration.

Ms Khrunova is a prominent human rights lawyer and a partner of the human rights organisation 'Agora', where she provides legal aid to victims of suspected state abuse. Ms Khrunova is also the lawyer of Ms Nadezhda Tolokonnikova, a member of "Pussy Riot", who is currently serving a two-year sentence in Penal Colony N14.

According to the information that we received, on 17 September Ms Tolokonnikova published an open letter denouncing the poor conditions of detention and the ill-treatment of prisoners in Penal Colony N14. As a consequence, on 23 September 2013, the head of the Penal Colony, Mr Kupriyanov, lodged a complaint against Ms Khrunova 'on the crime of corruption', stating that she had been blackmailing him in order to obtain better conditions of detention for her client.

In addition, on 25 September, a four-member delegation of the Presidential Council for the Development of Civil Society and Human Rights was sent to inspect Penal Colony N14. The delegation was composed of Mr Ilya Shablinsky, a lawyer and professor; Ms Elena Masuk, a prominent journalist; Mr Evgeny Myslovsky, a professor of law and former employee of the General Prosecutor's office; and Ms Maria Kannabikh, Head of the Russian Prison Monitoring Board. The grave violations detected in the prison were confirmed by Mr Shablinsky in an interview given after the inspection, and by Ms Masuk in her report of the visit published on 1 October 2013.

On the other hand, the CCBE has been informed that, on 26 September 2013, Mr Evgeny Myslovsky published an article entitled "Provocateurs and a Puppet" in which he states that Nadejda Tolokonnikova's hunger strike is a plot against the prison administration organised by her lawyers and Agora.

The CCBE has grounds to fear that the defamation campaign against Ms Khrunova and Agora is closely connected to their legitimate activity in the defence of human rights. The CCBE is alarmed by these facts, which indicate a threatening environment for lawyers in Russia

In this context, the CCBE wishes to draw to your Excellency's attention Article 16 of the United Nations Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers (1990), which states that:

*Governments shall ensure that lawyers (a) are able to perform all of their professional functions without intimidation, hindrance, harassment or improper interference; (b) are able to travel and to consult with their clients freely both within their own country and abroad; and (c) shall not suffer, or be threatened with, prosecution or administrative, economic or other sanctions for any action taken in accordance with recognized professional duties, standards and ethics.*

In view of the above, the CCBE respectfully urges your Excellency to take all necessary measures to ensure that lawyers in Russia are able to discharge their function, in all circumstances, without fear of intimidation, harassment or improper interference.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'E. Tsouroulis', written in a cursive style.

EVANGELOS TSOUROULIS  
CCBE President