



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Russian Law on Foreign Agents

As delivered by Political Officer Tim Fingarson
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
July 5, 2012

The United States notes with concern the proposed draft legislation currently scheduled for its first reading in the Russian Duma tomorrow, July 6.

If passed, the law would require domestic nongovernmental organizations (or NGOs) accepting foreign contributions and engaging in “political activities” to register as “foreign agents.” As Secretary Clinton underscored in St. Petersburg just a week ago, we want Russia to fulfill its own potential. That means giving the Russian people the chance to develop a vibrant civil society, including organizations that promote free and fair elections for Russians, fight discrimination against Russians, and protect Russian workers’ rights.

We also wish to clarify arguments drawing parallels between the proposed Duma bill and United States’ Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA). The draft Russian law, as we understand it, requires registration as a foreign agent of Russian groups receiving foreign funds and engaging in political activity, defined broadly. The U.S. law requires entities to register if they work to advance the interests of a foreign principal. The majority of FARA registrants are paid lobbyists, public relations offices, and law firms – not non-profit organizations. Registration under FARA is not required for U.S. organizations receiving funding from foreign sources. The U.S. government has produced a fact sheet on FARA, which we will be happy to share.

Noting also the speed with which the draft law appears to be moving through the Duma, the United States strongly urges Russian authorities to carefully consider this legislation and ensure that its provisions meet Russia’s international human rights obligations and OSCE commitments on human rights, fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law. The OSCE’s Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights has experts who can review draft legislation being considered by OSCE participating States to ensure that it meets those standards, and we encourage the Russian Federation to consider requesting ODIHR expertise in this regard.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.