



United States Mission to the OSCE

On the Russian presidential elections and Russia's violations of OSCE principles and commitments

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires Katherine Brucker
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
March 21, 2024

The Russian presidential election that concluded on Sunday, March 17, was neither free nor fair. It occurred in an environment of intense political repression that has marginalized or completely silenced all independent voices. Russian authorities denied registration to the few anti-war opposition candidates they have not already jailed or driven into exile, ensuring voters had no real choice when casting their ballots. The voting process itself was completely opaque, as the Kremlin sidelined or shut down independent groups dedicated to election monitoring and failed to invite the OSCE or any other credible international organization to observe and assess the conduct of the election.

Against this backdrop, Vladimir Putin's pre-determined victory was no surprise – although the 87 percent of the vote that he supposedly won is farcical, even in this context. And here I would contrast these results with those in Montenegro where only three percent of Russians there voted for Vladimir Putin. The so-called voting that took place in the temporarily occupied areas of Ukraine was illegitimate and nothing more than a propaganda exercise to attempt to strengthen Russia's false claims to Ukraine's sovereign territory. The United States cannot and will not recognize any elections conducted against Ukraine's will on its sovereign territory.

The Kremlin's internal repression has only intensified since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, in part to silence any criticism of the war. As ODIHR concluded on March 8, "the targeting of dissent in the Russian Federation is alarming and fundamentally undermines human rights and democracy." The Kremlin has nearly eliminated space for free and open civic discourse while deepening its campaign of intimidation, violence, and censorship against independent media and civil society. The Kremlin is desperately trying to control the flow of information into, within, and out of Russia. Authorities have deprived Russian citizens of their right to seek, receive, and impart information, including to inform political participation. As the *New York Times* reported on March 15, Russian authorities have restricted digital tools used to get around internet blocks, throttled access to communications apps in specific areas during protests, and expanded a program to cut off websites and online services, using lessons of censorship learned from other countries.

Over a month since Aleksey Navalny's tragic death in custody, we remain concerned about the health and treatment of the over 680 political prisoners in Russia. We call on Russian authorities to immediately and unconditionally release all political activists, human rights defenders, journalists, and others unjustly detained and imprisoned, including Vladimir Kara-Murza, Aleksey Gorinov, Aleksandra Skochilenko, Maria Ponomarenko, Oleg Orlov, Yury

Dmitriyev, Aleksey Moskalyov, Igor Baryshnikov, Ilya Yashin, Alsu Kurmasheva, and many others.

Russia's presidential election once again illustrated the extent to which the Kremlin has denied its citizens any meaningful opportunities to participate in a transparent, genuine democratic process. We applaud the Russian opposition activists, civil society organizations, and independent journalists who continue to peacefully advocate for change and accountability, and we commend their efforts to create a better future for their country.

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