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**STATEMENT BY  
MR. ALEKSANDR VOLGAREV, DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF  
THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE 1415th MEETING OF THE  
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

16 March 2023

**In response to the report by the Director of the  
OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, Matteo Mecacci**

Mr. Chairperson,  
Director,

We have studied your report carefully and should like to comment on it.

Since Russia opposes the “Ukrainization” of our Organization’s work, we should like to start by discussing the reason for which the Office was established over thirty years ago. I am referring to the monitoring of elections in OSCE participating States.

It would seem that, over such a considerable period of time, the methodology should have been perfected in order to meet the high criteria that were laid down when this executive structure was established. The reality, however, is different. The “methodology” is overtly characterized by double standards that are applied to countries depending on whether they are located to the west or to the east of the Austrian capital.

Take, for example, the size of the missions. On the surface, everything looked good in 2022. Ten of the fifteen missions went to Western States. However, there is an important nuance – these were either election assessment missions or groups of experts. That is to say, monitoring was conducted on a reduced scale and was not focused on the electoral process as a whole, unlike in the countries “east of Vienna”. This is despite serious problems in a number of Western OSCE participating States concerning elections and other related areas and the all-round failure of these countries to implement previous recommendations by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR).

We have cited specific examples of the Office “ironing out” such shortcomings in order to assign the desired monitoring format, for example in France, Latvia and a number of other countries. As for the deployment of two full-scale missions to Hungary and Bulgaria, the political context, rather than the proverbial “need”, played a role.

Let us turn to the statistics, which also confirm the persistence of geographical imbalances. There were 557 observers deployed in Western alliance countries, compared to 967 in other participating States. This trend is likely to continue in 2023. At the moment, large-scale ODIHR missions are planned for the Central Asian States, the Balkans and Türkiye.

However, a full-scale monitoring mission would be required in, say, Estonia, where a row broke out after the parliamentary elections over the integrity of the results of the electronic voting. The Office's experts did not have any complaints about it at the assessment stage. Neither did they complain about the situation of national minorities. In particular, we did not see any expression of concern about the consistent policy of assimilation of Russian speakers and the "Estonianization" of education.

If you, Director, are trying to present these things as the gold standard of electoral methodology, then the ODIHR has major problems with objectively assessing its work in this area. For the good of the Office and the OSCE as a whole, we call once again for a return to the development of uniform monitoring criteria.

Director,

A similarly bleak picture can be observed for other thematic reports. As the year 2022 showed, the Office failed its impartiality test miserably. The already steadfast anti-Russian stance of this executive structure has taken on grotesque forms against the backdrop of the Russian special military operation.

Here are some statistics. Between February 2022 and February of this year, the ODIHR issued 19 press releases with anti-Russian content. The number of tweets was even higher, at 29. We should not forget your social media posts either, Director. You have made remarks about my country at least sixteen times. Almost no other OSCE participating State can boast of such "popularity" among the leadership and staff of the Office. Furthermore, we resent the use of highly confrontational language on the Russian special military operation in the reports. Given that we have repeatedly pointed out the inadmissibility of using such language in the Office's official publications, the reluctance to change anything looks like deliberate disregard for the position of one participating State by an executive structure that is also accountable to it.

The Office's involvement in openly pro-Ukrainian extrabudgetary projects in violation of its mandate, the provision of "technical" assistance in the invocation of archaic OSCE human rights "mechanisms" against Russia, the drafting of objectionable anti-Russian reports and many other things do not fall under the definition of "impartiality" either. One cannot help but be struck by the persistent efforts of the Office's leadership – which could be put to better use – "[to] continue to work to contribute to accountability for all those responsible for human rights violations [by] supporting and assisting prosecution and investigation platforms".

Maybe the focus should have been on the faithful implementation of the existing commitments and mandate? After all, there are plenty of problems in the region – take for example the rise of neo-Nazism, gross violations of the right to freedom of movement, prejudice against Russian and Russian-speaking populations and discrimination in sport.

For many years we have been calling in vain for the issue of children to be properly addressed. However, the ODIHR's interest in the topic became apparent only this year and then only in a very specific context. Incidentally, it was discussed at length by representatives of the Western alliance countries during the Winter Meeting of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly.

The topic of religious freedom deserves the ODIHR's special attention. Especially against the backdrop of the frenzied campaign to curtail the rights of Orthodox believers in Ukraine. This is based on

the repressive policy of the Kyiv regime and its Western handlers aimed at destroying the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. We have spoken about this in detail several times at Permanent Council meetings. We expect the Office to issue a proper public response to the decision by the Kyiv city authorities to evict the monks of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church from Kyiv Pechersk Lavra. This discriminatory stunt, which violates a number of international legal instruments and the country's national legislation, should not go unnoticed.

Against this background, the claims that the Office's activities last year were supported by an absolute majority of participating States do not stand up to scrutiny. The work of the OSCE executive structure must be aligned with the interests of all the participating States and be built on consensus.

Director,

We take note of the statement that the current economic situation and particularly the high levels of inflation are exerting substantial pressure on the Office's activities. Indeed, inflation in Poland, where the ODIHR is based, is now hitting record highs, requiring a sharp increase in staff costs, rental of premises, servicing of meetings and other operating costs. We believe that this situation once again counts in favour of the Russian position regarding the need to transfer the staff of this OSCE institution to another, politically neutral and less expensive duty station.

We cannot agree with you, Director, that further work by the Office on the basis of zero nominal growth would be unsustainable and could prove fatal in the long term. The ODIHR already has all the funds it needs to cover its emerging resource requirements. All that is necessary is simply to use them more cost-effectively and in full compliance with the approved mandates. As soon as the Office begins seriously looking for savings and stops addressing issues that fall outside its scope of competence, its budget deficit will immediately disappear.

In this connection, we are obliged to reiterate that, in the current circumstances, Russia considers any increase in expenditure for this institution to be unacceptable. At the same time, refusal to follow a policy of zero nominal growth will not lead to an increase in the level of the ODIHR's funding from the Unified Budget. Last year's experience proved this convincingly.

We regret to note that the excessive and unjustified "appetites" of the third dimension institutions are hampering consensus on the approval of the Unified Budget, which is causing the rest of the OSCE structures to suffer. As you can see from the reasoning behind our statement, we are particularly dissatisfied with the work of the ODIHR and do not intend to derogate from our principled position. We therefore appeal to you, Director, to withdraw your demand for additional funds and agree to zero nominal growth.

Imagine that we are on the board of directors of a large company and we vote categorically against paying your division a bonus. At the same time, we do not raise the issue of disbanding the division or changing its head. Let us be realistic – you will still get your share through extrabudgetary funding; there are plenty of willing donors among the participating States.

I am sure that, if you take this noble and courageous step, your example will be followed by Ms. Teresa Ribeiro and Mr. Kairat Abdrakhmanov, and the Organization will have a real chance of finally achieving an approved budget.

Thank you for your attention.