



## **United States Mission to the OSCE**

# **Russia's Foreign Agents Legislation as a Violation of its OSCE Commitments**

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
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Last week, the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation designated the St. Petersburg-based Memorial Research and Information Center as a foreign agent organization. The Center began its work in the 1960s and today includes historical archives and a virtual museum of the Gulag. Memorial's Chairman Arseny Roginsky told media the listing was a "huge blow" to everyone involved in the memory of the victims of Soviet terror.

As the 101<sup>st</sup> organization to be designated as a so-called "foreign agent," Memorial joins other non-governmental organizations across Russia that also have been designated, including those that provide advocacy and services to the Russian people. These organizations engage in activities such as providing aid to orphans, protecting salmon habitat, promoting religious understanding, helping women start businesses, cleaning up air pollution, protecting consumers, and studying the flow of migrants.

We reiterate our deep concern that non-governmental organizations in Russia designated as "foreign agents" have been stigmatized, fined, and forced to curtail their activities. In some cases, individuals who work with these organizations have been subject to smear campaigns and even physical assaults. Non-governmental organizations have been identified as engaging in so-called "political activity" under this law for submitting a report on police abuses to the UN Committee Against Torture, advocating for transparency in the Russian electoral process, and organizing a roundtable discussion on the future of U.S.-Russian relations.

The number of civil society organizations the Russian Federation has designated as "foreign agents" has grown seven-fold – from 15 to 100 – in the first ten months of 2015. The implications for Russian civil society and the rights of all individuals in Russia are far reaching. We urge the government to reconsider this law and engage in a genuine dialogue with NGOs and their supporters.

In the 1990 Copenhagen Document, OSCE participating States explicitly recognized and committed to ensure that individuals are allowed to exercise the right to form, join and participate effectively in NGOs that seek to promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms. They committed to allow members of such groups unhindered access to similar bodies within and outside their countries, and with international organizations, and to solicit, receive, and utilize financial contributions for this purpose, including from abroad. Russia's so-called "foreign agents" law raises serious concerns about Russia's respect for its OSCE commitments and its obligation to respect the right to freedom of association.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.