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Policies, Laws and Relations between Europe and Russia in the context of Understanding Human Rights Violations and Economic Suppression

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ABSTRACT

This research paper has closely studied Euro-Russian Relations keeping various dimensions such as policies, laws and diplomatic relations in mind. The paper has started covering the duration of World War II to the current situation. The historical development of this relationship can be traced through long time back. The relations between the both are highly dependable over trade issues as well. Additionally, we have discussed the human rights violation which is performed by both continents on a rapid basis, that Russia has always been the centre of attraction for human rights activists but there are various European countries as well that are well known for their constant violations of human and civil rights.

Keywords: Human Rights, Relations, European Union (EU), Russia, Economic.

I. INTRODUCTION

During the post-world War II period, we see the relations between Russia and the European Union start to develop. The socialist Soviet Union and the recently emerged European communities began to have indirect trade relations during the 1960s with the delivery of milk on Trade, Commercial and Economic Cooperation.³ In 1991, the Soviet Union broke apart, leading to the European communities officially recognising Russia as the successor to the Soviet Union. It was after this that the relations between Russia and the EU began solidifying through partnership and cooperation agreements. In fact, the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement which was signed by European communities and Russia included the provision for the creation of a future free market. After 1993, the European Union was formally formed through the Maastricht and milk products into the USSR through the Regulation of the EU Commission.⁴

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³ Ibid (1)

⁴ Lazareva, M., 2017. *THE EUROPEAN UNION AND RUSSIA: HISTORY OF THE RELATIONSHIP AND COOPERATION PROSPECTS*. [online] Available at: <<https://dfk-online.sze.hu/images/sjj/2014/1/lazareva.pdf>> [Accessed 18 May 2021].

The first treaty which was signed between the European communities and the Soviet Union in 1989 was an Agreement Treaty.

II. HISTORY OF THE RUSSIAN AND EUROPEAN UNION

Many summits and meetings have been held over the last three decades as an attempt to strengthen the relationships, like the Moscow Summit and the London Summit. It is in the 2000s that we see the relations becoming more dynamic. This can be attributed to the fact that Vladimir Putin assumed the Presidency in 2000 and had increasingly authoritarian tendencies. However, some effort was put in by him to forge good relations with the EU. In 2003, a summit in St. Petersburg was held. The biggest outcome of this summit was the implementation of the Euro-Russia Common Spaces. These ‘common spaces’ are the following: Economic issues, including the environment, Freedom, Security & Justice, External Security, and Research & Education, including cultural aspects.⁵ These spaces are known to be the underlying framework for subsequent summits and negotiations.

The political relations were built on pre-existing economic and trade relations. It should be noted that one of the areas in which the EU and the communist bloc agreed to cooperate was democracy and human rights. However, in recent years, we see that energy plays a big role in their relationship. The two had many negotiations over the synchronization of their energy systems. Russia and Ukraine had gotten into a gas dispute in 2009 over overpricing. Due to the EU’s interference in this matter, things turned sour between Russia and the EU and Russia ultimately decided to reduce gas flow to Europe via Ukraine. In fact, Ukraine is still an issue for EU and Russia relations. In a summit held in December 2019, negotiations could still not be reached and as of right now, the two remain in a deadlock.⁶ From this we can understand that in the fast-growing world, partnerships in technological and economical backgrounds are necessary for long term relationships.

III. THE ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION IN HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

The European Union has played a vital role in the upliftment of European nations, especially its member states post-world war. The European Union is an alliance of 27 European nations which act as one economic and political unit.⁷ It is the second-largest economy as a whole, and

⁵ Eeas.europa.eu. 2011. [online] Available at: <https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/russia/docs/2011_eu-russia_leaflet_en.pdf> [Accessed 18 May 2021].

⁶ Russel, M., 2020. *The EU and Russia Locked into confrontation*. [online] Europarl.europa.eu. Available at: <[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2020/652030/EPRS_BRI\(2020\)652030_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2020/652030/EPRS_BRI(2020)652030_EN.pdf)> [Accessed 18 May 2021].

⁷ European Union. 2021. *The EU in brief | European Union*. [online] Available at: <https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/eu-in-brief_en> [Accessed 18 May 2021].

most EU countries have higher per capita GDP than the world's average. Moreover, they are among the top nations on the Human Development Index, putting them in the very high human development category. The member states enjoy the benefits of stability, democracy, security and prosperity, along with stimulus to GDP, increased employment opportunities and wages.⁸ They also enjoy free movement of labour, goods, services, capital and access to 450 million consumers.⁹ It also has a perpetual expansion process under its 'Enlargement Policy' where a country can become its member after complying with the Copenhagen criteria.¹⁰ For more than 50 years since the inception of European Integration, the EU has made continuous efforts in establishing peace, stability, and prosperity throughout Europe. To further support European Integration economically, a single currency, 'euro,' was formed. Its primary motive was to promote free trade and encourage investments by eliminating the risk in nations with a weak currency. The most important was to support the weak economies during any crisis and establish overall stability. However, many economists were critical of the monetary union, arguing that it cannot handle the asymmetric shocks from labor mobility and social security schemes.¹¹

The European Union prioritizes democracy, the rule of law, equality, freedom, human rights, and human dignity as fundamental rights for every individual.¹² Although earlier treaties signed by the EU did not emphasize enough the protection of human rights.¹³ The Lisbon Treaty, signed in December 2007, amplified the role of human rights protection in the European Union's foreign policy efforts. (Article 21(1)).¹⁴ The most vital institutions of the European Union include the European Council, the Council of the European Union, the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Court of Justice. They play an essential role in the human rights policy formations.¹⁵ The European Union emphasizes the protection of human rights making it the primary obligation of member states to protect and promote human rights under international law carrying direct accountability for it.¹⁶ They aim for worldwide peace, social

8 Benefits of EU Membership. 2021. *Benefits of EU Membership*. [online] Available at: <<https://mkik.hu/en/benefits-of-eu-membership>> [Accessed 18 May 2021].

9 Ibid (6)

10 European Neighbourhood Policy And Enlargement Negotiations - European Commission. 2021. *Rule of Law - European Neighbourhood Policy And Enlargement Negotiations - European Commission*. [online] Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/policy/rule-law_en> [Accessed 13 May 2021].

11 Hall, P., 2021. *The Euro Crisis and the Future of European Integration | OpenMind*. [online] OpenMind. Available at: <<https://www.bbvaopenmind.com/en/articles/the-euro-crisis-and-the-future-of-european-integration/>> [Accessed 18 May 2021].

12 Ibid (5)

13 Icelandic Human Rights Centre. 2021. *The Role of the European Union (EU) | Icelandic Human Rights Centre*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.humanrights.is/en/human-rights-education-project/human-rights-concepts-ideas-and-fora/human-rights-actors/the-role-of-the-european-union-eu>> [Accessed 18 May 2021].

14 Ibid (11)

15 Ibid (11)

16 Ibid (11)

inclusion and prevent discrimination and sustainable development, focusing on balanced and stable growth with full employment, environmental protection, and social progress.¹⁷ Thus, exhibiting a firm stance on the socialist ideology they follow. They have continuously aimed at the development and upliftment of not only its member states but also nations outside the European Union, making a substantial impact on human development worldwide as they are the leading humanitarian aid donors, contributing the most to the relief funds.¹⁸

IV. HISTORY OF VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS BY RUSSIA

For the communist society of the Russian Federation, the fight for human rights has been similar to the fight for democracy. We observe many forms of violation of human rights in Russia.

Torture and forms of ill-treatment is a serious issues in various Russian institutions despite it being clearly forbidden in the Constitution of Russia. Chapter 2, Article 21 of the Constitution states, "No one may be subjected to torture, violence or any other harsh or humiliating treatment or punishment. No one may be subjected to medical, scientific or other experiments without his or her free consent."¹⁹ Particularly, many human rights bodies are concerned about the degrading, inhuman treatment in overcrowded detention facilities or prison colonies across Russia.²⁰ Organised crime is prevalent in Russia and killings of various business figures, politicians and important personalities have happened owing to the social unrest. The corruption of state officials has been endemic in the Russian Federation.²¹

A wide network of organised criminals can be found in Moscow and St. Petersburg with connections to everyone from finance to manufacturing.²² There is a lack of effective legal mechanisms to prevent all the corruption. However, there has been a decrease in organised crime in the 2000s than where it was in the 80s or 90s.²³ The more pressing issue is the prevalent corruption which can lead to crime. Russia has violated article 17 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which states that: "Everyone has the right to own property alone as well as in

17 Ibid (5)

18 Jochheim, U., 2020. *Humanitarian aid | Fact Sheets on the European Union | European Parliament*. [online] Europarl.europa.eu. Available at: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/164/humanitarian-aid> [Accessed 13 May 2021].

19 The Constitution of The Russian Federation, n.d. *Chapter 2. Rights and Liberties of Man and Citizen*. Article 21.

20 Amnesty.org. 2006. *RUSSIAN FEDERATION: PRELIMINARY BRIEFING TO THE UN COMMITTEE AGAINST TORTURE*. [online] Available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur46/014/2006/en/> > [Accessed 18 May 2021].

21 Frisby, Tanya. (2007). *The Rise of Organised Crime in Russia: Its Roots and Social Significance*. Europe-Asia Studies. 27-49 page.

22 Ibid (19)

23 Holmes, L., 2008. *Corruption and Organised Crime in Putin's Russia*. [online] Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20451570> > [Accessed 18 May 2021].

association with others.

No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property.”²⁴ High profile business-related abuse of human rights is seen in the Russian Federation. As mentioned before due to the rampant corruption, cases of expropriation of assets are seen. Another issue is Chechnya, which is the constituent Republic of Russia where human rights have been under attack. There have been reports of Russian forces violating a number of international human rights and humanitarian laws.²⁵ The situation was pretty and dire, bringing international attention to it, while the Russian authorities are turning a blind eye towards the inhumane behaviour. As of recent, there have been crimes against gay men who are facing abduction style detention, enforced disappearances, torture and deaths in Chechnya by the hands of people holding anti-gay social attitudes.²⁶ Horrific incidents have been reported such as metal rod bearings and electric shocks.²⁷ A very pertinent issue of violation of human rights in Russia is the freedom of speech or media freedom. According to William Dunkerley, the Russian government enacts laws that sabotage Russian press freedom, politicians and business tycoons pull the Russian media strings from behind the scenes, and henchmen plant bogus news stories to deceive the public.²⁸ Not only have there been attacks on journalists but recently, internet censorship and surveillance in the political and social domains has been on the rise.

V. HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INDICES: RUSSIA VS EUROPE

The kinds of policies followed by the two economies can be analysed through the human development indices. These can be used to see how much of a contrast we see between human development in Russia and the European Union as it is related to how different human rights are handled in the countries.

HDI or the Human Development Index measuring overall health, knowledge and standard of living in a country tells us that in 2019 (according to the 2020 report), Russia had an HDI of

²⁴ Nations, U., n.d. *Universal Declaration of Human Rights | United Nations*. [online] United Nations. Available at: <<https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>> [Accessed 18 May 2021].

²⁵ Amnesty International. n.d. *Chechnya – human rights under attack*. [online] Available at: <<https://web.archive.org/web/20080219125042/http://www.amnesty.org/russia/chechnya.html>> [Accessed 18 May 2021].

²⁶ Knight, K., 2017. *Gay men in Chechnya are being tortured and killed. More will suffer if we don't act*. [online] the Guardian. Available at: <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/apr/13/gay-men-targeted-chechnya-russia>> [Accessed 18 May 2021].

²⁷ Vasilyeva, N. and Roslyakov, A., 2017. *Gay men reveal details of torture and beatings 'from government' in Chechnya*. [online] The Independent. Available at: <<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/gay-chechens-beating-electro-shock-torture-detain-camps-chechnya-russia-thugs-homophobia-human-rights-a7713391.html>> [Accessed 18 May 2021].

²⁸ Dunkerley, W., 2011. *Omnicom Press - Medvedev's Media Affairs*. [online] Omnicompress.com. Available at: <<https://www.omnicompress.com/mma/>> [Accessed 18 May 2021].

0.824.²⁹ It has steadily improved over the years, especially in years of schooling post-1995. As for the European Union, its member countries all have higher HDI than Russia except for Bulgaria (0.816).³⁰ Countries with the top HDI are Ireland (0.955), Germany (0.947) and Sweden (0.945).³¹ GDI or the Gender Development Index tells us the existing gender gaps in human development taking in the same parameters as HDI. For Russia, it is quite high at 1.007 as the female HDI is 0.823 and male is 0.817.³² Other European Union countries also have high GDIs with Ireland, Germany and Sweden again being the highest. Additionally, when we look at the GII or Gender Inequality Index, it gives us a more clear picture of the divide as it reflects gender-based disadvantage in three dimensions: reproductive health, empowerment and the labour market. We see that Russia has the rank 50 while European countries have higher ranks especially Denmark, Sweden and Netherlands ranking 2,3 and 4 respectively.³³ IHDI is the Inequality-adjusted Human Development Index and it adjusts for the inequality that might be included in HDI in the distribution of each dimension across the population.

For Russia, after the inequality adjustment, the value of IHDI falls from 0.824 to 0.74 while Ireland, Sweden and Germany still remain high in the ranks.³⁴ The core reason for the increasing inequality in Russia can be attributed to the socioeconomic stratification after the fall of the Soviet Union.³⁵ WPFI is the World Press Freedom Index which is published by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) ranks countries based on the level of freedom journalists have. It doesn't tell us about the quality of journalism but rather the independence of the media. This is especially important when it comes to Russia as we have already seen that the federation has a concerning amount of censorship of the press. According to the 2020 report, Russia ranks 150th out of a total of 180 countries.³⁶ On the other hand, Finland, Sweden and Denmark have high positions.³⁷ The RSF has stated that Europe is the most favourable continent for press freedom but has lately been seeing violence against journalists.³⁸ The score is calculated based on abuse

²⁹ United Nations Development Programme, 2020. *The next frontier: Human Development and the Anthropocene*. Human Development Report. [online] New York, pp.343-367. Available at: <https://report.hdr.undp.org/> [Accessed 18 May 2021].

³⁰ Ibid (27)

³¹ Ibid (27)

³² Ibid (27)

³³ Ibid (27)

³⁴ Ibid (27)

³⁵ Philipp, J., 2020. *The Rise of Income Inequality in Russia | The Borgen Project*. [online] The Borgen Project. Available at: <https://borgenproject.org/income-inequality-in-russia/#:~:text=Recently%2C%20income%20inequality%20in%20Russia,to%2014%20percent%20of%20income> > [Accessed 18 May 2021].

³⁶ RSF. 2021. *2020 World Press Freedom Index | Reporters Without Borders*. [online] Available at: <https://rsf.org/en/ranking> > [Accessed 18 May 2021].

³⁷ Ibid (34)

³⁸ RSF. 2021. *2020 World Press Freedom Index | Reporters Without Borders*. [online] Available at: <https://rsf.org/en/rsf-2021-index-eu-struggles-defend-values-home> > [Accessed 18 May 2021].

score, underlying situation score and global score.³⁹

VI. IMPACT OF POLICIES ON HUMAN AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN EUROPEAN UNION AND RUSSIA

Since its inception, the European Union has contributed to the growth and prosperity of human development significantly. Its achievements include building the single biggest market globally, offering 500 million people the freedom to study, live, work anywhere, and also abolished the death penalty to enhance human rights development.⁴⁰ For its constant efforts in advancement in peace, reconciliation, democracy, and human rights, the European Union was awarded the Nobel Peace prize in 2012.⁴¹ However, the Eurozone debt crisis at the beginning of 2009 exposed the flaws of the improper regulations in the EU's administration, including the Eurozone's lack of decision-making power, minimal regulation, and weak fiscal structure. The crisis highlights the importance of a monetary union with excellent fiscal policy support.⁴² The crisis impacted the Southern economies the most, with Greece, Portugal, Italy, Ireland, and Spain being the weakest.⁴³

In November 2008, the EU came out with the European Economic Recovery Plan to counter the faltering economies of its member states, giving bailout packages to come out of the crisis and prevent bankruptcy.⁴⁴ The period also observed reduced confidence in the authorities leading to a collapsing government in 17 countries of the Eurozone.⁴⁵ The Eurozone crisis has spotlighted the widening gap between the Northern and Southern European Union nations. The severe austerity measures imposed on the Southern European economies have hampered economic growth, only resulting in increased unemployment and poverty. Recent data shows that well-educated youth is leaving their country to find employment abroad, leading to a massive 'brain drain' and a major issue of emigration.⁴⁶ The EU's restricting monetary policy

³⁹ Ibid (34)

⁴⁰ Parker, C., 2017. *6 things the EU has achieved, 60 years on from its founding treaty*. [online] World Economic Forum. Available at: <<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/03/6-things-the-eu-has-achieved-60-years-on-from-its-founding-treaty-7609e02c-01bb-4763-8cbf-716d2287a647/>> [Accessed 18 May 2021].

⁴¹ Ibid (5)

⁴² Clark, S., 2012. *How Will the Crisis in the European Single Currency Change the Direction of Integration Europe?*. [online] Inquiries Journal. Available at: <<http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/articles/1064/how-will-the-crisis-in-the-european-single-currency-change-the-direction-of-intergration-europe>> [Accessed 18 May 2021].

⁴³ Gabel, M., n.d. *European Union - The euro-zone debt crisis*. [online] Encyclopedia Britannica. Available at: <<https://www.britannica.com/topic/European-Union/The-euro-zone-debt-crisis>> [Accessed 18 May 2021].

⁴⁴ Ibid (41)

⁴⁵ Ibid (41)

⁴⁶ Europeanceo.com. n.d. *Southern Europe continues to struggle in the wake of the sovereign debt crisis*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.europeanceo.com/finance/southern-europe-continues-to-struggle-in-the-wake-of-the-sovereign-debt-crisis/>> [Accessed 18 May 2021].

has only trapped the Southern European economies. It does not give them the power to devalue their currencies during a financial crisis to protect their economies. Mismanagement by the EU in handling the Eurozone crisis reduced the public's trust, leading to Euroscepticism. The highly controversial 'Brexit' also has been the output of Euroscepticism, including other factors like national identity and sovereignty, economic insecurity, rise in immigration, and its effect on the lower working strata of the nation.⁴⁷

The Russian Federation is considered a developing nation with a transitioning economy.⁴⁸ Even though Russia holds a place in the top 15% of most developed countries in the world evaluated by education, it is ranked at least 15% because of its inability to contribute human capital to the nation's wealth successfully.⁴⁹ Although there is a positive trend in Russian HDI components, the country still lacks quality teachers and healthcare professionals. Inequalities in HDI dimensions induced an accounted loss of 10.2% exhibited by the IHDI of the nation.⁵⁰ According to the 2014 Credit Suisse analysis, 'top 10% of the people control the 85% wealth of Russia', highlighting the extreme inequality in the distribution of income.⁵¹ The analysis also exhibited that 83% of the Russian population holds less than \$10,000 in personal wealth.⁵² The report also highlighted that 90% of entrepreneurs had experienced corruption.⁵³ In 2020, Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index ranked Russia 129th out of 180 countries, notably the lowest-rated European nation.⁵⁴ In March 2014, the Russian Armed Forces and pro-Russian separatists took over Crimea, an autonomous republic in Ukraine, causing a worldwide controversy.⁵⁵ On 11 April 2014, the annexation was ratified by Russia; however, the Ukrainian government and other international bodies did not accept the annexation.⁵⁶ Russia was also actively involved in the Syrian Civil War when the Russian

⁴⁷ Malik, S. (2018). *Post-Brexit Scenario: The European Union under Threat*. *Strategic Studies*, 38(4), 90-109. [online] Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48544279?read-now=1&seq=19#metadata_info_tab_contents> [Accessed 18 May 2021].

⁴⁸ Worldpopulationreview.com. n.d. *Developed Countries List*. [online] Available at: <<https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/developed-countries>> [Accessed 18 May 2021].

⁴⁹ Kurgansky, S., 2019. *Human Capital and Human Development in Russia*. [online] SSRN. Available at: <<https://ssrn.com/abstract=3373423>> [Accessed 18 May 2021].

⁵⁰ Hdr.undp.org. n.d. [online] Available at: <http://hdr.undp.org/sites/all/themes/hdr_theme/country-notes/RUS.pdf> [Accessed 18 May 2021].

⁵¹ Breslow, J., 2015. *Inequality and the Putin Economy: Inside the Numbers*. [online] FRONTLINE. Available at: <<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/inequality-and-the-putin-economy-inside-the-numbers/>> [Accessed 18 May 2021].

⁵² Ibid (49)

⁵³ Ibid (49)

⁵⁴ Transparency.org. n.d. *Corruption Perceptions Index 2020 for Russia*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2020/index/rus>> [Accessed 18 May 2021].

⁵⁵ Britannica. 2020. *Vladimir Putin | Biography, KGB, Political Career, & Facts*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Vladimir-Putin>> [Accessed 18 May 2021].

⁵⁶ Ibid (53)

aircraft targeted the cities near Homs and Hama.⁵⁷ Therefore, Putin's administration has been resisted by human rights support groups. The government conforms to economic liberalism and fascist governance with extensive corruption.

VII. THE CURRENT SITUATION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION AND RUSSIA

The existence of the European Union was precarious as many assumed 'European Disintegration' after Brexit, provoking more countries to leave the European Union. Meanwhile, Russia tried to benefit from the Brexit situation by increasing its influence on the eastern periphery of Europe.⁵⁸ Contrary to expectations, Brexit has been a blessing in disguise for the European Union.⁵⁹ To counter Russia, the EU members decided to include the eastern European nations into the Eurozone.⁶⁰ Besides, the political and economic instability in the UK post-Brexit has only paralyzed the intention of other countries from exiting the EU.⁶¹ Therefore, resulting in a more robust European Integration than before.

Due to the pandemic, Europe experienced widespread public health and socioeconomic crises. It led to the economic recession, giving rise to unemployment, homelessness, food demand, racism, and hate crimes. To mitigate the socioeconomic impact of the crisis, various decisions were adopted by the European Union. In April and May 2020, the European Commission approved an emergency fund 'Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD),' to distribute food, clothing, and sanitary items.⁶² In September 2020, a fund of 17 billion USD was created by the European Commission named European Social Fund (ESF), lending it to states to protect employment.⁶³ The Election Commission also announced an action plan to fight racism and discrimination triggered by the Covid-19 crisis.⁶⁴ In November 2020, the European Union approved its first-ever five-year LGBTIQ Equality Strategy to protect the rights and freedom of gender minorities.⁶⁵

VIII. CONCLUSION

In September 2019, the interference of Putin's administration in the regional election by eliminating the opposition led to massive backlash through mass protests for democracy,

⁵⁷ Ibid (53)

⁵⁸ Ibid (45)

⁵⁹ Ibid (45)

⁶⁰ Ibid (45)

⁶¹ Ibid (45)

⁶² Human Rights Watch. 2020. *World Report 2021: Rights Trends in European Union*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/european-union>> [Accessed 18 May 2021].

⁶³ Ibid (60)

⁶⁴ Ibid (60)

⁶⁵ Ibid (60)

unfortunately resulting in a large-scale arrest and police brutality.⁶⁶ On 3 July 2020, the president gave the order to amend the constitution by scrapping the term limits for the presidency giving himself two additional six-year terms, coming to effect on 4 July.⁶⁷ Following the former, Putin also signed a bill that gave lifetime prosecutorial immunity to Russian ex-presidents.⁶⁸ In August 2020, a Russian lawyer and political opposition leader Alexei Navalny was poisoned by Putin's administration to crush and warn the political opposition.⁶⁹ Navalny was later detained and imprisoned by the court of Moscow in a suspended embezzlement case in February 2020.⁷⁰ The incident caught worldwide media attention, leading to two UN rights experts issuing an 'open call' investigation and further deterioration of its relationship with the European Union.⁷¹

The Covid-19 crisis exacerbated the restrictive policy of Putin's administration, increasing the violation of human rights by the government. There was a lack of transparency and regularity in publishing data related to the Coronavirus outbreak and associated cases and deaths.⁷² The pandemic period observed more detention and wrongful prosecution of peaceful protestors, human rights defenders, journalists and critics of the government.⁷³ The country also experienced a rise in discrimination, hate crimes, and hate-motivated vandalism, including the unreasonable mass detention of migrants.⁷⁴ There was a spike in gender-based violence and suspension of legal abortion, ignoring the time-sensitivity of the medical procedure.⁷⁵ The government maintained its homophobic discrimination by making same-sex marriage illegal.⁷⁶ It tightened its control over online content and increased censorship, violating the right to privacy and freedom of expression.⁷⁷ As the country is facing stagnation since 2013, the

⁶⁶ The Guardian. 2019. *The Observer view on Putin's ongoing corruption of democracy | Observer editorial*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/sep/08/the-observer-view-on-russia-subversion-of-democracy>> [Accessed 18 May 2021].

⁶⁷ Aljazeera.com. 2020. *Putin orders constitution changes allowing him to rule until 2036*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.aljazeera.com/amp/news/2020/07/03/putin-orders-constitution-changes-allowing-him-to-rule-until-2036/>> [Accessed 18 May 2021].

⁶⁸ Aljazeera.com. 2020. *Russia's Putin signs bill giving ex-presidents lifetime immunity*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/12/22/russias-putin-signs-bill-giving-presidents-lifetime-immunity>> [Accessed 18 May 2021].

⁶⁹ UN News. 2021. *Russia responsible for Navalny poisoning, rights experts say*. [online] Available at: <<https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/03/1086012>> [Accessed 18 May 2021].

⁷⁰ UN News. 2021. *Russia: UN rights office 'deeply dismayed' by Navalny sentencing*. [online] Available at: <<https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/02/1083682>> [Accessed 18 May 2021].

⁷¹ Ibid (67)

⁷² Human Rights Watch. 2021. *World Report 2021: Rights Trends in Russia*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/russia#b1d3bb>> [Accessed 18 May 2021].

⁷³ Ibid (70)

⁷⁴ Ibid (70)

⁷⁵ Ibid (70)

⁷⁶ Ibid (70)

⁷⁷ Ibid (70)

continued practice of violating human rights and suppressing the opposition's criticism will only harm the nation's human development, thus hampering its economic growth.
