



United States Mission to the OSCE

Concerns Regarding Freedom of Association in the Russian Federation and the Investigation of Valentina Cherevatenko and Andrey Piontkovsky

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
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At the 1990 Copenhagen Meeting, when this organization was the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), the participating States committed themselves to “respect the rights of everyone, individually or in association with others, to study and discuss the observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms and to develop and discuss ideas for improved protection of human rights and better means for ensuring compliance with international human rights standards.” Participating States further committed themselves “to ensure that individuals are permitted to exercise the right to association, including the right to form, join and participate effectively in non-governmental organizations which seek the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, including human rights monitoring groups.” The following year, at the 1991 meeting in Moscow, we welcomed “NGO activities, including, *inter alia*, observing compliance with CSCE commitments in the field of the human dimension.” We said we would “allow NGOs, in view of their important function with the human dimension of the CSCE, to convey their views to their own governments and the governments of all the other participating States during the future work of the CSCE on the human dimension.”

The United States calls on the Russian Federation to dismiss the investigation into the activities of Valentina Cherevatenko, a leader of the NGO "Union of Women of Don," and the “Women of the Don Foundation for Civil Society Development” which focus on conflict resolution and protecting the rights of women and children. The criminal investigation, the first of its kind for alleged non-compliance with the Russian Federation’s Foreign Agents Law, is clearly designed to send a warning to all NGO leaders whose organizations have been declared “foreign agents.” An investigation like this, whether by local or federal officials, is a mechanism of intimidation and harassment, and represents an escalation in ongoing government efforts to restrict Russia’s civil society.

We applaud Ms. Cherevatenko for her outstanding work on human rights education, peace building, and humanitarian issues. We urge Russia to halt its investigation of Ms. Cherevatenko, and fully adhere to its OSCE commitments and obligations under international law regarding the exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of association.

Colleagues, we are likewise concerned that Russia has initiated a criminal case against Russian political commentator Andrey Piontkovsky for allegedly authoring a public call aimed at violating Russia’s territorial integrity and inciting hatred based on nationality. Following the announcement of the criminal investigation, Russia's security service searched Ekho Moskvyy's offices in Moscow and interrogated several employees. This is especially

disturbing given that Ekho Moskvyy is one of the few remaining independent media outlets in Russia.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.