E&E's response to due-out from A/AID's 5/30 Meeting with Russian Democracy Advocates on how USAID can help on tech sanctions that have been limiting the reach of civil society and independent media within Russia (see SOC below).

Russian civil society and independent media continue to face significant challenges in maintaining a presence inside Russia and reaching their target audiences. This has been exacerbated by the decisions of private sector tech companies to either stop operating inside Russia or deny service to Russian passport holders.

While the intent of these policies is sound, denial of service policies do not generally impact supporters of Putin's regime, but significantly handicap those who oppose the war. All of Putin's enablers have acquired foreign assets, accounts, and citizenships which they can use to circumvent denials of service. It is the most politically active and vocal voices opposed to Putin and his war that are now cut off from access to the global information space by this denial of service.

It is critical for private companies to continue to sanction the Russian state and citizens involved in the Russian aggression in Ukraine. However, it is also essential to US national security interests that privately held US companies revise their approach to ensure that denial of service policies do what they are designed to do and not the opposite. Exceptions should be made (as they are in official US sanctions) for **verified** activists, journalists, CSOs, media, and others campaigning against the war.

Key Recommendation: Tech companies implement an inclusion list for verified actors. These lists could be private and managed in a decentralized manner through trusted third-party implementers, which are already interlocutors with the tech companies on similar issues in other countries. This approach would make it more difficult for the regime to block independent information and allow pro-democracy and anti-war activists to have a competitive edge when using technologies that are unavailable to the representatives of the authoritarian regime. E&E can provide a list of the organizations that should be added to the inclusion list in coordination with our partners.

Prioritized Company Recommendations:

1. **YouTube:**

   YouTube has deactivated monetization for anyone located inside Russia and for any views that occur inside Russia. This has removed a key revenue source for independent

publishers and at the same time made it easier for the Government of Russia to advance its plans for a sovereign internet.

Recommendation: Online publishers should allow organizations on the inclusion list to monetize their content inside Russia.

CSOs and independent media can't target or advertise content to audiences inside Russia.

Recommendation: Allow organizations on the inclusion list to buy and publish ads inside Russia and target content to users inside Russia.

2. **Meta (Facebook and Instagram):**

   CSOs and media can't target or advertise content to audiences inside Russia. Even though Facebook and Instagram are blocked and declared extremist, they still have large audiences there and our partners are currently unable to take advantage of a significant tool for exposing Russians to independent information.

   Recommendation: Allow organizations on the inclusion list to buy and publish ads inside Russia and target content to users inside Russia.

3. **Google and Bing**:

   Websites blocked in Russia are being downgraded in search results. Search algorithms register user behavior such as whether a user who clicked on a search result returns to the results page (i.e. they didn't find what they were looking for). If so, the page is considered a low quality result. If a website is blocked, then many users return to the search results. This sends a false signal to the search engine and search algorithms become amplifiers of censorship.

   Recommendation: Search engines should warn users that websites belonging to entities on the inclusion list may be blocked and offer recommendations for VPNs or other circumvention technology to bypass the blocking. Search engines should not downgrade pages belonging to entities on the inclusion list for reasons related to blocking.

4. **MailChimp:**

   Russian civil society civil society organizations have been denied access to their existing paid subscriptions, their newsletters, or their subscriber databases. Email is still a good outreach method to people inside Russia.

Recommendation: Allow organizations and individuals on the inclusion list to continue to use MailChimp's services inside Russia.

5. **Sectigo**:

   Certificate authorities have stopped issuing SSL/TLS certificates for Russian domains. This has increased vulnerability to hackers and other malicious actors or forced companies and organizations to use the Russian government's certificate authority which opens them to man-in-the-middle attacks by the Government of Russia.

   Recommendation: The ban on issuing SSL/TLS certificates be lifted for organizations and individuals on the inclusion list.

6. **TechSoup:**

   TechSoup has suspended its program for Russia. We believe there is room for a nuanced policy for engaging with democratic Russian civil society within similar parameters to those currently used by our existing ENP partners.

   Recommendation: TechSoup should continue to engage with organizations on the inclusion list.

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Summary of Conclusions
Administrator Power's Meeting with Russian Democracy Advocates [redacted]
May 30, 2023

Key Takeaways

- **Administrator Power:** Stated that it is inspiring that the Russian democracy advocates are speaking out. USAID has been supporting Russian exiles. Asked to hear from the democracy advocates about where they see the biggest challenges for Putin's regime due to the war.
- [redacted]**:** Shared that she fled Russian in 2012 which was the year that USAID had to leave Russia and she founded the Free Russia Foundation. The Free Russia Foundation has resources in several European countries and provides important programs to Russian exiles across Europe. Several countries that the Foundation does not yet work in have asked us to set up there including Spain, France, and Poland. The Invasion of Ukraine has been a huge tragedy; please know that there is resistance within Russia to the war. There are many protests against the war. The Invasion has been hard on pro-democracy Russians because we have been lumped in with Putin's regime and blamed for this war. Before the invasion pro-democracy Russians were considered heroes by the West for opposing Putin's regime but the war has created this narrative that "all Russians are bad." This narrative has been an issue not only because of Ukraine but also a deep set narrative among the post-Soviet Eastern European countries. Messaging support from the USG on differentiating the Russian people and Putin's regime would be very helpful.
- [redacted]**:** Because of sanctions Russian exiles have not been able to access banks, news subscriptions, and some government and private sector services. Sanctions are affecting the pro-democracy Russian exiles more than those who are a part of Putin's regime because they are of higher means and often have dual citizenship. The sanctions have made life for exiles hard in Europe so they either have to face challenges in Europe or risk the dangers of going to Central Asian countries where the Government of the Russian Federation (GoRF) influence is high.
- **Administrator Power:** Asked what more the USG can do to support pro-democracy Russians, including those in exile.
- [redacted]**:** It is important that the USG supports pro-democracy Russian exiles very vocally and loudly. The Free Russia Foundation could be reaching more exiles as well as get information to those inside Russia virtually if not for tech sanctions.
- [redacted]**:** Russian society is very isolated from free speech and democratic expression, they don't have the freedom to voice their opinions safely. Thus, it is hard to say whether Russians are truly indifferent to democracy or if they are just scared to express an opinion about it. Over 20,000 people were arbitrarily detained including minors in recent years. This shows there are many people that are against the regime and speaking out about it.

- **Administrator Power:** Asked about the conditions that [redacted] husband is facing while detained.
- [redacted]**:** The conditions in Russian prisons aren't good to begin with even for healthy people. Stated that her husband has health conditions as a result of him surviving several poisonings. It is good that the U.S. supported the Magnitsky Act - all those responsible for committing human rights violations should be held responsible not the whole country - but need this to be enforced more. As long as Russia is an authoritarian regime it will be a threat to the world. Russia was placed second in Virtual Private Network (VPN) services downloaded last year. This shows that there are a lot of people in Russia who are trying to access independent objective information. Need to support journalists and access to VPN services.
- [redacted]**:** For the Free Russia Foundation to do more work fighting misinformation in Russia we need support on lifting tech sanctions against us.
- [redacted]**:** There are grassroot initiatives in Russia and people are protesting. We need to support them by providing legal representation for them when the GoRF comes for them.
- **AA/E&E McKee:** USAID does support Russian exiles with legal representation but the program should be expanded.
- [redacted]**:** These lawyers are also coming under a lot of pressure and need support. They are often the only point of contact between a defendant and their family as well as the person documenting all the rights violations that are occurring.
- [redacted]**:** Many of the Russians in exile could be the best advocates and change makers but they need to be professionalized.
- [redacted]**:** Europe receives most Russian exiles but there has not been a concerted effort in Europe to support them. U.S. support on this issue has inspired some action from Europeans but not enough. We need the U.S. to continue being vocal about their support and to encourage Europeans to do so.
- **Administrator Power:** It would be helpful in bolstering Congressional and US public understanding of the activists' efforts if the Free Russia Foundation could share evidence for the under-the-radar opposition to the war occurring within Russia, such as the arbitrary detentions and VPN usage numbers.

Asks/Tasks

- Johnny Walsh/DDI to follow up with the Free Russian Foundation on how USAID can help on tech sanctions that have been limiting their reach within Russia.

Scheduling Requests

- N/A

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