

United States Mission to the OSCE

Reply to Russia on Harassment and Intimidation of the Political Opposition in Russia

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
June 2, 2016

Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just have a couple of quick comments.

One, in answer to our distinguished Russian colleague's question about my use of the term "violence." Just to be clear: the definition that we would use for violence is any kind of physical attack, and I am very surprised to hear that the Russian Ambassador doesn't consider throwing disinfectant in somebody's face to be a violent attack. I just clarify that we consider violence to be a physical attack on someone, and so I think the attack that happened in front of the cinema – which did involve, by the definition that I think the Russian Federation and the United States share, children, that is to say, people at the age of 18 and under – we would count that as violence.

Second, just to answer the question about the fact that there are sometimes things thrown at American political leaders, although some of the incidents cited happened outside the United States – does that make us worry about the condition of democracy in America? I think it's a fair question. I think the answer would be no because it happens in a different context. Obviously these are, as you say, regrettable incidents, but it happens in a different context, and that is a context in which violence is not used as a political tool. And the concern about the acts of harassment of political opposition in Russia comes on the heels of, for instance, a person who holds a government position in Russia – Kadyrov – threatening political opposition with death threats; it comes on the heels of depicting people with gun sights on their foreheads; it comes on the heels of the murder of Nemtsov in the shadow of the Kremlin; it comes on the heels of the killing of journalists like Estemirova and Politovskaya.

And so when violence is used as a political tool – an unacceptable political tool we should say – when violence is used as a political tool in a society, then threats or harassment that could encourage others to take violent actions have to be looked at with concern, and looked at in a different way than maybe those same things would be looked at in another society. So that explains why we see these things differently. I hope that clarifies for our distinguished Russian colleague.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.