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Permanent Mission of Ukraine
to the International
Organizations in Vienna

Statement on “Freedom of Assembly and Associations in Russia”

As delivered by Ms. Yevheniia Filipenko,
Deputy Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the International Organizations in Vienna,
to the 1185th meeting of the Permanent Council,
10 May 2018

Mr. Chairperson,

The delegation of Ukraine aligns itself with the statement of the European Union which we fully support. We would now wish to add some remarks in the national capacity.

We are appalled over gross denial by the authorities of the Russian Federation of fundamental freedoms to the citizens of this country. On 6 May 2018 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine strongly condemned the brutal attacks of the punitive units of the Kremlin regime on Russian citizens who had taken to the streets in numerous cities to participate in #HeIsNotOurTsar (#ОнНамНеЦарь) peaceful protest of 5 May.

We note with concern that the Kremlin employed so-called “Cossaks” paramilitaries to beat and disperse the peaceful demonstrators in Moscow. It must be noted that former members of terrorist organizations in Donbas were identified among these “Cossaks”.

Detentions and arrests of reportedly over 1,600 citizens, who wished to exercise their Constitutional right, testified to the fear of the regime and the shameful state policy of suppression of human rights and fundamental freedoms, attempts to stamp out dissent in Russia. Use of violence against minors and young people is particularly outraging.

Mr. Chairperson,

As repeatedly emphasised by the delegation of Ukraine, there is a direct link between the internal oppression of human rights and freedoms in Russia and the external aggression of this country posing a grave threat to its neighbours and the European security order. This link underscores the enduring relevance and validity of the OSCE’s comprehensive security concept which relates the maintenance of peace to the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Just over a year ago, in our statement of 30 March 2017, we drew attention of the Permanent Council to the unprecedented in last decades number of detention of

more than 1000 protesters in peaceful assemblies against corruption of 26 March 2017. Today we continue to witness the full-scale clamp-down by Russian authorities on human rights and freedoms, particularly in the territories illegally occupied by Russia, unfounded denial of the right to peaceful assembly, abuse by the authorities of their powers and unwillingness to grant equal political opportunities. In the current environment in Russia there are no possibilities for people to make their voice heard in protest of Russia's war against Ukraine.

This troubling human rights record, coupled with Russia's flagrant and ongoing violation of international law, should prompt every OSCE participating State to consider whether it wants to allow the Russian regime to use the upcoming FIFA World Cup 2018 as an instrument of propaganda to whitewash its stained reputation. With the aim of upholding the OSCE principles and commitments it would be most appropriate to refrain from political level visits.

We take note of the reported intentions of the Russian authorities to engage the above "Cossacks" paramilitaries to "protection of public order" during the FIFA World Cup. The manner that they acted on 6 May and their well-known intolerance towards other nations prompt serious concerns over the safety of those foreign football fans, who may decide to visit the competition. We deem important to raise awareness of the security risks that foreign football fans may face while visiting Russia.

In this worrying context we encourage the Russian Federation to consider inviting an OSCE Human Rights Assessment Mission to thoroughly examine the situation and elaborate respective recommendations in line with the OSCE commitments and international standards.

In the meantime, we encourage the OSCE Chairmanship, its Special Representative on Youth and Security, and the OSCE Institutions to use all available assets and instruments to monitor and react to the developments in Russia.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.