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Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
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1336th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

23 September 2021

**On foreign interference in the elections to the State Duma of the
Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation**

Madam Chairperson,

Elections to the State Duma were held in the Russian Federation from 17 to 19 September. According to the Central Election Commission, the final turnout was 51.68 per cent. Remote electronic voting was conducted in seven regions. Participation in online voting was 95.6 per cent in Moscow and 93.21 per cent in the other regions. A total of 6,651 journalists from 2,144 media outlets worked at the polling stations to cover the voting. Present at the elections were observers from the Commonwealth of Independent States, the Collective Security Treaty Organization, the Union State, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe – a total of 245 people from almost 60 countries. They all gave a generally positive assessment of the voting process. The voting took place in full compliance with the provisions of domestic legislation and international law.

Unfortunately, during the election campaign we were confronted with numerous instances of outside interference and attempts to discredit the legitimacy of the voting. At the Permanent Council, we have been hearing statements by some colleagues since the summer that the integrity and transparency of the voting in Russia is in question. In other words, the elections had not yet taken place, but the verdict had already been pronounced.

In a European Parliament report dated 16 September – the day before the voting – the authors stated that “the EU must be prepared not to recognise the Parliament of Russia and to consider asking for Russia’s suspension from international organisations with parliamentary assemblies ... if the 2021 parliamentary elections in Russia are recognised as ... having been conducted in violation of democratic principles and international law”. Who, in the European Parliament’s opinion, should give this recognition? OSCE participating States, for example, have not conferred such a right on anyone. The “ODIHR syndrome” is plain to see – an unsubstantiated desire to be the supreme authority and arbitrarily set the rules.

In view of the decision by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly not to observe the elections, I recall that Russia fully complied with its commitments under paragraph 8 of the CSCE Copenhagen Document by inviting observers. Again, we, the participating States, did not give the ODIHR the right to dictate the parameters of international monitoring

of our electoral processes. As a result, the ODIHR and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly have found themselves isolated in their desire to impose their conditions.

Questions remain for the Office. On the eve of the elections, videos of seminars by the Golos movement, which is so zealously defended by Western countries, appeared in the media. At these seminars, representatives of this association instructed their members on how to stage provocations to disrupt the voting and create reasons to declare the Russian elections illegitimate. This was done under the banner of the ODIHR. The video is available on the Internet. Did the ODIHR sanction the use of its name for such purposes?

Attempts to influence the result of the vote through hacking attacks on the Central Election Commission's website, online voting systems and election-related portals have been documented. A number of cyberattacks were launched from foreign Internet Protocol (IP) addresses. Half of them are registered in the United States of America, a quarter in Germany, and the rest in other countries, including Ukraine and Lithuania. All of the attacks were repelled. Nevertheless, the Russian authorities will be issuing a remonstrance to the countries in question with the aim of identifying the offenders and bringing them to justice.

We note the direct involvement of a number of Western information technology (IT) monopolists in the attempts to discredit the elections. We have already spoken at the OSCE on several occasions about the arbitrariness of "Big Tech". We are referring to the placement on the servers and online stores of Apple and Google of several applications that were clearly designed to violate Russian electoral law. United States IP addresses were used most frequently to circumvent the blocking of one of these applications. The concrete evidence has been handed over to the United States for examination and response.

The failure to respond to the Russian authorities' demands to remove the extremist content, particularly in the midst of an election campaign, points to the direct involvement of these corporations in efforts to undermine democratic processes in Russia. Apple and Google did indeed remove the malicious applications on 17 September. However, the influence of Internet monopolists on domestic political processes, including in our own country, remains a fact.

There are also other issues relating to Apple and Google. In particular, direct links have come to light between certain representatives of corporations responsible for providing technical support to the "non-systemic opposition" accused of extremist activities, and former high-ranking Pentagon officials who are now part of the management of major IT companies in the United States. For example, it was revealed that Roman Rubanov, the author of the Smart Voting application for the iPhone, is a project director for the US aerospace company Momentus Space Inc. At the same time, the President of Momentus is Fred Kennedy, a former high-ranking Pentagon official, and the Chief Executive Officer is John Rood, former US Under Secretary of Defense for Policy. The company's Board of Directors includes Victorino Mercado, former US Assistant Secretary of Defense for Strategy, Plans, and Capabilities. In addition, the Anti-Corruption Foundation's applications were developed by Dmitry Bochkov, a programmer at the company Luka in San Francisco in the United States. It is hard to believe that these are coincidences.

In this context, we consider it necessary to develop a universal and fair framework for interaction between States, their associations and "tech giants", and to agree on requirements for the transparency of content moderation policies by digital platform operators.

Foreign embassies in Moscow were implicated in supporting the extremist organization Anti-Corruption Foundation and its Internet project through hired Russian citizens who transferred funds to the Foundation. Of these individuals, 16 were employees of the Germany embassy, four of the US embassy,

two of the French embassy, and one each from the embassies of Denmark, Switzerland, Spain, Italy and Canada. Of the employees registered on the Smart Voting website, 49 were from the German embassy, 17 from the US embassy, 14 from the French embassy, four from the UK embassy, three from the Netherlands embassy, and one each from the embassies of Switzerland, the Czech Republic, Ireland and Canada.

I should like to note that, in terms of the stories about Western embassies funding Alexei Navalny's projects, we are only pointing out the evidence that has been uncovered. And the evidence is as follows: foreign embassies in Moscow hired Russian citizens (doing so in different ways, with each embassy having its own practice) and paid them money, which they in turn transferred to the relevant structures. These are simply the facts. We confirmed them ourselves. Why have we drawn attention to this topic? Because our diplomats have been expelled from a number of countries under the invented pretext of interfering in electoral processes and supporting some opposition party, movement or the like. Our diplomats that have been accused of interference have never been presented with a shred of evidence in principle. Sanctions have also been imposed on Russian organizations and individuals – also, however, with no evidence. Why these double standards?

In addition, we followed closely active campaigning and awareness-raising by activists sponsored by the West. At a number of events held outside of Russia on the eve of the Russian elections, participants, including members of Navalny's organizations, contemplated the non-recognition of the voting in our country. These gatherings included the Vilnius Russia Forum on 19 August, supported by the Lithuanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the "Fear and Loathing in Russia" pre-event at the Lennart Meri Conference on 3 September, supported by the Estonian Ministry of Defence, and the notorious Crimea Platform. Freedom of speech and of assembly, of course, has not been abolished. But if similar events were to take place in Russia on the same subject and along the same lines as those talking points on the eve of an election in a Western country, we would immediately be accused of interference.

Moreover, in a number of OSCE participating States, organizations are being established with the aim of discrediting the Russian elections through propaganda and with the help of fake "observers" and by stirring up protests.

For example, a certain Centre for Political Emigration has been established in Georgia, the activities of which are linked to Nikolai Levshits, an employee of the US Free Russia Foundation, which has been recognized as an undesirable organization in Russia. The Centre's tasks include "launching an institute of bloggers", targeted funding of certain Russians living abroad who are "needed" by the Centre to disseminate anti-Russian propaganda material, selecting prospective activists and participating in election campaigns in Russia by discrediting them with the help of specially trained "observers".

A similar organization has been set up in Lithuania with the support of the local authorities – a so-called think tank associated with opposition member Garry Kasparov. In recent months, the structure has been active in gathering pre-election information for subsequent interpretation in order to discredit the Russian electoral system. Why? To subsequently justify the West's decision not to recognize the Russian elections and to impose additional anti-Russian restrictions, of course. Kasparov's Free Russia Forum also announced that it would hold an event in Vilnius following the most recent elections to the Duma in order to analyse their results and improve the performance of the respective parties in the next elections. To this end, in particular, the creation of a regional hub of the European Digital Media Observatory, based at Charles University in the Czech Republic, is already being considered to reinforce anti-Russian sentiments in Eastern Europe.

There have also been attempts to stir up protests abroad. In Poland, for example, on the instructions of the US Department of State and with the support of the local authorities, a certain WOT Foundation tried to involve representatives of the Russian-speaking diaspora in protests outside the Russian embassy in Warsaw and outside Russian consular offices.

In Sweden, at the end of August, the so-called Association of the Schools of Political Studies of the Council of Europe attempted to organize various protests outside Russian diplomatic missions on 20 and 21 September. Similar protests were planned in Berlin, Vilnius, Warsaw and Prague.

Even attempts to produce fake news in clandestine video studios were carried out with foreign support.

We have also taken note of Western sponsorship of individual non-governmental organizations and their anti-Russian activities – in particular, of a video circulated in the media in which Carl Gershman, head of the US National Endowment for Democracy, talks about the Endowment's massive financial support for specific political groups across Russia and their strategies for the elections to the Duma. According to Mr. Gershman, Navalny's associates and related groups are "very successful in raising funds" from the United States. We cannot see this as anything other than irrefutable evidence of the United States' desire to interfere in the internal affairs of the Russian Federation.

Apart from the United States, the Danish Government has also been seen doing this. In Denmark, anti-Russian social movements affiliated with Navalny's group are working to ramp up anti-Russian sentiment in Europe, notably using topics related to the parliamentary elections in Russia.

In Germany, an organization called UnKremlin has been set up with the participation of the ruling Christian Democratic Union party. Its aim is reportedly to implement projects by such undesirable organizations in the Russian Federation as the Forum of Russian-Speaking Europeans and the Centre for Liberal Modernity.

Let me recall one of the principles underlying the OSCE and the relations of its participating States. Namely, the principle of non-intervention in internal affairs established by the Helsinki Final Act. Accordingly, "[t]he participating States will refrain from any intervention, direct or indirect, individual or collective, in the internal or external affairs falling within the domestic jurisdiction of another participating State."

In view of these facts, we call for an end to the erosion of the foundations of the Organization through interference in the internal affairs of sovereign States.

Thank you for your attention.