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ENGLISH only

**Response by Sweden, to the current issue raised by the Russian Federation regarding the general elections in Sweden on September 14, as delivered by Ambassador Fredrik Löjdquist at the 1026<sup>th</sup> Permanent Council**

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At a recent meeting of the Permanent Council, the Russian Federation raised a current issue regarding the Swedish general elections of 14 September this year. We would like to take this opportunity to return to this issue.

First, let me once again underline that we very much value the practice of bringing up questions of concern regarding the implementation of our common commitments at the Permanent Council, in line with what was agreed by our countries in Moscow and Astana. Let me also underline that Sweden considers the implementation of election related OSCE commitments as a central part of our OSCE aquis. We thank the Russian Federation for raising this issue and for correcting the factual errors in their oral statement, pertaining to the invitation by Sweden of international observers to the September 14 elections, in the subsequently distributed English translation of their statement.

The Russian Federation has expressed concern about the lack of international observers at the general elections. In connection to all general elections in Sweden, international visitors come to observe the election processes - as representatives of organisations, individual countries or as private persons. Since the voting and counting processes are open to the public, no special permission or accreditation is needed. Anyone may therefore observe voting and counting, as long as the observation does not intervene with these processes. However, in accordance with our OSCE commitments, we also invite international observers. For the September 14 elections, Sweden issued an invitation to participating states, ODIHR, OSCE PA and other appropriate

20 November 2014

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institutions and organizations both in writing, and orally, here in this room, at the Permanent Council on April 10 this year.

In addition, the Russian Federation had questions regarding the secrecy of the vote, and placing of ballots in voting places. In Sweden, voters have access to ballot papers at a variety of places. They are available at all voting places but are also distributed by parties directly to voters in various manners. The secrecy of the vote is therefore, according to the law, determined by the voter behind the screen. The voters cast their vote behind a screen where nobody can see how they vote.

Some election related incidents have caught the interest of the Russian Federation. Anyone entitled to vote who considers that a mistake or an error has been made which has affected the results of an election, may appeal this result. A party participating in the election may also submit appeals. Appeals must have been received within ten days of the announcement of the election results.

The Election Review Board can overturn an election and decree a re-election in a certain election or a certain constituency if an error has been made that could be presumed to influence the outcome of the election. If the error can be corrected through a new counting of the votes or some other lesser measure, the Election Review Board can instead mandate the authority that made the decision subjected to the appeal to correct the error.

As for the elections to the Swedish Riksdag (the Swedish Parliament), a total of 19 appeals have been received. They include appeals related to an incident of 145 uncounted votes in the Piteå municipality - not thousands, as the Russian Federation stated. All these appeals are now being reviewed by the Election Review Board.

Finally, the Russian Federation expressed concern about police protection of demonstrations of the so called "Party of Swedes", as well as increased activity of extreme right wing parties in Sweden in connection with the

20 November 2014

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elections. The right to freedom of expression, as well as to freedom of association and peaceful assembly are enshrined in the Swedish constitution, and are cornerstones in the Swedish legal system. The scope for restrictions of these fundamental rights is limited by the constitution and our international obligations. There is a provision on agitation against a national or ethnic group that applies to racist messages disseminated within an organisation as well as among the public. In practice, this makes it impossible for groups advocating racial discrimination to operate without crimes being committed.

Thank you, Chair.