

## **WORLD ASSOCIATION FOR PUBLIC OPINION RESEARCH (WAPOR)**

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### **PRESS RELEASE**

#### **Statement on the Levada Center Case**

Lincoln (Nebraska, USA), May 28, 2013. WAPOR expresses its concern about recent reports from Russia regarding restrictions to public opinion research. A government warning has been issued to the Levada Center, a public opinion research organization based in Moscow, that they must register as a "foreign agent" and that they must stop their research activities if not so registered. The failure to do so could lead to both administrative and criminal sanctions.

Russian prosecutors have asserted that under a new law, the Levada Center is regarded as "foreign agent" because a) it "influences public opinion and therefore does not constitute research but political activity" and b) receives some funds from foreign sources. The Levada Center has declared that only a small percentage of its funding comes from foreign sponsors.

Lev D. Gudkov, Director of the Levada Center, has indicated that these measures seriously damage the research center's ability to continue operating. He notes, "Following the logic of the cautions received from the Prosecutor's office, we would have to stop the publication of our journal, shut down our website, stop publishing, commenting, and analyzing results of our surveys among professionals or among the society at large, namely in the mass media, as well as during seminars and conferences. This is what we cannot accept."

WAPOR considers it legitimate for every scientific public opinion research center to cooperate and conduct research projects together with research centers in other countries. Such cooperation does not turn a research institute into a "foreign agent".

The government warning to Levada posits a serious threat not only to the Levada Center's legitimate scientific activities, but also to the purpose and practice of public opinion research by independent organizations more broadly speaking.

In accordance with its mission to promote in each country of the world the right to conduct and publish scientific public opinion research, as well as the right to free expression of speech, WAPOR rejects any attempts to limit this right and any measures to consider it an illegal practice. The Association urges the Russian government authorities to abstain from these restrictions and to allow the proper practice and dissemination of results about their citizens' voices by independent research agencies. As WAPOR's constitution states: "Public opinion is a critical force in shaping and

transforming society. Properly conducted and disseminated survey research provides the public with a tool to measure opinions and attitudes in order to allow its voices to be heard.”

WAPOR is an international association whose members worldwide profess an adherence to scientific and ethical principles of survey research. In addition to promoting the right to conduct and publish opinion surveys, WAPOR also encourages high professional standards. For further information about WAPOR see our website: <http://wapor.unl.edu/>.

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