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Laura Buffo
Chair, Trade Policy Staff Committee
Office of the United States Trade Representative
600 17th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20508

Re: 2024 Russia WTO Implementation Report—Comments of the International Intellectual Property Alliance (IIPA) in response to “Request for Comments and Notice of Public Hearing Concerning Russia’s Implementation of its WTO Commitments” (89 Fed. Reg. 63463, August 5, 2024)

To the Trade Policy Staff Committee:

These comments regarding Russia’s implementation of its obligations as a Member of the World Trade Organization (WTO) are submitted on behalf of the International Intellectual Property Alliance (IIPA).¹ The IIPA comments focus exclusively on Russia’s copyright law and enforcement obligations under the WTO Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS Agreement) (Marrakesh Agreement Establishing the World Trade Organization, Annex 1C (Apr. 15, 1994)), as well as on related market access issues. Full compliance with the TRIPS Agreement and the accession obligations would help to expand the market for all creators and producers in the Russian marketplace. In addition to these comments, IIPA is attaching its 2024 Special 301 Russia filing that sets out a broader array of concerns regarding copyright protection and enforcement in Russia, as well as market access issues and issues beyond the scope of the TRIPS Agreement obligations.

As requested by the Trade Policy Staff Committee (TPSC) in the Federal Register notice, IIPA’s written submission specifically addresses “Russia’s implementation of the commitments

¹ IIPA is a private sector coalition, formed in 1984, of trade associations representing U.S. copyright-based industries working to improve copyright protection and enforcement abroad and to open foreign markets closed by piracy and other market access barriers. Members of the IIPA include: Association of American Publishers (www.publishers.org), Entertainment Software Association (www.theesa.com), Independent Film & Television Alliance (www.ifta-online.org), Motion Picture Association (www.motionpictures.org), and Recording Industry Association of America (www.riaa.com). Collectively, IIPA’s five member associations represent over 3,200 U.S. companies producing and distributing copyrightable content. The materials produced and/or distributed by IIPA-member companies include: video games for consoles, handheld devices, personal computers, and online; motion pictures and television programming distributed in all formats (including cinema, television, online, mobile, DVD, etc.); music recorded in all formats (from digital files to CDs and vinyl) for streaming and other online services, as well as broadcasting, public performance, and synchronization in audiovisual materials; and fiction and non-fiction books, educational, instructional and assessment materials, and professional and scholarly journals, and databases.

made in connection with its accession to the WTO, including, but not limited to, commitments in the following areas: . . . [i]ntellectual property rights (including intellectual property rights enforcement),” related to the obligations set forth in the TRIPS Agreement and in the Report of the Working Party of the WTO on the Accession of the Russian Federation (Working Party Report).² The TRIPS Agreement includes substantive copyright law and related rights obligations in Articles 9 through 14, and obligations on enforcement in Articles 41 through 61.

Concerns regarding substantive copyright protections (i.e., TRIPS Articles 9 through 14) historically have not been the focus of concern for the copyright industries, with the exception of overly broad exceptions in the copyright law in Civil Code, Part IV (detailed in past IIPA Special 301 filings). However, the Government of Russia has introduced several problematic proposals that would weaken existing intellectual property (IP) protections, including plans for a compulsory licensing scheme to permit exploitation of a copyrighted work if a partner from an “unfriendly state” (including the United States) partially or completely unilaterally repudiated an existing license agreement with a Russian entity on grounds not related to the violation of such contract by a licensee. If Russia follows through on these proposals, it would be tantamount to state-sanctioned piracy on a massive scale. This would be an extraordinary step for a WTO member, contravening the rule of law and serving as a *de facto* expropriation of U.S. copyrighted works and sound recordings. Belarus, which is not a WTO member, has enacted similar legislation, underscoring the concern that Russia could enact these proposals.

This submission is provided against the backdrop of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, the attendant sanctions against Russia by the U.S. and its allies, the suspension of operations in Russia by many U.S. and international companies, and a disturbing trend in Russia to ignore the intellectual property rights (IPR) of companies that have withdrawn from the market. As such, this submission largely draws from IIPA’s submissions from prior years.

Notwithstanding the problematic proposals discussed above, the copyright industries continue to have two main priority actions for Russia, which are a result of either legal or enforcement deficiencies, or both, related to Russia’s TRIPS Agreement obligations:

- (1) Russia should make significant improvements in copyright enforcement against:
 - (a) physical piracy and especially digital piracy, which affects all of the copyright industries represented by the IIPA—the recording, audiovisual, book and journal publishing, and entertainment software industries; and
 - (b) unlicensed screenings and camcording of motion pictures in Russian theaters, which currently results in illegal online and hard copies of films being widely available without authorization; and
- (2) Russia should address deficiencies in the collective management of rights in Russia.

² 89 FR 63463 (Aug. 5, 2024).

ENFORCEMENT

Article 41(1) of the TRIPS Agreement requires that “Members shall ensure that enforcement procedures . . . are available under their law so as to permit effective action against any act of infringement of intellectual property rights . . . including expeditious remedies to prevent infringements and remedies which constitute a deterrent to further infringements.” The existing remedies and enforcement actions under Russian law, including the civil, administrative, and criminal provisions taken as a whole, do not provide the kind of “expeditious,” “effective,” or “deterrent” remedies required by Article 41 of the TRIPS Agreement.

In addition to the Article 41 obligation, the Government of Russia pledged certain actions in the Working Party Report as a part of its WTO accession. Specifically, the Government of Russia pledged that it would “continue to take actions against the operation of websites with servers located in the Russian Federation that promote illegal distribution of content protected by copyright or related rights, such as phonograms (sound recordings) and investigate and prosecute companies that illegally distribute objects of copyright or related rights on the Internet.”³

Even before WTO accession, the U.S. and Russian governments completed a detailed Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) Action Plan in December 2012, which set out several important copyright enforcement and legal reform priorities for Russia. This IPR Action Plan was in addition to another bilateral agreement—the 2006 U.S.-Russia Bilateral WTO Market Access Agreement Side Letter on IPR (2006 IPR Side Letter). Neither agreement was ever properly or fully implemented by Russia.

In the U.S.-Russia IPR Action Plan, the Government of Russia agreed it would take “enforcement actions targeting piracy over the Internet” and more specifically it would, *inter alia*:

Take measures in order to disrupt the functioning of websites that facilitate criminal copyright infringement, and provide for takedown of infringing content;

Take actions against the creators and administrators of websites through which intellectual property crimes are committed;

Conduct meaningful consultations with rights holders to target and to take action against high-priority infringing websites; . . .⁴

In the 2006 IPR Side Letter Russia agreed to combat the growing threat of Internet piracy “with the objective of shutting down websites that permit illegal distribution of content protected by copyright or related rights” (and especially for websites registered in Russia’s .ru domain name, or whose servers are situated in Russia), and “to investigate and prosecute companies that illegally distribute objects of copyright or related rights on the Internet.”⁵

³ Working Party Report (paragraph 1339).

⁴ U.S.-Russia IPR Action Plan, p. 1, Section IA.

⁵ 2006 U.S.-Russia Bilateral WTO Market Access Agreement Side Letter on IPR (2006 IPR Side Letter), p. 3, Section 2.

Enforcement against Online Piracy

Full and proper implementation of the TRIPS Agreement and these bilateral agreements would help stem online piracy, especially for hosting sites and streaming services. The failure to do so has stalled the ability of legitimate digital services to thrive in Russia. Russia remains home to many of the most popular illegal piracy services in the world. These include commercial-scale infringing websites, such as web-based, peer-to-peer (P2P) downloading and streaming sites, stream-ripping sites, linking sites, and cyberlockers, offering access to unauthorized music, film, video games, books, and journal articles. Another problem is the significant movement of pirated content to mobile apps, such as Telegram. Russia remains first globally when it comes to P2P piracy for the video game industry. Many of these sites cater to English-speaking and other non-Russian users. Some BitTorrent and other pirate sites have reportedly moved their sites to foreign hosting locations in response to the new enforcement measures or court-ordered injunctions directed at sites within Russia. The development of technologically advanced pirate cloud systems (e.g., piracy as a service, often consisting of content delivery network-based video providers that are accessible to only pirate streaming website operators), which provide Russian streaming websites with pirate video content, likewise continues to grow.

Civil judicial and administrative remedies have improved over the years (with legal reforms in 2013, 2014, 2017, and 2020), but enforcement difficulties continue. The civil injunctive relief mechanism continues to allow rights holders to enjoin notoriously infringing sites, but critical gaps remain. These include the lack of relevant laws targeted at online piracy and the liability of hosting providers. Current regulations were designed in the offline environment, and some provisions are difficult to apply to diversified online piracy, particularly regarding timelines, evidence fixation, and damages calculation.

Moreover, pirates have found tools to navigate around the content protection tools provided in recent legal reforms. Part of the problem lies in how Yandex, the major search engine in Russia, indexes sites. Neither internal Yandex policy nor laws oblige Yandex to improve search and retrieval algorithms to reduce the number of pirate sites and links to infringing content. Yandex algorithms instantly or even automatically include updated mirror sites. Another tactic is to use an empty site with a relevant domain name for search engine results, which redirects to a site with infringing content. Significant changes and improvements in the piracy situation will require adoption of anti-piracy laws and policies that are relevant to the current issues affecting the creative industries.

In addition, court practice related to title-specific civil injunctions has worsened. The Moscow City Court, under the influence of the first appellate court, changed its approach to decisions in title-specific civil injunction cases. Previously, the court prohibited a site from using the title on the site in general. Now, the court prohibits the use of the title on only the page on which it was captured. Thus, any change of the URL allows the site to avoid enforcement under the court decision.

Nevertheless, overall, rights holders have seen some positive results of the reforms to civil laws and procedures. Some sites exhibited dramatic decreases in traffic right after such court

orders, and some sites even moved out of the country. Unfortunately, without the deterrence of criminal prosecutions against the owners and operators of notoriously infringing sites and services, many simply resurface in new guises.

Although the civil law reforms have improved enforcement by the courts, absent these court orders, most ISPs and website operators do not comply with takedown notices; instead, they merely forward notices to users without taking down infringing material. Often, as a delaying tactic, the Russian websites insist on proof of copyright ownership before even considering compliance with takedown requests. The advertising agencies and payment processors that financially support infringing sites continue to resist cooperation with the copyright industries.

The only alternative has been the voluntary Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), signed in November 2018 and extended until May 2025, between some ISPs and certain local rights holders regarding delisting of infringing sites from search engines. In August 2023, the parties to the MOU agreed to extend it to music and literary works and simplified the approval procedure for the new members, eliminating the requirement to apply via a non-commercial organization for certain rights holders. The candidates for membership still must obtain approval by most of the existing members; however, they can now apply directly if they own a catalog of at least 100 works.

In June 2021, legislation was proposed in the Duma to convert the ISP-rights holder MOU into legislation. The Duma was to consider the bill in February 2022 but has not taken any action. The legislation should provide sanctions for non-compliance with takedown notices and should be applicable to all platforms and search engines and all copyrighted works. An addendum to the MOU, MOU 2.0, was signed in December 2021, but is subject to the adoption of the legislation and has not been enforced. MOU 2.0 provides for several new measures to stop search engines from providing easy access to infringing services. New measures include removal of repeat offender sites from search results, removal of sites displaying over one hundred links to infringing content from search results, and measures to defeat “domain gluing.”⁶

IIPA and its members continue to note three major overarching concerns in the Civil Code, as amended: (a) a lack of clarity on numerous provisions, especially on exceptions and limitations; (b) administrative law principles throughout the Civil Code that likely cannot be enforced by civil or criminal procedures; and (c) the absence of clear liability rules for online websites and services that induce or encourage infringement, as well as the applicability of safe harbors for such services. Even after the recent amendments, the law does not define ISPs and the various services they provide, nor does it link liability and safe harbors in a manner that will incentivize cooperation with rights holders to effectively address Internet piracy. Lastly, Russia’s law does not define secondary liability. The law should be clarified regarding the liability of online infringing websites and services, including that those safe harbors should apply to only passive and neutral intermediaries that do not contribute to infringing activities. Further, it is critical that Russia amend its regime to allow for civil injunctive relief that is quick and effective and applicable to all works.

⁶ “Domain gluing” is a process used by operators of infringing services allowing them to return to the same search ranking from which they were removed by “gluing” pages together.

Examples of the types of large-scale online piracy problems that persist are evident in the annual Notorious Markets List, and in IIPA's past filings with the U.S. government. Many commercial-scale sites in Russia, including those sites on the Notorious Markets List, operate unimpeded, offering unauthorized copies of films, TV programs, music, books and journal articles, and video games. The U.S. government included six Russian online sites on the 2023 Notorious Markets List, including Sci-Hub, Lib-Gen (and its related sites), and VK.com (vKontakte)⁷

The motion picture and television industry is particularly concerned about *VK.com*, which is one of the most popular sites in the world and the most popular social network in Russia, along with *OK*, which is also an infringement hub. On these social media platforms, users illegally distribute thousands of unlicensed motion picture files (even though *VK.com* negotiated licenses a few years ago with some of the music companies for its use of music). *VK.com* has demonstrated improvements over the past few years in their responsiveness to takedown notices and has limited access to third-party apps, thus making it more difficult for users to download content directly. However, dozens of groups dedicated to movie and TV piracy with millions of users have been illegally uploading and sharing infringing content on *VK.com* for several years, despite multiple removal requests from rights holders. The publishing industry (particularly trade book publishing) is similarly affected, with significant e-book piracy on the site. Although the site responds to notifications of infringement, piracy remains unabated given the ease with which the site's users can continuously upload and make available pirated e-books and audiobooks. *VK.com* is still one of the main platforms for promoting video game piracy sites and marketplaces. Russian social networks have improved their responsiveness to take-down notices from the video game industry. These sites promptly remove any infringing material, including cheats and other unauthorized digital goods (UDGs).⁸ However, video game piracy remains a significant problem in Russia and fuels piracy in other markets.

The video game industry historically has experienced overall very weak compliance in Russia with takedown notices regarding links to pages with infringing content via forums, cyberlockers, and direct download sites, and very quick reposting of materials that are taken down. BitTorrent sites are significant sources in Russia for downloading illegal copies of video games, with no abatement in recent years. In 2023, Russia ranked number one in the world for the number

⁷ See USTR, "2023 Review of Notorious Markets for Counterfeiting and Piracy," available at https://ustr.gov/sites/default/files/2023_Review_of_Notorious_Markets_for_Counterfeiting_and_Piracy_Notorious_Markets_List_final.pdf (2023 NML). The 2023 NML also included three physical markets in Russia, all of which are on the list for the prevalence of counterfeit materials.

⁸ Unauthorized digital goods (UDGs) are unauthorized sales of in-game digital items. They have become a growing concern for the video game industry. Closely related to these in-game items are software products (collectively known as "cheat software") that enable the unfair and rapid collection and aggregation of virtual goods, such as bots, hacks, and "cheats," or which otherwise tilt the scales in favor of one player over another. The rise of UDGs and cheat software have a negative impact on video game companies and consumers in the following ways: (1) sellers of unauthorized digital goods and cheat software divert significant revenue away from video game developers and publishers; (2) sales of digitally delivered items, like in-game digital items, have the potential for consumer fraud (such as stolen payment methods or compromised accounts) and the facilitation of money laundering schemes; (3) the unchecked sales of cheat software can threaten the integrity of game play, alienating and frustrating legitimate players; and (4) video game publishers and developers are forced into a perpetual virtual "arms race" to update their products and security technology before the sellers can update theirs.

of connections by peers participating in the unauthorized file-sharing of Entertainment Software Association (ESA)-member video game titles on public peer-to-peer (P2P) networks. By the same metric, Russia ranked first in the world for unauthorized file-sharing of PC-based games, and second in the world for console-based games.

The most prominent forms of music piracy in Russia remain web downloads, BitTorrent, and stream ripping. The most popular BitTorrent site (and the most popular piracy site of any kind) in Russia is *rutracker.org* (which received over 227.5 million visits from Russia in from September 2023 to August 2024, a 6% increase in popularity over the last two years). Visits to the site remain high as Russian users have learned how to circumvent the block imposed on the site by authorities enabling them to easily access the large amounts of both English and Russian content available on the site, including enormous quantities of discographies for many music artists. The continued popularity of the site is demonstrated in its position as the 6th most visited site of any kind in Russia from September 2023 to July 2024.

From September 2023 through August 2024, *SaveFrom.net* continued to be the most popular stream-ripping site in Russia, receiving 1.590 billion visits globally and 134.4 million visits from Russia according to SimilarWeb. Over the same time period, *Y2Mate.mx* received 28.56 million visits from Russia; *Save4k.com* received 15.02 million visits from Russia; *SSYouTube.com* received 5.7 million visits from Russia; and Russian-language MP3 download site *Zaycev.net*, which offers popular music content to download or stream, was visited 70.28 million times from Russia.

Russia also remains home to many services supporting large-scale infringing websites, including web-based and P2P downloading and streaming sites, linking sites, stream-ripping sites, BitTorrent sites, and cyberlockers that operate globally. For example, *Newalbumreleases.net* is a popular linking site that has a large library of newly released popular music available and is often the first site to feature links to newly leaked pre-release music content. *Songswave.com* (formerly *music-bazaar.com*) and *mp3va.com* are sites that have the look and feel of legal music sites like Amazon or iTunes but sell music content as downloads at a considerable discount, with all of the revenue accruing to site operators and none actually reaching artists or record labels. These sites undermine the sale of licensed music on legitimate platforms and remain targets for action.

Most concerning to book and journal publishers are the online book and journal piracy websites operating out of Russia. *Sci-Hub.se* (also *Sci-Hub.ru* and *Sci-Hub.st*) continues to be the most problematic piracy site for professional and scholarly journal publishers. Infringing journal articles purloined by the site's operator are likewise available on a network of sites collaborating under the "Library Genesis Project" collection of piracy sites. As of November 2021, *Sci-Hub*⁹

⁹ *Sci-Hub* is an adjudged pirate entity, with two Association of American Publishers (AAP) members having secured judgments against the site and its operator in 2017 and 2015 in two U.S. courts.⁹ These judgments resulted in injunctions requiring U.S. domain name registries to suspend the site's U.S. administered domains.⁹ In October 2018, publishers successfully sought an injunction to block the sites' primary domain in Russia. In 2019, a permanent block was issued against *Libgen.org*, while a permanent injunction against several *Sci-Hub* mirrors in Russia took effect in 2020.

claimed its servers hold some 88 million copyright-protected journal articles, as well as millions of books found on *Lib-Gen*, *Z-Library*,¹⁰ and numerous other mirror sites.¹¹

In addition to these large-scale book and journal piracy platforms, Russian Internet users also use P2P file-sharing services. An AAP member has registered 6.1 million P2P downloads of pirated copies of its books by Internet users in Russia since May 2021, with 2.9 million of those downloads by Internet users in Moscow. Finally, publishers have identified dozens of pirate platforms (among them *Vdoc.pub*, *torrentdownload.info*, *pixel-brush.ru*, *VK*, *prizrak.ws*, *libramar.net*, and *torrentdownloads.me*) hosted in Russia that either host pirated books or link to pirated content. *DDOS-Guard* also plays a prominent role in hosting at least seven highly popular book piracy platforms.

In short, much more effective enforcement is needed against online piracy in Russia, particularly the long-identified piracy sites (including those on the Notorious Markets list, as well as the myriad of other infringing websites). The TRIPS Agreement, Article 61 provides that “Members shall provide for criminal procedures and penalties to be applied at least in cases of . . . copyright piracy on a commercial scale.”¹² Among other things, the TRIPS Agreement requires Members to make remedies available that “shall include imprisonment and/or monetary fines sufficient to provide a deterrent, consistently with the level of penalties applied for crimes of a corresponding gravity,” and “[i]n appropriate cases, remedies available shall also include the seizure, forfeiture and destruction of the infringing goods and of any materials and implements the predominant use of which has been in the commission of the offence.”¹³ Overall, proper enforcement means focusing criminal enforcement actions against the owners and operators of sites engaged in large-scale infringement, which are causing significant economic harm to all rights holders.

Enforcement against Illegal Screenings of Motion Pictures

After Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the U.S. film, broadcast, and streaming industries, along with many other industries, suspended operations in Russia. Unfortunately, third-party operators have recently begun organizing illegal screenings of U.S. films in theaters throughout Russia. At first, the theaters did not advertise the screenings openly, referring to them as “private club” events. However, by August 2023, most of the theater chains included such screenings in their schedules and started promoting them along with the legal exhibitions, such as *Barbie*, *Blue Beetle*, and *Oppenheimer*. In 2024, most cinemas still openly show unlicensed content. The content shown at these illegal screenings are sourced from pirated

¹⁰ In November 2022, *Z-Library* domains were seized by the Department of Justice, and the network of some 244 sites taken offline. The alleged operators, two Russian nationals, were also arrested in Argentina and await extradition. See U.S. Attorney’s Office, Eastern District of New York Press Release, *Two Russian Nationals Charged with Running Massive E-Book Piracy Website*, November 16, 2022, available at <https://www.justice.gov/usao-edny/pr/two-russian-nationals-charged-running-massive-e-book-piracy-website>.

¹¹ *Sci-Hub* provides access to nearly all scholarly literature. See <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/01/17/universities-ignore-growing-concern-over-sci-hub-cyber-risk>.

¹² WTO Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS Agreement) (Marrakesh Agreement Establishing the World Trade Organization, Annex 1C (Apr. 15, 1994)), Article 61.

¹³ *Id.*

Digital Cinema Packages (DCP) that are illegally distributed online. Moreover, there is evidence of camcording occurring at these illegal screenings, compounding the harm.¹⁴ The Ministry of Culture generally condemns such practices, but is reluctant to take a proactive and systematic approach to preventing them, limiting action to sporadic raids in theaters before major domestic releases, with penalties usually limited to warnings to suspend the illegal screenings for the first weekend. It appears that such raids happen under pressure from local producers and do not reflect the government's determination to prevent piracy.

Other Enforcement Issues

To be effective, IPR enforcement in Russia needs a clear nationwide governmental directive with a particular focus on online piracy. Without coordination and a high-level directive, criminal and administrative enforcement practices have varied considerably from region to region and have had little deterrent effect. A coordinated nationwide campaign should focus on *ex officio* criminal actions targeting large-scale commercial enterprises, improving investigations and digital tracking, and strengthening administrative penalties that to date have been largely ineffective.

The agencies that can commence criminal cases—including the Investigative Committee of Russia, the Investigative Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD), the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation (FSB), and Customs—should coordinate their efforts with the police. Because the General Prosecutor's Office has supervisory authority over investigations and prosecutions, it should work with the Investigative Committee of Russia and the Investigative Department of MVD to develop an updated and detailed methodology for investigations of digital copyright infringements. Such coordination would help to increase the quality, effectiveness, and consistency of IPR enforcement activities. Work on a draft methodology was suspended years ago.

IIPA continues to recommend that the Government of Russia create a dedicated digital IPR enforcement unit to focus on online piracy. For example, combatting copyright violations on the Internet, such as the dissemination of music through illegal pay-per-download sites and illegal P2P or streaming services, does not clearly fall within the current jurisdiction of the Computer Crimes Department (Department K) within the MVD, even though they have occasionally acted on such cases in the past. Department K's authority and responsibility to act in all cases of online infringement should be clarified and strengthened. In addition, Department K should be adequately staffed, equipped, and resourced, and other such units within the MVD should be formed to deal exclusively with IP Internet cases and to train officers on how to combat these copyright crimes, including the maintenance of evidence. It also should be clarified that actions can be brought under the Code of Administrative Offenses against commercial actors involved in the massive distribution of infringing material, even where the enterprise does not charge a direct fee.

Changes to criminal procedure that placed copyright infringement cases into the category of serious crimes have enabled Russian law enforcement agencies to conduct thorough and comprehensive investigations against owners and operators of piratical operations, although challenges still exist. Deterrent criminal penalties have rarely, if ever, been imposed against

¹⁴ On August 23, 2022, Webwatch reported a partial capture of *Top Gun: Maverick* from Moskva Cinema in Moscow.

operators or owners of commercial Internet operations. In recent years, police and prosecutors have had difficulty applying the criminal law thresholds to Internet crimes and especially have had difficulty proving intent and identifying the individuals responsible for criminal activities. As a result, few such cases are ever brought and even fewer are tried to a conclusion. The problem has been an inability of police and prosecutors to adopt a unified formulation for how to apply the thresholds for online crimes. An intensification of criminal investigations and criminal convictions against principals of organized commercial pirate syndicates is sorely needed. The status quo only further corroborates the lack of political will or incentives by government agencies to act against large-scale copyright infringers.

For roughly the past 12 years, the quality and quantity of criminal raids and police activity against IP infringers in general has declined, especially against large-scale online infringers. The decline in police activity in general is the lingering result of the major reorganization of the police force in 2011 and the consequent reduction in resources, as well as changes in government priorities and an unwillingness to pursue large-scale online infringers. Though rare, Russian courts have imposed some deterrent sentences, including a handful aimed at serious repeat offenders.

The Government of Russia should also examine and redress the lengthy criminal investigative process, particularly at the provincial level. As the government continues to rely on its own experts in investigating, examining, and prosecuting IP violations, it should take measures to increase the number of experts and consider the appointment of a specialized unit of investigators and prosecutors, adequately trained and provisioned to effectively address IP crimes. Due to the lack of adequate staffing and the high volume of work, examinations of seized products take months. For the video game industry, enforcement efforts are also complicated by several issues, including new legislation, changes in jurisdiction, and new law enforcement personnel. Enforcement is also hampered and trials delayed by the requirement that exemplars be collected only with the participation of state officials and by a statutory reliance on government expert reports. Delays also result from a lack of subject-matter expertise in some cases, as well as a reluctance to use or rely on rights holder expertise on forensic matters. The Government of Russia should modernize the rules so that industry experts can be more effectively integrated into the judicial process. One way to accomplish this integration would be for the Supreme Court to issue new guidelines on the admissibility of the testimony of private experts. Some courts reportedly will accept private expert testimony, but a uniform rule would be more effective.

Improvements should also be made with respect to court procedure. The criminal procedures generally permit a rights holder to request the destruction of the seized goods or to move for recovery of damages in a separate proceeding before the Arbitration Court (a court of general jurisdiction). However, the criminal courts are reluctant to order these remedies and instead, treat these cases as civil law matters. The copyright industries recommend that the Supreme Court clarify guidelines on the destruction of goods and the calculation of damages in online cases for the purpose of meeting the minimal criminal damage thresholds established under the revised Article 146 of the Criminal Code, which increased such thresholds.

Another recommended measure to increase the efficiency of IP criminal investigations is the appointment of IP special prosecutors, investigators, and police officers at both the federal and regional levels throughout Russia. IIPA recommends that Russia establish an official uniform

methodology for the investigation and prosecution of copyright and related rights infringements, focused on digital enforcement. In 2013, a specialized IP court in Skolkovo was launched with 30 trained judges. This development was a positive step in IP enforcement but is limited to patent cases. These courts should be created in other cities and regions across Russia and the jurisdiction broadened to handle copyright, as well as patent cases.

Finally, Russia's Criminal Code should be amended to allow for corporate entities to be held criminally liable for infringement. At present, only a natural person (usually a corporate director) can be found criminally liable and only upon a showing that he or she had a direct intent to commit the infringement. It is extremely difficult to meet this burden of proof, so many cases are suspended without any penalty.

COLLECTIVE MANAGEMENT

The long-standing problems concerning the collective management of music rights in Russia needs to be addressed properly. The ability to exercise one's rights through proper collective management is a WTO TRIPS Agreement obligation, and Russia made specific commitments on these issues as part of its accession to the WTO. In the Working Party Report, Russia assured its trading partners it would "review its system of collective management of rights in order to eliminate non-contractual management of rights within five years after Part IV of the Civil Code entered into effect," to bring the management societies in line with international standards on governance, transparency, and accountability.¹⁵ That commitment had a deadline of 2013. The 2006 IPR Side Letter had similar obligations to correct this problem.

After years of missed deadlines, Russia adopted new legislation in 2017 (in force, May 2018) that did not address key relevant issues and created even more problems, instead of fixing the collective management system in Russia. The new collective management system denies transparency to rights holders and good governance consistent with international norms, as well as best practices for CMOs as required by Russia's WTO accession obligations. The 2017 law amended the Civil Code and the Administrative Code to revise the make-up and activities of collective rights management organizations (RMOs). One obvious failure of the 2017 law regarding transparency is that it does not allow rights holders to see how much money their RMOs collect or distribute to their members. Moreover, in terms of a lack of good governance, the law does not allow rights holders to control their RMOs.

The so-called "fiscal control improvements" in the new law, including regular audit reports, will not improve accountability because the audit obligations are for reports only to the government for taxation purposes, not to rights holders. The new law creates "supervisory boards" for each of the various authors' CMOs (the Russian Authors Society, the Russian Union of Right Holders, and the All-Russian Intellectual Property Organization) consisting of members of each RMO, but also including government representatives and "user" group representatives. This structure does not allow rights holders to be involved in the selection and management of the organizations that purport to manage their rights. Proper management would allow for a supervisory board of rights holders to oversee the internal management of the RMO and would

¹⁵ WTO Working Party Report (Paragraph 1218).

include international rights holders with local representatives on the board. Instead, partial control of RMOs by the Government of Russia deprives rights holders of their ability to control the licensing and collection of monies for their works and recordings and is resulting in less, not more, money flowing to authors and producers and certainly less money than should be collected for a market the size of Russia.

To develop properly functioning music broadcasting and public performance payment systems via collective management, the Government of Russia should re-visit the 2017 law to ensure that rights holders are able to control and manage their own RMOs or can effectively opt out of collective management. This change would result in fair representation characterized by direct representation of rights holders on the board in a manner that is proportionate to relevant market share and reflects commercial realities, with no conflicts of interest in the governance structures. Many models for proper governance of RMOs exist, including WIPO best practices, international rights holder group best practices, as well as U.S. and European Union (EU) existing practices. Instead, the existing regulations and state accreditations have institutionalized a system that is neither transparent, nor well governed with accountability for authors, record labels, and performers, who have no other option except for the state CMOs.

MARKET ACCESS ISSUES

While U.S. industries have largely suspended operations in Russia, significant market access barriers remain, including a discriminatory Value-Added Tax (VAT); foreign ownership restrictions in broadcasters, mass media entities, and OTT services; and an advertising ban on Pay-TV. In 2022, in response to sanctions imposed on Russia following the invasion of Ukraine, the Russian government adopted several restrictive measures targeting foreign investors from unfriendly jurisdictions. The measures include an obligation for the foreign shareholders of the Russian joint-stock and limited liability companies to obtain governmental approval for any deals involving their shares.

In addition to these barriers, the video game industry also faces significant market access issues in Russia. For example, Russia imposes customs duties on the royalty value of some imported audiovisual materials, including some video games, rather than solely on the value of the physical carrier medium, contrary to standard international practice. Furthermore, on June 17, 2021, the State Duma adopted a law mandating foreign Information Technology (IT) companies with a daily audience over 500 thousand users to open a branch, a representative office, or an authorized legal entity in Russia, which could potentially affect the video game industry.

CONCLUSION

Russia's WTO TRIPS Agreement and Working Party Report commitments have not been fully implemented, especially regarding adequate and effective enforcement against online piracy. The Russian government has proposed problematic legislation that, if enacted, would significantly undermine the exclusive rights of U.S. rights holders in clear violation of Russia's WTO obligations. Nevertheless, at present, the primary concern for the copyright industries remains the failure of the Russian IPR legal regime to fully comply with the enforcement provisions in the

TRIPS Agreement's Articles 41 through 61, to provide "effective action" and "deterrent" remedies, and especially against "willful . . . copyright piracy on a commercial scale," including against digital and theatrical piracy. In addition, Russia has failed to meet its obligations to impose a proper collective administration system for music licensing and distribution and to address the problem of theatrical piracy. Likewise, Russia's proposed compulsory licensing scheme for works and sound recordings from "unfriendly states" remains deeply troubling and would be an unprecedented repudiation of Russia's TRIPS Agreement commitments.

Thank you for allowing IIPA to provide these comments, and for your consideration and possible incorporation of these comments into the U.S. government's annual WTO compliance report regarding Russia.

Best regards,

/Sydney G. Blitman/
International Copyright Policy Counsel
International Intellectual Property Alliance

ATTACHMENT

RUSSIAN FEDERATION

INTERNATIONAL INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY ALLIANCE (IIPA)

2024 SPECIAL 301 REPORT ON COPYRIGHT PROTECTION AND ENFORCEMENT

Special 301 Recommendation: IIPA recommends that the Russian Federation be retained on the Priority Watch List in 2024.¹

Executive Summary: This submission is provided against the backdrop of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, the attendant sanctions against Russia by the United States and its allies, the suspension of operations in Russia by many U.S. and international companies, and a disturbing trend in Russia to ignore the intellectual property rights (IPR) of companies that have withdrawn from the market. As such, this submission largely draws from IIPA’s submissions from prior years. The Government of Russia recently introduced several problematic proposals that would weaken existing intellectual property (IP) protections, including plans for a compulsory licensing scheme to permit exploitation of a copyrighted work if a partner from an “unfriendly state” (including the United States) partially or completely unilaterally repudiated an existing license agreement with a Russian entity on grounds not related to the violation of such contract by a licensee. If Russia follows through on these proposals, it would be tantamount to state-sanctioned piracy on a massive scale. This would be an extraordinary step for a WTO member, contravening the rule of law and serving as a *de facto* expropriation of U.S. IP. Russia should abandon these proposals and instead focus on improving criminal, civil, and administrative enforcement, particularly against organized criminal syndicates and large-scale unlicensed services; addressing long-standing problems with collective management of music rights; addressing the camcording of motion pictures; and taking action to prevent or disrupt the proliferation of illegal screenings of films in Russian theaters.

PRIORITY ACTIONS REQUESTED IN 2024

Enforcement

- Increase the number and effectiveness of criminal copyright digital piracy cases, especially deterrent criminal actions directed against organized criminal syndicates.
- Improve administrative enforcement against large-scale unlicensed services, including by imposing deterrent-level penalties.
- Improve civil enforcement, including by amending the Civil Code or other relevant law to address the issue of “domain hopping.”
- Take action to prevent or disrupt the unauthorized screenings of motion pictures in cinemas.

Legal Reforms

- Ensure recent legal reform proposals do not worsen copyright protection and enforcement.
- Continue to resist efforts to implement state-sanctioned IP theft regardless of existing license agreements, which would have serious, long-term implications for Russia’s economy and creative ecosystem.
- Reject proposed legislation that would allow esports event organizers to profit from copyright-protected video game content without authorization from rights holders.
- Convert the memorandum of understanding (MOU) between Internet service providers (ISPs) and rights holders into law with broader applicability and sanctions for non-compliance, and enforce the addendum to the MOU.
- Implement regulations on the operation of collective management organizations (CMOs) that confirm that rights holders, whether local or foreign, have the legal and practical ability to determine how to exercise their rights.
- Amend the Administrative Code and Criminal Code to adequately address theatrical camcording.

¹ For more details on Russia’s Special 301 history, see previous years’ reports, at <https://iipa.org/reports/reports-by-country/>. For the history of Russia’s Special 301 placement, see <https://www.iipa.org/files/uploads/2024/01/Appendix-B-2024.pdf>.

- Amend the Civil Code, Part IV, to incentivize ISPs to cooperate with rights holders to effectively address online piracy.
- Amend the Civil Code and Criminal Code to provide adequate protection for technological protection measures (TPMs).

Market Access

- Remove market access restrictions negatively impacting the U.S. creative industries.

ENFORCEMENT

- **Increase the number and effectiveness of criminal copyright digital piracy cases, especially deterrent criminal actions directed against organized criminal syndicates.**

Effective enforcement means focusing criminal enforcement actions against the owners and operators of sites engaged in large-scale infringing content causing significant economic harm to all rights holders. The Government of Russia has unfulfilled commitments to take such action against digital piracy under the 2006 U.S.-Russia Bilateral WTO Market Access Agreement Side Letter on Intellectual Property Rights (2006 IPR Side Letter). In the 2006 IPR Side Letter Russia agreed to combat the growing threat of Internet piracy “with the objective of shutting down websites that permit illegal distribution of content protected by copyright or related rights” (and especially for websites registered in Russia’s .ru domain name, or whose servers are situated in Russia), and “to investigate and prosecute companies that illegally distribute objects of copyright or related rights on the Internet.” When Russia joined the WTO in 2012, as part of its WTO accession, Russia pledged that it would “continue to take actions against the operation of websites with servers located in the Russian Federation that promote illegal distribution of content protected by copyright or related rights, such as phonograms (sound recordings), and investigate and prosecute companies that illegally distribute objects of copyright or related rights on the Internet.”² Also in 2012, Russia agreed it would take “enforcement actions targeting piracy over the Internet” and more specifically it would, *inter alia*:

Take measures in order to disrupt the functioning of websites that facilitate criminal copyright infringement, and provide for takedown of infringing content....Take actions against the creators and administrators of websites through which intellectual property crimes are committed....Conduct meaningful consultations with rights holders to target and to take action against high-priority infringing websites.³

The Government of Russia should fully and properly implement these obligations.

Russia remains host to several illicit sites that cater to English-speaking audiences, negatively impacting markets worldwide. Many pirate sites have moved to foreign hosting locations after several legal reforms that allow rights holders to seek injunctions through the Moscow City Court. However, the lack of explicit liability provisions for hosting providers creates a supportive environment for infringing services to use the infrastructure in Russia. Infringement on Russian social media and hosting platforms such as *VK*, *OK*, and *DDoS-Guard*, as well as dealing with registrars such as *Reg.ru*, *Beget*, and *RU-CENTER* remains a significant concern for rights holders.

Examples of the types of large-scale online piracy problems that persist are evident in the annual Notorious Markets List, and in IIPA’s past filings with the U.S. government. Many commercial-scale sites in Russia, including those sites on the Notorious Markets List, operate unimpeded, offering unauthorized copies of films, TV programs,

² WTO Working Party Report (paragraph 1339).

³ U.S.–Russia Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) Action Plan (2012).

music, books and journal articles, and video games. The U.S. government included six Russian online sites on the 2022 Notorious Markets List, including *Sci-Hub*, *Lib-Gen* (and its related sites), *VK.com* (*vKontakte*), and *MP3juices*.⁴

The motion picture and television industry is particularly concerned about *VK.com*, which is one of the most popular sites in the world and the most popular social network in Russia, along with *OK*, which is also an infringement hub. On these social media platforms, users illegally distribute thousands of unlicensed motion picture files (even though *VK.com* negotiated licenses a few years ago with some of the music companies for its use of music). *VK.com* has demonstrated improvements over the past few years in their responsiveness to takedown notices and has limited access to third-party apps, thus making it more difficult for users to download content directly. However, dozens of groups dedicated to movie and TV piracy with millions of users have been illegally uploading and sharing infringing content on *VK.com* for several years, despite multiple removal requests from rights holders. The publishing industry (particularly trade book publishing) is similarly affected, with significant e-book piracy on the site. Although the site responds to notifications of infringement, piracy remains unabated given the ease with which the site's users can continuously upload and make available pirated e-books and audiobooks. *VK.com* is still one of the main platforms for promoting video game piracy sites and marketplaces. Russian social networks have improved their responsiveness to take-down notices from the video game industry. These sites promptly remove any infringing material, including cheats and other unauthorized digital goods (UDGs).⁵ However, video game piracy remains a significant problem in Russia and fuels piracy in other markets.

The video game industry historically has experienced overall very weak compliance in Russia with takedown notices regarding links to pages with infringing content via forums, cyberlockers, and direct download sites, and very quick reposting of materials that are taken down. BitTorrent sites are significant sources in Russia for downloading illegal copies of video games, with no abatement in recent years. In 2023, Russia ranked number one in the world for the number of connections by peers participating in the unauthorized file-sharing of Entertainment Software Association (ESA)-member video game titles on public peer-to-peer (P2P) networks. By the same metric, Russia ranked first in the world for unauthorized file-sharing of PC-based games, and second in the world for console-based games.

The most prominent forms of music piracy in Russia remain BitTorrent and stream ripping. The most popular BitTorrent site (and the most popular piracy site of any kind) in Russia is *rutracker.org* (which received over 55 million visits from Russia in Q3 2023, a 25% increase in popularity over the last two years). Visits to the site remain high as Russian users have learned how to circumvent the block imposed on the site by authorities and can easily access the large amounts of both English and Russian content available on the site, including enormous quantities of discographies for many music artists. The continued popularity of the site is demonstrated in its position as the 126th most visited site of any kind in Russia.

SaveFrom.net continued to be the most popular stream-ripping site in Russia, receiving 24.5 million visits in Q3 2023 according to Similarweb. *SSYouTube.com* and *Y2Mate.mx* each received six million visits from Russia over the same period. At the same time, Russian-language MP3 download site *Zaycev.net*, which offers popular music content to download or stream, was visited 11 million times from Russia in Q3 2023.

Russia also remains home to many services supporting large-scale infringing websites, including web-based and P2P downloading and streaming sites, linking sites, stream-ripping sites, BitTorrent sites, and cyberlockers that

⁴ See USTR, "2022 Review of Notorious Markets for Counterfeiting and Piracy," available at [https://ustr.gov/sites/default/files/2023-01/2022%20Notorious%20Markets%20List%20\(final\).pdf](https://ustr.gov/sites/default/files/2023-01/2022%20Notorious%20Markets%20List%20(final).pdf) (2022 NML). The 2022 NML also included three physical markets in Russia, all of which are on the list for the prevalence of counterfeit materials.

⁵ Unauthorized digital goods (UDGs) are unauthorized sales of in-game digital items. They have become a growing concern for the video game industry. Closely related to these in-game items are software products (collectively known as "cheat software") that enable the unfair and rapid collection and aggregation of virtual goods, such as bots, hacks, and "cheats," or which otherwise tilt the scales in favor of one player over another. The rise of UDGs and cheat software have a negative impact on video game companies and consumers in the following ways: (1) sellers of unauthorized digital goods and cheat software divert significant revenue away from video game developers and publishers; (2) sales of digitally delivered items, like in-game digital items, have the potential for consumer fraud (such as stolen payment methods or compromised accounts) and the facilitation of money laundering schemes; (3) the unchecked sales of cheat software can threaten the integrity of game play, alienating and frustrating legitimate players; and (4) video game publishers and developers are forced into a perpetual virtual "arms race" to update their products and security technology before the sellers can update theirs.

operate globally. For example, *Newalbumreleases.net* is a popular linking site that has a large library of newly released popular music available and is often the first site to feature links to newly leaked pre-release music content. *Songswave.com* (formerly *music-bazaar.com*) and *mp3va.com* are sites that have the look and feel of legal music sites like Amazon or iTunes but sell music content as downloads at a considerable discount, with all of the revenue accruing to site operators and none actually reaching artists or record labels. These sites undermine the sale of licensed music on legitimate platforms and remain targets for action.

Most concerning to book and journal publishers are the Russian-operated online book and journal piracy websites. *Sci-Hub.se* (also *Sci-Hub.ru* and *Sci-Hub.st*) continues to be the most problematic piracy site for professional and scholarly journal publishers. Infringing journal articles purloined by the site's operator are likewise available on a network of sites collaborating under the "Library Genesis Project" collection of piracy sites. As of November 2021, *Sci-Hub* claimed its servers hold some 88 million copyright-protected journal articles, as well as millions of books found on *Lib-Gen*, *Z-Library*,⁶ and numerous other mirror sites.⁷

In October 2018, publishers successfully sought an injunction to block the sites' primary domain in Russia. In 2019, a permanent block was issued against *Libgen.org*, while a permanent injunction against several *Sci-Hub* mirrors in Russia took effect in 2020. It remains the unfortunate case that despite the seizure of some 244 *Z-Library*-related domains by the Department of Justice in November 2022—and the arrest of the alleged Russian operators in Argentina⁸—*Z-Library* operators appear determined to continue the infringing conduct. Despite a further seizure of several alternative *Z-Library* domains (such as *singlelogin.click*) in November 2023, with assistance from enforcement authorities in Europe, various domains remain live.

In addition to these large-scale book and journal piracy platforms, Russian Internet users also use P2P file-sharing services. An AAP member has registered 6.1 million P2P downloads of pirated copies of its books by Internet users in Russia since May 2021, with 2.9 million of those downloads by Internet users in Moscow. Finally, publishers have identified dozens of pirate platforms (among them *Vdoc.pub*, *torrentdownload.info*, *pixel-brush.ru*, *VK*, *prizrak.ws*, *libramar.net*, and *torrentdownloads.me*) hosted in Russia that either host pirated books or link to pirated content. *DDOS-Guard* also plays a prominent role in hosting at least seven highly popular book piracy platforms.

Currently, criminal cases for online piracy do not reach courts due to outdated provisions of the Criminal Code that are hard to enforce for online infringements, specifically, the "value of the crime" definition that sets the threshold for liability. The copyright industries continue to report high levels of piracy and declining levels of criminal enforcement, continuing a trend of the past several years. Official statistics of the Ministry of Interior demonstrates a continuous decrease in the number of registered copyright-related crimes, dropping from 423 cases in 2020 to 317 cases in 2021 (a 22% decrease) and zero copyright infringement cases in 2022.

To be effective, IPR enforcement in Russia needs a clear nationwide governmental directive with a particular focus on online piracy. Without coordination and a high-level directive, criminal and administrative enforcement practices have varied considerably from region to region and have had little deterrent effect. A coordinated nationwide campaign should focus on *ex officio* criminal actions targeting large-scale commercial enterprises, improving investigations and digital tracking, and strengthening administrative penalties that to date have been largely ineffective.

The agencies that can commence criminal cases—including the Investigative Committee of Russia, the Investigative Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD), the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation (FSB), and Customs—should coordinate their efforts with the police. Because the General Prosecutor's

⁶ In November 2022, *Z-Library* domains were seized by the Department of Justice, and the network of some 244 sites taken offline. The alleged operators, two Russian nationals, were also arrested in Argentina and await extradition. See U.S. Attorney's Office, Eastern District of New York Press Release, *Two Russian Nationals Charged with Running Massive E-Book Piracy Website*, November 16, 2022, available at <https://www.justice.gov/usao-edny/pr/two-russian-nationals-charged-running-massive-e-book-piracy-website>.

⁷ *Sci-Hub* provides access to nearly all scholarly literature. See <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/01/17/universities-ignore-growing-concern-over-sci-hub-cyber-risk>.

⁸ See supra note 6.

Office has supervisory authority over investigations and prosecutions, it should work with the Investigative Committee of Russia and the Investigative Department of MVD to develop an updated and detailed methodology for investigations of digital copyright infringements. Such coordination would help to increase the quality, effectiveness, and consistency of IPR enforcement activities. Work on a draft methodology was suspended years ago.

IIPA continues to recommend that the Government of Russia create a dedicated digital IPR enforcement unit to focus on online piracy. For example, combatting copyright violations on the Internet, such as the dissemination of music through illegal pay-per-download sites and illegal P2P or streaming services, does not clearly fall within the current jurisdiction of the Computer Crimes Department (Department K) within the MVD, even though they have occasionally acted on such cases in the past. Department K's authority and responsibility to act in all cases of online infringement should be clarified and strengthened. In addition, Department K should be adequately staffed, equipped, and resourced, and other such units within the MVD should be formed to deal exclusively with IP Internet cases and to train officers on how to combat these copyright crimes, including the maintenance of evidence. It also should be clarified that actions can be brought under the Code of Administrative Offenses against commercial actors involved in the massive distribution of infringing material, even where the enterprise does not charge a direct fee.

Changes to criminal procedure that placed copyright infringement cases into the category of serious crimes have enabled Russian law enforcement agencies to conduct thorough and comprehensive investigations against owners and operators of piratical operations, although challenges still exist. Deterrent criminal penalties have rarely, if ever, been imposed against operators or owners of commercial Internet operations. In recent years, police and prosecutors have had difficulty applying the criminal law thresholds to Internet crimes and especially have had difficulty proving intent and identifying the individuals responsible for criminal activities. As a result, few such cases are ever brought and even fewer are tried to a conclusion. The problem has been an inability of police and prosecutors to adopt a unified formulation for how to apply the thresholds for online crimes. An intensification of criminal investigations and criminal convictions against principals of organized commercial pirate syndicates is sorely needed. The status quo only further corroborates the lack of political will or incentives by government agencies to act against large-scale copyright infringers.

For roughly the past 12 years, the quality and quantity of criminal raids and police activity against IP infringers in general has declined, especially against large-scale online infringers. The decline in police activity in general is the lingering result of the major reorganization of the police force in 2011 and the consequent reduction in resources, as well as changes in government priorities and an unwillingness to pursue large-scale online infringers. Though rare, Russian courts have imposed some deterrent sentences, including a handful aimed at serious repeat offenders.

The Government of Russia should also examine and redress the lengthy criminal investigative process, particularly at the provincial level. As the government continues to rely on its own experts in investigating, examining, and prosecuting IP violations, it should take measures to increase the number of experts and consider the appointment of a specialized unit of investigators and prosecutors, adequately trained and provisioned to effectively address IP crimes. Due to the lack of adequate staffing and the high volume of work, examinations of seized products take months. For the video game industry, enforcement efforts are also complicated by several issues, including new legislation, changes in jurisdiction, or new law enforcement personnel. Enforcement is also hampered and trials delayed by the requirement that exemplars be collected only with the participation of state officials and by a statutory reliance on government expert reports. Delays also result from a lack of subject-matter expertise in some cases, as well as a reluctance to use or rely on rights holder expertise on forensic matters. The Government of Russia should modernize the rules so that industry experts can be more effectively integrated into the judicial process. One way to accomplish this integration would be for the Supreme Court to issue new guidelines on the admissibility of the testimony of private experts. Some courts reportedly will accept private expert testimony, but a uniform rule would be more effective.

Improvements should also be made with respect to court procedure. The criminal procedures generally permit a rights holder to request the destruction of the seized goods or to move for recovery of damages in a separate proceeding before the Arbitration Court (a court of general jurisdiction). However, the criminal courts are reluctant to

order these remedies and instead, treat these cases as civil law matters. The copyright industries recommend that the Supreme Court clarify guidelines on the destruction of goods and the calculation of damages in online cases for the purpose of meeting the minimal criminal damage thresholds established under the revised Article 146 of the Criminal Code, which increased such thresholds.

Another recommended measure to increase the efficiency of IP criminal investigations is the appointment of IP special prosecutors, investigators, and police officers at both the federal and regional levels throughout Russia. IIPA recommends that Russia establish an official uniform methodology for the investigation and prosecution of copyright and related rights infringements, focused on digital enforcement. In 2013, a specialized IP court in Skolkovo was launched with 30 trained judges. This development was a positive step in IP enforcement but is limited to patent cases. These courts should be created in other cities and regions across Russia and the jurisdiction broadened to handle copyright, as well as patent cases.

Finally, Russia's Criminal Code should be amended to allow for corporate entities to be held criminally liable for infringement. At present, only a natural person (usually a corporate director) can be found criminally liable and only upon a showing that he or she had a direct intent to commit the infringement. It is extremely difficult to meet this burden of proof, so many cases are suspended without any penalty.

- **Improve administrative enforcement against large-scale unlicensed services, including by imposing deterrent-level penalties.**

In addition to criminal enforcement, the relevant administrative agencies should target large illegal distribution enterprises, such as the large-scale unlicensed services responsible for most of the illegal distribution of music and film in Russia. The Administrative Code (Article 7.12) provides a range of fines for infringement by natural persons (1,500 to 2000 rubles, US\$20 to US\$27), the owners or managers of legal entities (10,000 to 20,000 rubles, US\$133 to US\$266), and legal entities themselves (30,000 to 40,000 rubles, US\$400 to US\$533) and permits the confiscation and destruction of pirated products. The police or agencies file administrative cases, but the courts of general jurisdiction levy fines. Imposing significant administrative fines on legal entities would have a deterrent effect, especially in instances when criminal cases are terminated for failing to meet the high evidentiary burdens. Unfortunately, current administrative procedures are inadequate because of the very low level of fines imposed, as well as the inability to reach commercial enterprises that distribute infringing content. Moreover, enforcement under the Administrative Code has been ineffective due to the lack of enforcement actions. In 2021, there were 676 cases under this article, in which only 449 cases included fines for a total of 5,129,000 rubles (approx. US\$70,000).

- **Improve civil enforcement, including by amending the Civil Code or other relevant law to address the issue of “domain hopping.”**

Civil judicial and administrative remedies have improved over the years (with legal reforms in 2013, 2014, 2017, and 2020), but enforcement difficulties continue.⁹ The civil injunctive relief mechanism continues to allow rights holders to enjoin notoriously infringing sites, but critical gaps remain. These include the lack of relevant laws targeted at online piracy, “domain hopping” of pirate sites that occurs after the Moscow City Court issues an initial content-removal order, and the liability of hosting providers. Current regulations were designed in the offline environment, and some provisions are difficult to apply to diversified online piracy, particularly regarding timelines, evidence fixation, and damages calculation.

Moreover, pirates have found tools to navigate around the content protection tools provided in recent legal reforms. Part of the problem lies in how Yandex, the major search engine in Russia, indexes sites. Neither internal Yandex policy nor laws oblige Yandex to improve search and retrieval algorithms to reduce the number of pirate sites

⁹ Prior IIPA filings have detailed the 2013, 2014, 2017, and 2020 legal reforms, which implemented ISP liability and safe harbors and injunctive relief against infringing content online. See, e.g., IIPA 2022 at 79-80.

and links to infringing content. Yandex algorithms instantly or even automatically include updated mirror sites. Another tactic is to use an empty site with a relevant domain name for search engine results, which redirects to a site with infringing content. Significant changes and improvements in the piracy situation will require adoption of anti-piracy laws and policies that are relevant to the current issues affecting the creative industries.

In addition, court practice related to title-specific civil injunctions has worsened. The Moscow City Court, under the influence of the first appellate court, changed its approach to decisions in title-specific civil injunction cases. Previously, the court prohibited a site from using the title on the site in general. Now, the court prohibits the use of the title on only the page on which it was captured. Thus, any change of the URL allows the site to avoid enforcement under the court decision.

Nevertheless, overall, rights holders have seen some positive results of the reforms to civil laws and procedures. Some sites exhibited dramatic decreases in traffic right after such court orders, and some sites even moved out of the country. Unfortunately, without the deterrence of criminal prosecutions against the owners and operators of notoriously infringing sites and services, many simply resurface in new guises.

- **Take action to prevent or disrupt the unauthorized screenings of motion pictures in cinemas.**

After Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the U.S. film, broadcast, and streaming industries, along with many other industries, suspended operations in Russia. Unfortunately, third-party operators have recently begun organizing illegal screenings of U.S. films in theaters throughout Russia. At first, the theaters did not advertise the screenings openly, referring to them as "private club" events. However, by August 2023, most of the theater chains included such screenings in their schedules and started promoting them along with the legal exhibitions, such as *Barbie*, *Blue Beetle*, and *Oppenheimer*. Theaters have escaped enforcement by claiming that renting out their premises for a fixed fee to a third-party waives liability for any unlawful actions during the rental period. The content shown at these illegal screenings are sourced from pirated Digital Cinema Packages (DCP) that are illegally distributed online. Moreover, there is evidence of camcording occurring at these illegal screenings, compounding the harm.¹⁰ The Ministry of Culture conducts sporadic raids in theaters before major domestic releases, with penalties usually limited to warnings to suspend the illegal screenings for the first weekend. It appears that such raids happen under pressure from local producers and do not reflect the government's determination to prevent piracy.

LEGAL REFORMS

- **Ensure recent legal reform proposals do not worsen copyright protection and enforcement.**

Since its invasion of Ukraine, Russia has introduced several troubling legal reforms that would negatively impact the copyright industries. For example, on May 27, 2022, the Russian President issued Decree #322 regarding the payment of remuneration to foreign rights holders from "unfriendly" countries (i.e., the countries that imposed sanctions against Russia in response to its invasion of Ukraine). The Decree orders that Russian persons (including the Russian authorities, organizations, companies, and residents) make payments for the use of IP to foreign rights holders in rubles to a special O-type bank account opened in the name of the foreign rights holder. Russian entities have no obligation to make payments to foreign rights holders until the rights holder agrees to the new method and rights holders may not transfer funds from O-type bank accounts outside of Russia without government permission. The Decree restricts the rights holders subject to the Decree from receiving license payments other than through governmental approval.

In September 2023, following the President's recommendations, the Ministry of Justice published draft amendments to the Criminal Code that include a proposal to further increase the threshold for criminal liability for

¹⁰ On August 23, 2022, Webwatch reported a partial capture of *Top Gun: Maverick* from Moskva Cinema in Moscow.

copyright infringement.¹¹ The State Duma hasn't yet considered the proposal, but if adopted, it would worsen criminal enforcement.

Also in September 2023, the State Duma Committee on the State Building and Legislation proposed a draft law amending Part IV of the Civil Code. The bill would establish a procedure for the use of orphan works, including creation of a database for orphan works and appointment of a collective management organization to manage rights for such works. The draft would limit the possible uses of the orphan works as follows: reproduction and distribution of the copies, making them available to the public, and creation of derivative works. The remuneration rates are subject to determination by the government. If the potential licensee is unable to identify the copyright holder, the licensee would have the right to apply to the CMO authorized by the Ministry of Culture with a statement of intent to use the corresponding copyrighted work. The Ministry of Culture would determine the necessary and sufficient measures to be taken by a potential licensee to identify the rights holder before applying to the CMO. The authorized CMO must place an announcement about the rights holder's search on its official website. If the rights holder is not identified within 30 days, the CMO will record information about the copyrighted work in the database, including the measures taken to find the rights holder, after which the CMO will have the right to grant the right to use the work on the terms of a non-exclusive license. The CMO will deposit the remuneration in a dedicated account until the rights holder submits a payment request. Although the draft contains a provision securing the rights holder's right to terminate the license agreement concluded by the CMO and recover damages if the CMO fails to take proper measures to identify the rights holder, the procedure for determination of fees and rights holders' search creates unnecessary state involvement in rights management, raising concerns that rights holders' copyright rights will be undermined.

- **Continue to resist efforts to implement state-sanctioned IP theft, which would have serious, long-term implications for Russia's economy and creative ecosystem.**

In mid-April 2022, Russia began drafting legislation that, if enacted, would drastically undermine exclusive rights. This unprecedented bill would allow a Russian licensee of a copyrighted work to apply to the court for a compulsory license to exploit a copyrighted work if a partner from an "unfriendly state" (including the United States) partially or completely unilaterally repudiated the license agreement on grounds not related to the violation of such a contract by the licensee. As U.S. industries have suspended operations in Russia in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, such a bill, in effect, would legalize piracy of copyrighted materials owned by U.S. rights holders, in clear violation of Russia's WTO obligations—essentially amounting to state-sanctioned IP theft. On August 19, 2022, the first version of the draft was submitted to the State Duma. However, after the pushback from the local industry association, the sponsor of the bill stated the bill would be withdrawn and an alternative version would be drafted. The amended text will reportedly cover only compulsory licensing for theatrical distribution of audiovisual content, leaving out over-the-top (OTT) and TV services, but this would still violate Russia's obligations under international treaties, including the Berne Convention.

- **Reject proposed legislation that would allow esports event organizers to profit from copyright-protected video game content without authorization from rights holders.**

Russian lawmakers recently proposed legislation that would allow esports tournament organizers to profit from video game content without obtaining licensing agreements directly from video game publishers. The bill contemplates the creation of a public-law company (PLC), which would replace the role of rights holders to manage licensing fees associated with the use of games in esports tournaments, interfering with the exclusive right of publishers to maintain brand integrity and to exercise rights to their protected works.

- **Convert the MOU between ISPs and rights holders into law with broader applicability and sanctions for non-compliance, and enforce the addendum to the MOU.**

¹¹ The current version of the Criminal Code sets out a 100k RUB (~US\$1,100) threshold; the proposal would increase the threshold to 500k RUB (~US\$5,500).

Although the civil law reforms have improved enforcement by the courts, absent these court orders, most ISPs and website operators do not comply with takedown notices; instead, they merely forward notices to users without taking down infringing material. Often, as a delaying tactic, the Russian websites insist on proof of copyright ownership before even considering compliance with takedown requests. The advertising agencies and payment processors that financially support infringing sites continue to resist cooperation with the copyright industries.

The only alternative has been the voluntary Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), signed in November 2018 and extended until May 2024, between some ISPs and certain local rights holders regarding delisting of infringing sites from search engines. In August 2023, the parties to the MOU agreed to extend it to music and literary works and simplified the approval procedure for the new members, eliminating the requirement to apply via a non-commercial organization for certain rights holders. The candidates for membership still must obtain approval by most of the existing members; however, they can now apply directly if they own a catalog of at least 100 works.

In June 2021, legislation was proposed in the Duma to convert the ISP-rights holder MOU into legislation. The Duma was to consider the bill in February 2022 but has not taken any action. The legislation should provide sanctions for non-compliance with takedown notices and should be applicable to all platforms and search engines and all copyrighted works. An addendum to the MOU, MOU 2.0, was signed in December 2021, but is subject to the adoption of the legislation and has not been enforced. MOU 2.0 provides for several new measures to stop search engines from providing easy access to infringing services. New measures include removal of repeat offender sites from search results, removal of sites displaying over one hundred links to infringing content from search results, and measures to defeat “domain gluing.”¹² The deadlines for the removal of pirated links from search results by search engine operators will also be reduced.

- **Implement regulations on the operation of collective management organizations (CMOs) that confirm that rights holders have the legal and practical ability to determine how to exercise their rights.**

The long-standing problems concerning the collective management of music rights in Russia needs to be addressed properly. The ability to exercise one’s rights through proper collective management is a WTO TRIPS Agreement obligation, and Russia made specific commitments on these issues as part of its accession to the WTO. In the Working Party Report, Russia assured its trading partners it would “review its system of collective management of rights in order to eliminate non-contractual management of rights within five years after Part IV of the Civil Code entered into effect,” to bring the management societies in line with international standards on governance, transparency, and accountability.¹³ That commitment had a deadline of 2013. The 2006 IPR Side Letter had similar obligations to correct this problem. Russia should ensure that key principles of collective management of rights are reflected in legislation, including (but not limited to) the following:

- The essential characteristics of a CMO include that the CMO is non-profit and owned or controlled by its member rights holders (whether local or foreign), such that rights holders are able to control the exercise of their exclusive rights and to ensure that the CMO is operating according to good standards of transparency, accountability, and governance.
- While collective licensing is normally used where it is uneconomical for rights holders to exercise their rights individually, the decision for whether to use collective licensing must rest with the rights holder.
- CMO tariffs should be determined by the collecting society in negotiation with users (or their representatives), according to the economic value of the use of the rights in trade.
- Rights holders should have fair and balanced voting powers in their CMO that reflect the value of their rights under management.

¹² Domain gluing” is a process used by operators of infringing services allowing them to return to the same search ranking from which they were removed by “gluing” pages together.

¹³ WTO Working Party Report (Paragraph 1218).

After years of missed deadlines, Russia adopted new legislation in 2017 (in force, May 2018) that did not address key relevant issues and created even more problems, instead of fixing the collective management system in Russia. The new collective management system denies transparency to rights holders and good governance consistent with international norms, as well as best practices for CMOs as required by Russia's WTO accession obligations. The 2017 law amended the Civil Code and the Administrative Code to revise the make-up and activities of collective rights management organizations (RMOs). One obvious failure of the 2017 law regarding transparency is that it does not allow rights holders to see how much money their RMOs collect or distribute to their members. Moreover, in terms of a lack of good governance, the law does not allow rights holders to control their RMOs.

The so-called "fiscal control improvements" in the new law, including regular audit reports, will not improve accountability because the audit obligations are for reports only to the government for taxation purposes, not to rights holders. The new law creates "supervisory boards" for each of the various authors' CMOs (the Russian Authors Society, the Russian Union of Right Holders, and the All-Russian Intellectual Property Organization) consisting of members of each RMO, but also including government representatives and "user" group representatives. This structure does not allow rights holders to be involved in the selection and management of the organizations that purport to manage their rights. Proper management would allow for a supervisory board of rights holders to oversee the internal management of the RMO and would include international rights holders with local representatives on the board. Instead, partial control of RMOs by the Government of Russia deprives rights holders of their ability to control the licensing and collection of monies for their works and recordings and is resulting in less, not more, money flowing to authors and producers and certainly less money than should be collected for a market the size of Russia.

To develop properly functioning music broadcasting and public performance payment systems via collective management, the Government of Russia should re-visit the 2017 law to ensure that rights holders are able to control and manage their own RMOs or can effectively opt out of collective management. This change would result in fair representation characterized by direct representation of rights holders on the board in a manner that is proportionate to relevant market share and reflects commercial realities, with no conflicts of interest in the governance structures. Many models for proper governance of RMOs exist, including WIPO best practices, international rights holder group best practices, as well as U.S. and European Union (EU) existing practices. Instead, the existing regulations and state accreditations have institutionalized a system that is neither transparent, nor well governed with accountability for authors, record labels, and performers, who have no other option except for the state CMOs.

- **Amend the Administrative Code and Criminal Code to adequately address theatrical camcording.**

A long-standing problem in Russia is the camcording of motion pictures. Traditionally, Russia has been the source of many feature films being illegally copied in theaters and migrating online. Piracy operators obtain their source materials for infringing copies by camcording films at local theaters, and then upload these copies onto the Internet and sell illegal hard copies. Russia remains the home to some of the world's most prolific criminal release groups of motion pictures.

In August 2021, the Government of Russia adopted a Decree establishing the rules for film exhibition in theatres that cover the rights and obligations of both exhibitors and viewers. The Decree replaced the older document from 1994 and extended the exhibitors' rights to remove from the screening room viewers who disregard the exhibition rules, including those who attempt to record the film illicitly. While the Decree provides an explicit framework to address viewers who illicitly attempt to record a film in the theater, it does not resolve the issue of lack of liability for camcording.

To adequately address the camcording problem requires changes in the Russian legal framework, as well as dedicating sufficient resources and government willpower to engage in effective enforcement. Owing to the complex burden of proof procedure that the Administrative Code requires for copyright infringements, law enforcement is reluctant to investigate camcording incidents. Separate provisions addressing illegal recording in theaters and tailored to that specific form of infringement, could enhance enforcement. The Government of Russia should amend the Administrative Code to add liability for camcording to the general liability provisions on copyright infringements (Article

7.12) and to provide criminal law penalties as well. In 2020, the Government of Russia prepared changes to a new Administrative Code to address camcording, but the timing for revising the Code is unclear. The new rules, if adopted, would explicitly prohibit video or audio recordings of films in theaters and would allow theater owners to act to stop any such recordings, including removing the offending party from a theater. The proposed new law would also add administrative sanctions for camcording. While this is a step in the right direction, unfortunately, no proposals exist to amend the Criminal Code or to add any criminal sanctions for camcording pursuant to Russia's WTO and bilateral obligations. In addition to these needed legal reforms, IIPA recommends that the Government of Russia properly resource enforcement actions and undertake more effective enforcement against illegal camcording of motion pictures.

- **Amend the Civil Code, Part IV, to incentivize ISPs to cooperate with rights holders to effectively address online piracy.**

IIPA and its members continue to note three major overarching concerns in the Civil Code, as amended: (a) a lack of clarity on numerous provisions, especially on exceptions and limitations; (b) administrative law principles throughout the Civil Code that likely cannot be enforced by civil or criminal procedures; and (c) the absence of clear liability rules for online websites and services that induce or encourage infringement, as well as the applicability of safe harbors for such services. Even after the recent amendments, the law does not define ISPs and the various services they provide, nor does it link liability and safe harbors in a manner that will incentivize cooperation with rights holders to effectively address Internet piracy. Lastly, Russia's law does not define secondary liability. The law should be clarified regarding the liability of online infringing websites and services, including that those safe harbors should apply to only passive and neutral intermediaries that do not contribute to infringing activities. Further, it is critical that Russia amend its regime to allow for civil injunctive relief that is quick and effective and applicable to all works.

- **Amend the Civil Code and Criminal Code to provide adequate protection for technological protection measures (TPMs).**

Article 1299 of the Civil Code prohibits the commercial distribution (i.e., trafficking) in circumvention devices and services that circumvent TPMs. The law should be expanded so that liability applies to the commercial trafficking in all variety of circumvention devices (including software) and services. In addition, commercial trafficking in circumvention devices, including by importation, should be criminalized. IIPA also recommends improving Article 1252(5) of the Civil Code, which currently includes remedies for the seizure and destruction of materials and equipment used in infringements, by deleting the exception for the sale of materials by the state for "income" and by making corresponding changes in the respective procedural codes.

MARKET ACCESS

- **Remove market access restrictions negatively impacting the U.S. creative industries.**

While U.S. industries have largely suspended operations in Russia, significant market access barriers remain, including a discriminatory Value-Added Tax (VAT); foreign ownership restrictions in broadcasters, mass media entities, and OTT services; and an advertising ban on Pay-TV. In 2022, in response to sanctions imposed on Russia following the invasion of Ukraine, the Russian government adopted several restrictive measures targeting foreign investors from unfriendly jurisdictions. The measures include an obligation for the foreign shareholders of the Russian joint-stock and limited liability companies to obtain governmental approval for any deals involving their shares.

In addition to these barriers, the video game industry also faces significant market access issues in Russia. For example, Russia imposes customs duties on the royalty value of some imported audiovisual materials, including some video games, rather than solely on the value of the physical carrier medium, contrary to standard international practice. Furthermore, on June 17, 2021, the State Duma adopted a law mandating foreign Information Technology

(IT) companies with a daily audience over 500 thousand users to open a branch, a representative office, or an authorized legal entity in Russia, which could potentially affect the video game industry.