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before, during and after election day (with focus on legal framework,  
media, campaign finance and gender)**

**Co-operation between the Central Election Commission of the Russian Federation and  
civil society institutions**

In accordance with Russian legislation, the primary purpose of the Central Election Commission (CEC) and the whole election commission system is to ensure that the voting rights of Russian citizens are exercised and protected. In this respect, we consider co-operation with civil society to be a priority.

The crucial work we undertake in this regard is as follows:

- Establishing effective communication between the State as represented by the Commission and civil society bodies, reaching every voter;
- Expert analysis of the legislation, the current situation and the decisions of the Commission;
- Monitoring the operation of the electoral system.

During the decades that the Russian electoral system has been in operation, various forms of co-operation with civil society have been established and are evolving. The CEC participates actively in the events of all kinds of public bodies (forums, round tables, debates of human rights organizations) and educational projects to increase the legal culture of various categories of citizens (school and youth parliaments, Olympiads, conferences).

The number of non-governmental organizations dealing with the protection of citizens' voting rights increases annually, with leading roles played by the Russian Foundation for Free Elections, the Co-ordinating Committee on the protection of citizens' voting rights, the Civic Monitoring association, which is one of the most

authoritative public bodies on the protection of voters' rights in Russia and comprises more than 20 organizations, and the "Honest elections" public council.

We have seen the Public Chamber, which contains prominent representatives of Russian civil society and the representatives of religious faiths, take shape before our very eyes. Members include well-known human rights activists such as Anatoliy Kucherenka, leader of the all-Russian Civil Society public movement and chairman of the non-profit foundation Institute for Democracy and Co-operation, Sergey Abakumov, chairman of the National Civic Committee for co-operation with law enforcement, legislative and judicial bodies and the independent organization "In support of civil society", Sergey Markov, member of the council of the President of the Russian Federation for the development of civil society and human rights and Darya Miloslavskaya, chairperson of the board of the non-profit partnership "Lawyers for civil society".

Our fundamental objective both during election campaigns and between elections is to respond to all their appeals and invitations, and to submit to the public for appraisal all significant decisions, especially those being prepared for the first time. Once a month, only the Civic Monitoring association and the Public Chamber invite CEC representatives to discuss current electoral law issues, the results of previous campaigns (including at the municipal level) and legislative initiatives.

Representatives of civil society belong to CEC working groups, for example on awareness-raising debates and with regard to the airtime allocated to broadcasting the activities of the parliamentary parties. One active working group involves representatives of the largest disabled people's organizations. Co-operation with representatives of civil society in forming working groups means that the quality of decisions can be improved and their transparency ensured.

One of the most important mechanisms for communication with civil society is the CEC Public Consultative Committee on Scientific Methods, which now brings together 195 leading Russian academics, specialists in law and the electoral process and prominent public figures. Among their number are seven Russian Academy of Sciences academicians, four Russian Academy of Sciences corresponding members, 83 doctors of science and 54 professors. Of all those I could name, I shall mention only the eminent legal specialist Marat Baglay (author of a number of learned works and twice elected chairman of the Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation).

The Consultative Committee comprises 12 thematic sections. A key expert and communication platform for the CEC, it is a forum where the evolution of the electoral system is discussed, where expert conclusions on the CEC's draft documents and guidance materials are prepared and where experts submit their own proposals on improving the electoral process for the CEC to discuss. Prior to the parliamentary and presidential elections, it was only after the Committee's appraisal of documents on international co-operation, the organization of voting, the activities of the election commissions, the organization of video monitoring and many other subjects that they were submitted to the CEC for review.

Another way of ensuring effective co-operation with civil society is through working with the media. The CEC is open to providing information on an unprecedented scale.

Active public monitoring has also been achieved through call centres dealing with citizens' enquiries and Internet portals, where the public can ask various questions regarding the protection of their voting rights. The demand for these grows from one election to the next. The CEC helps with organization by reviewing the queries and checking information as required. Specifically, call centres were run by the Russian Foundation for Free Elections, the Civic Monitoring association and the public chambers of the constituent entities of the Russian Federation.

An analysis of the call centres' work indicates that the number of complaints received was not high. For example, only nine per cent of citizens' calls to the Russian Foundation for Free Elections call centre were to report supposed election irregularities. Most often – in 63 per cent of cases – citizens were seeking clarification on various issues related to the organization of the elections and electoral legislation. The level of confidence in the call centres is evidenced by the fact that almost a quarter of callers communicated their initiatives and proposals for improving the work of the State bodies and the electoral system.

The CEC co-operates with all traditional religious faiths represented in Russia. As recently as the end of 2011, CEC chairman Mr. Vladimir Churov held working meetings with Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and all Russia, Metropolitan Korniliev of the Orthodox Old Believers' Church of Moscow and all Russia and with the leaders of Muslim and Jewish organizations. Meetings were also held with many national cultural associations, including those for Armenia and Azerbaijan. Regular co-operation with the Commission gives religious representatives the opportunity to respond to citizens' questions on exercising their voting rights.

Civil society bodies are not only involved in improving election practices and election monitoring, but are also one of the most important sources of members of election commissions. Public organizations and local voters' assemblies are entitled to stand for municipal election commissions and for territorial, district and precinct election commissions and constituted 55 per cent of precinct election commissions for the 2012 presidential elections.

The campaigns conducted bear witness to the increasing maturity of civil society and its involvement in the election process.

Information from surveys of public opinion, specifically the All-Russia Public Opinion Research Centre survey (carried out on 10 and 11 March 2012) and the Levada Centre survey (carried out from 16 to 19 March 2012) shows that over 60 per cent of Russian voters believe that the elections were an open and honest political contest, and they are satisfied with the results.

We can confidently say that a major contributing factor in this has been the active participation of civil society institutions in the election process and public monitoring of the voting.