



## United States Mission to the OSCE

### **Response to Russia regarding principles of ODIHR election observation**

As delivered by Ambassador Ian Kelly  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
March 29, 2012

The United States is compelled to respond as a general principle to the suggestion that participating States develop normative principles for ODIHR election observation – this is what amounts to political guidance for OSCE institutions. We have a notably different vision. We believe it is our role to ensure that the OSCE’s institutions are able to monitor states’ compliance with their commitments free of such political direction or influence.

The OSCE’s institutions – we believe – are at the core of this organization.

It is never easy for any of us – including my country – to listen to criticism; and harder still, to act on that criticism. But that’s precisely why we created ODIHR, the RFoM and the HCNM. The United States is assessed and criticized by these institutions when questions arise about our implementation of our commitments. We have been criticized by the RFOM for the Stop Online Piracy Act (SOPA). ODIHR has raised issues about the freedom of assembly in response to the Occupy Wall Street phenomenon, and ODIHR monitors our elections commitments as well.

The United States will not support political control over these institutions or their assessments and reports. To do so would immediately undercut the credibility and the value of the OSCE’s documents. ODIHR provides an important, objective assessment of how governments conduct elections – which is the most fundamental element of democracy. Governments have no more right to control or direct these assessments than they do to control or direct how media cover the work of our government.

OSCE’s election observation methods – both ODIHR and the Parliamentary Assembly – set a standard for the rest of the world. Every participating State should be proud that we are part of an organization best known for monitoring elections and improving elections standards. ODIHR, the Parliamentary Assembly and their elections practices are among the very best parts of the OSCE and have endured the test of time.

We stand ready to engage in a comparative discussion of elections observations methods. But we will go into it guided by a basic premise that the OSCE’s institutions must remain autonomous.

And I must say, Mr. Chairman, that those who question the institutions’ autonomy arguably call into question their commitment to the principles and values of this organization.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.