

Statement on the need for international assistance to the investigation of the murder of the Russian opposition leader Boris Nemtsov

**Delivered at the OSCE HDIM
Session on independence of judges and prosecutors**

Warsaw, 24 September 2015

I am speaking on behalf of 8 thousand people who have signed a petition asking for international assistance to the investigation of the murder of the Russian opposition leader Boris Nemtsov.

Boris Nemtsov, well-known political and public figure in Russia, was killed on February 27, 2015 in the downtown of Moscow near the Kremlin. It was obvious that it was a political murder, aimed at stopping his political activity.

At the time of the murder, Boris Nemtsov was one of the key leaders of the Russian opposition, co-chairman of the political party "Republican Party of Russia - People's Freedom Party" (RPR-PARNAS) and a member of the Regional Parliament in Yaroslavl. He was one of the strongest, consistent, and vocal critics of the Russian government, one of the main organizers of the numerous and significant protest rallies during the last 7 years. He consistently exposed corruption of the ruling elite and strongly spoke against Russian involvement in the war in Ukraine.

Regular and constant pressure on Boris Nemtsov and his supporters and colleagues preceded this terrible crime. Over the past few years, top Russian officials have contributed to and allowed broad dissemination of very negative and aggressive statements against opposition politicians in the media, often equal to smear and hate campaign. Government-controlled media have systematically instigated hatred against and aggressive rejection of the opposition by the Russian public. Top Russian officials have negatively referred to the opposition figures, forming the public perception of unlawful activity of the political opposition and pumping aggressive behavior of the president's supporters against critics of the government.

Moreover, in the past few years, Russian law-enforcement authorities have persistently put pressure on the opposition by initiating numerous trumped-up criminal cases against its leaders and activists. Several cases were opened against Boris Nemtsov, based on appeals by supporters of the government.

At the same time all appeals by Nemtsov to the law enforcement authorities regarding publication in the media of his illegally tapped phone conversations, as well regarding threats against his life, have not been properly investigated and those guilty remained unpunished.

Boris Nemtsov was repeatedly physically attacked by supporters of the government during his meetings with voters and other public events. Pro-government activists threw eggs, sprinkled flour on him and physically attacked him. Despite his appeals, these illegal actions were completely ignored by the law enforcement and went unpunished.

Such impunity is seen by everyone as tacit, or not so tacit, approval by the authorities of such actions against opponents of the regime.

Moreover, law-enforcement agencies ignored the last appeal of Boris Nemtsov in connection with death threats received by him. It was registered in the Russian Investigation Committee on July 15, 2014. Boris Nemtsov said that based on his previous experience, this appeal would never be investigated. Just a few months later, on February 27, 2015 he was killed in the center of Moscow near the Kremlin.

Obviously, constant media attacks on the opposition in the government-controlled media together with impunity for the attacks by government's supporters made this political assassination possible.

Official investigation of the murder conducted currently by the Russia Investigation Committee is stuck and faces serious obstacles, not allowing it to conduct effective investigation.

As of now, five suspects have been charged with execution of the crime, all natives of Chechnya and persons believed to be close to the head of Chechen Republic Ramzan Kadyrov. Based on the circumstances of the case, the data of the official investigation, and the charges, it can be confidently asserted that the law-enforcement agencies have not yet managed to detain any of the organizers of the murder and its sponsors. They have detained only the executors of this crime.

It is also obvious that the investigators are prevented from conducting effective investigation in Chechnya: the leadership of the country does not provide necessary assistance for the revealing of whereabouts and apprehension of organizers and sponsors of this very serious political crime. Ramzan Kadyrov himself, exercising absolute power in the territory of Chechnya, has repeatedly and publicly stated that he believes that the arrested persons are "true patriots of Russia" and that he has strong doubts in their guilt.

There are strong reasons to believe that the traces of the crime are leading to the inner circle of Ramzan Kadyrov, and it is necessary to look for the organizers and especially the sponsors of the crime there, in Chechnya. The probable motive of the murder is sharp criticism of President Putin by Boris Nemtsov which he repeatedly expressed during the last year, including the ones related to the war in Ukraine, as well as Nemtsov's criticism about military troops loyal to Kadyrov sent to Donbass to assist separatists there. Kadyrov constantly speaks to the mass media about his full loyalty to Putin and his admiration of him, as well as about his constant readiness to fight President's enemies by any means. He has repeatedly stated that he listens to the instructions of only one person, Vladimir Putin.

On April 22, 2015 the lawyers of Zhanna Nemtsova (daughter of Boris Nemtsov who was recognized a victim of the crime) filed a request to the investigation to conduct interrogation of several persons including the head of Chechnya, Ramzan Kadyrov. The head of the investigation group satisfied the appeal only in the part asking for questioning of the alleged organizer of the murder, Ruslan Geremeev, whose whereabouts are unknown. The rest of the appeal was turned down. At the same time, Ruslan Geremeev has not been included in the official search warrant and has not been charged in absentia. In an interview to the Interfax news agency on June 18, 2015, Ramzan Kadyrov, publicly stated that Ruslan Geremeev should not meet with investigators.

Taking into account public interest in the effective investigation of this assassination and bringing the perpetrators, organizers and sponsors of this crime to justice, thousands of people in Russia and beyond believe it is necessary to use mechanisms of international assistance to and control of the investigation. This might include establishment of special commissions to monitor and assist the investigation in the framework of the OSCE, the Council of Europe and the UN.

On 3 September, Russian activists launched a petition addressed to the UN, the OSCE and the Council of Europe, calling for international investigation into the murder of Boris Nemtsov. In three weeks, six and a half thousand signatures have been collected online and one and half thousand signatures offline, total eight thousand, and growing daily. At their request, I am passing the text of the petition to the OSCE Chair-in-Office, representatives of the incoming German Chairmanship, the ODIHR Director, and the leadership of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly.