



United States Mission to the OSCE

Ongoing Concerns About Restrictions on Civil Society in Russia

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
October 27, 2016

Colleagues, twenty years ago in Copenhagen, our governments committed to “ensure that individuals are permitted to exercise the right to freedom of association, including the right to form, join and participate effectively in non-governmental organizations which seek the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, including trade unions and human rights monitoring groups.”

The United States, therefore, remains deeply concerned by the Russian government’s ongoing criminal investigation against Valentina Cherevatenko, a leader of the NGOs Union of Women of Don and the Women of the Don Foundation for Civil Society Development. This investigation - the first of its kind for alleged non-compliance with the Russian Federation’s Foreign Agents Law - is clearly designed to send a warning to all NGO leaders whose organizations have been declared so-called “foreign agents.”

The United States reiterates its call on the Russian Federation to halt the investigation into Ms. Cherevatenko’s activities and to adhere fully to its OSCE commitments and international obligations regarding the exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of association. We applaud Ms. Cherevatenko for her outstanding work on human rights education, peace building, and humanitarian issues. An investigation like this, whether by local or federal officials, is a means of intimidation and harassment, and represents an escalation in ongoing government efforts to restrict Russia’s civil society.

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. The people of Russia deserve transparent and accountable governance, equal treatment under the law, and the ability to exercise their rights without fear of retribution. We again urge the government to reconsider this law and engage in a genuine dialogue with NGOs and their supporters.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.