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18 January 2008

ENGLISH only



**United Kingdom
Delegation**

To the Organisation for Security and
Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)
Vienna

Statement by the United Kingdom to the Permanent Council on 17 January 2008, regarding the British Council in the Russian Federation.

Begins

I would like to draw the attention of the Permanent Council to continuing concerns with regard to the situation of the British Council in Russia, in the light of reports of harassment and intimidation of British Council officials.

The EU Presidency made a statement on this issue on 21 December, and on 15 January the British Foreign Secretary Mr David Miliband made a statement in the House of Commons. I will read the relevant parts of this statement.

Quote:

I regret to inform the House that, on 14 January, the Russian authorities informed the British Ambassador in Moscow that Russia intends to take a series of administrative measures against the British Council. These include tax measures against the British Council in St Petersburg and visa restrictions against British Council staff in St Petersburg and Yekaterinburg. Russia has further stated that it may take further action against the British Council in Moscow, including visa restrictions against UK Diplomatic staff. Such threats can only make matters worse. It is not in the interests of either the UK or Russia for flourishing cultural, educational and scientific links to be held hostage to unrelated issues in this way.

As the Government has repeatedly made clear to the Russian authorities, the British Council's activities in St. Petersburg, Yekaterinburg and across Russia are fully compliant both with Russian and international law, under the Vienna Conventions. Its presence and activities are also specifically sanctioned by a 1994 UK/Russia Agreement on Co-operation in Education, Science and Culture, signed by Russia.

End Quote

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