

Russian Federation: limit of the right to protest

On 22 October, the Russian State Duma accepted amendments to the law on public assembly, after the second and third readings. The changes limit the possibility of organising legal protests in Russia. At the same time, the new mayor of Moscow has for the first time in a long while agreed to two opposition demonstrations being held in the capital. In the context of new legal regulations, this agreement can be seen as a superficial change in the relationship between the government and its opponents.

The amendment states that persons against whom administrative proceedings have been carried out within the last year cannot request that a demonstration be held. This makes it impossible for most opposition leaders to organise protests, as most of them have been charged with public order offences. When planning a protest action, the date and place may be made known only after agreement has been obtained; this allows the local authorities to effectively prohibit the organisation of mass action by dragging out the decision process. In turn, those who participate in the increasingly popular road blockades, as part of protests against the impunity of representatives of the government elite who have caused accidents or danger on the roads, will have to submit their cars' registration data, which will prevent them from remaining anonymous.

These changes show that the government is taking the recently rising potential of the public protests seriously; the series of recent concessions to demonstrators (halting the road works in Khimki, the change of governor in the Kaliningrad oblast, the aforementioned agreement to a demonstration in Moscow) is not a signal of any real change in internal policy. <agaw>