



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Deterioration of Russia's Protection of OSCE Commitments

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
March 20, 2014

The wholesale violations of OSCE principles and international law in Russia's armed intervention in Ukraine and purported annexation of Crimea should not cause us to ignore the deepening deterioration of fundamental freedoms in Russia itself. The United States has not failed to notice that as Russia pursues illegal acts of aggression outside of its borders, it has further clamped down on human rights internally—and the internal situation has gone from bad to worse, even in the last three weeks. The media freedom situation in Russia continues to deteriorate. Both the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media and Reporters Without Borders have expressed deep concern about the shrinking space for independent media in Russia, online and off. As we've noted before, Russia's only independent TV network, Dozhd, was removed from major cable networks in February and may never recover its lost viewers or revenue. Cable operators are reported to have admitted privately that they dropped Dozhd in response to pressure from the Russian government.

Since Russia's incursion into Ukraine, the Russian government has taken further steps to silence its media critics, and its allies in the State Duma have threatened to do more. Russia officially banned three independent websites earlier this month, grani.ru, kasparov.ru, and ej.ru, under the new law about which we expressed concerns last month allowing the blocking of sites – without a court order – that “incite illegal activity and participation in mass activities conducted in violation of the established order.” The blog written by leading opposition figure Alexey Navalny, who remains under house arrest, was also banned.

Last week Lenta.ru Editor-in-Chief Galina Timchenko was fired and replaced by the former editor of a pro-Kremlin Internet publication, after accusations by Russia's state media regulator that Lenta.ru had engaged in extremist activity when it interviewed a Ukrainian ultranationalist paramilitary leader. Lenta.ru had developed a strong reputation as one of Russia's most reliable and accurate news sources. Sixty-nine staff members, including most of Lenta.ru's reporters, resigned in protest after the move, issuing a public letter stating, “The trouble is not that we've lost our jobs. The trouble is that you've got nothing to read.”

We are also concerned by an extremism investigation opened against Vologda journalist Roman Romanenko after he wrote a satirical post on Facebook on March 4 asking President Vladimir Putin to dispatch troops to protect his region's Russian speakers from corrupt officials. In addition, we take note of reports that another journalist, Alexandr Yerenko, was fired on March 5 from his job at the Ural-Inform news agency for sharing Romanenko's post on his Facebook page. In addition, many dozens of protesters were detained on March 2 in

Moscow, and there are reports that the total number detained at anti-war demonstrations in recent weeks is in the hundreds.

Mr. Chairman, these clear encroachments on media freedom and freedom of expression are not isolated incidents; rather, they form part of a deeply worrying trend of Russia's larger suppression of fundamental freedoms—efforts to silence political opposition leaders and restrict civil society.

Let me elaborate a paradox: The Russian Federation is a country where millions of Russian-speakers have their fundamental freedoms of expression and freedom of association violated. Yet, there is a neighboring country where millions of Russian-speakers enjoy these rights and fundamental freedoms, and where the leaders of the interim government have publicly pledged repeatedly to protect those freedoms for all. Ukraine is a country where people speak Russian, while Russia is a country where people are told to stay quiet in Russian.

Mr. Chair, this is part of a pattern that has become observable anew in recent weeks. As it perpetrates its own crackdowns on freedom of expression, Russia accuses others of violations of freedom of expression. As it struggles to cope with its own failed policies with respect to minority populations inside Russia, it lashes out at others on issues of minority rights. After it has flagrantly violated the commitments it made under the Budapest Memorandum, it laughably accuses others of doing so. If you want to know what's wrong with Russia today, you can just look at the statements turned out by the MFA and see what they're accusing others of.

Aggressive nationalism is another of these internal problems of the Russian Federation that we see reflected in external statements, most recently with respect to Ukraine. I too understand aggressive nationalism as something that should be condemned. Aggressive nationalism is distinct from patriotism. It is not about building a stronger, more just society, but about subjugating others and denying their rights. Importantly it suggests a fundamental and deep-seated insecurity, an attempt to distract from hard truths, perhaps because the perpetrators have no good answers.

There are plenty of worrying examples of aggressive nationalism inside Russia today. Of course, I suppose that some might see Russia's illegal military external aggression as the most obvious instance of aggressive nationalism in the world today.

And here's the hard truth: None of the wrongs that Russia perpetrates beyond its borders will make anything right at home. External aggression is not a strategy for addressing the serious political, economic, and social challenges that Russia faces.

The United States calls upon the Russian Federation to uphold its OSCE commitments, including its commitment to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of other participating States, and its commitments to respect and protect the rights of its own people. Russia's flagrant failures to keep the promises it has made to each of our governments have consequences for all of us—some more urgently than others. But they also have consequences for Russia itself—there are millions of Russians who want a sustainable, stronger, rights-respecting, prosperous, Russia, one that can be a leader in the international community. We want that too—but in order for that to happen, Russia has to start seeing

OSCE commitments not as something to disregard, but as rules to live by, as part of a strategy for success.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.