



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on the Amendments to the Treason Law in the Russian Federation

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires Gary Robbins
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
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Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States notes its concern regarding amendments to the treason and state secrets law adopted by Russia's State Duma on October 23. We call upon President Vladimir Putin not to sign this legislation into law. The adoption of these treason law amendments gives rise to serious questions as to their scope and intended application. They are particularly troubling in light of other new laws passed this summer to restrict public assemblies, institute onerous "foreign agent" registration requirements on NGOs, re-criminalize libel, and impose new restrictions on internet content. These measures appear to be orchestrated to stifle dissent and to discourage Russian citizens from exercising their rights and fundamental freedoms to associate and to assemble peacefully.

We therefore wish to address the following questions to the esteemed representatives of the Russian Federation: We understand that the amendments to the treason law expand the definition of treason to include "providing financial, technical, advisory or other assistance to a foreign state or international organization . . . directed at harming Russia's security." What is the contemplated threshold for defining what "harming Russia's security" means? In the context of the other recent restrictions on human rights, is it not likely that this statute will have a chilling effect on legitimate information sharing and cooperation between Russian civil society organizations, foreign NGOs, the media, foreign governments and international bodies, including the OSCE itself?

Additionally, we note that the law makes it a crime to pass on to foreign and international organizations information garnered from open sources if the organization receiving the information plans to use it to harm Russia's national security interests. Again, what is meant by "harming Russia's security?" In light of other events in Russia, are participating States not right to be concerned that these amendments are inconsistent with the Russian Federation's commitment, as an OSCE participating State, and as agreed in the Copenhagen Document, to "allow members of non-governmental groups and organizations to have unhindered access to and communication with similar bodies within and outside their countries and with international organizations, to engage in exchanges, contacts and co-operation with such groups and organizations and to solicit, receive and utilize for the purpose of promoting and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms voluntary financial contributions from national and international sources as provided for by law"? Will sharing information on human rights abuses in Russia or expressions of disagreement with Russian government policies or practices with foreign publics, other governments, or international bodies be considered to "harm" to Russia's security?

Regrettably, Mr. Chairman, the new amendments to the treason law, and other developments that we have repeatedly brought to the attention of this organization, such as the recent Razvozhayev incident and mounting legal charges against members of the Russian opposition, represent a worrisome pattern of increasing restrictions on civil society and declining respect for human rights in Russia.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.