



United States Mission to the OSCE

Reply to Russia on Threats Against the Political Opposition and Independent Voices in the Russian Federation

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
February 18, 2016

I thank the distinguished Russian colleague for his reply to concerns raised by my delegation and a large number of others. I want to make three points in response.

First, our distinguished Russian colleague's first reply was that the threats made by Ramzan Kadyrov were "misinterpreted" by the US, EU and others. I wondered whether he wants to reconsider that statement, because it would be very difficult to misinterpret calling members of the political opposition "traitors" and "enemies of the people," and placing their images in the cross-hairs of the sight from a weapon – it's hard to misinterpret that. And if we misunderstood that, and it was actually not a threat, I'd appreciate clarification from the Russian Federation. By the way, if the Russian Federation would like to offer that clarification, why not offer it publicly? Because clearly it has been interpreted as a permissive threat to those actors who are harassing people on the ground. I don't think it's credible to say the threats have been misinterpreted.

Second, our distinguished Russian colleague cited offensive videos on YouTube as a justification for imprisoning someone. I'd just like to note that if offensive videos on YouTube were a justification for imprisoning someone, a large portion of the Russian Presidential Administration would have to go to prison because Russian state-controlled media posts offensive things all the time. But none of us has a right not to be offended. And offensive YouTube videos are not a reason to send somebody to prison.

Third, with respect to Memorial, and without getting into the details of specific numbers, if it is in fact the case that 93 percent of Memorial's funding of last year and 100 percent of this year came from outside of Russia, then: how embarrassing for the Russian Federation that this august institution is in such a climate of fear and repression that it is unable to attract donations from those who support human rights and the work that it does within Russia!

Obviously, the distinguished Russian colleague knows that there are people within Russia who support democracy, support the protection of human rights, and want to advocate for it – how embarrassing for the Russian Federation that it has come to the point that the only place where the people feel safe to give support to Memorial is outside of Russia's borders.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.