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Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,  
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,  
AT THE 1273rd MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

2 July 2020

**On the plebiscite on amendments to the Constitution of the Russian Federation**

Mr. Chairperson,

The ballots from the recent plebiscite held in Russia are still being counted today; the final result will be known tomorrow. I should nevertheless like to explain how this expression of the will of my country's people took place.

In particular, I wish to emphasize that this was not an election but a plebiscite. The latter, in essence, means an assessment of the administration and of its work.

The voting took place from 25 June to 1 July and featured the use of electronic voting on a trial basis in the Moscow and Nizhny Novgorod regions. The trial was a most successful one. The electronic format had been necessitated by the challenges arising from the coronavirus pandemic and by the authorities' consequent striving to make the electoral process as safe as possible.

According to the preliminary results announced by the Central Election Commission of the Russian Federation, the turnout was 68 per cent. The ballots counted so far indicate that 78 per cent of Russian citizens are in favour of the amendments to the Constitution, while 21 per cent are against.

The voting process was monitored by more than 500,000 people, 1,600 civil society organizations, 36 non-profit organizations, 18 political parties and around 50 foreign citizens. There was live-streaming from a number of polling stations. All this attests to the complete openness and transparency of the plebiscite.

Allusions to some sort of pressure being exerted on voters and to obstacles being created to hinder independent observers from monitoring the voting are conjectures for which there is not the least foundation. According to information from the Central Election Commission and the Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation, the violations that were recorded were isolated incidents. None of them was of a serious nature and in no way could they affect the result of the vote. All violations and complaints are being carefully examined by the competent authorities in accordance with the established procedure.

My US colleague has drawn attention to the incident involving the journalist David Frenkel at one of the polling stations in St. Petersburg. I agree that this was a shocking affair. The investigating authorities are already busy clarifying the circumstances in which the reporter was injured. Moreover, the Commissioner for Human Rights in the Russian Federation, Tatiana Moskalkova, has asked the law enforcement authorities to investigate the incident. The Chairperson of the Central Election Commission, Ella Pamfilova, has for her part ordered a separate investigation by the St. Petersburg Election Commission into what happened. The incident also elicited a response at the highest level, with President Vladimir Putin affirming that “journalists must be able to perform their activities in an unhindered manner within the framework of the law”. In general, the authorities will respond to every single one of those violations.

Furthermore, I should like to point out in particular that the constitutional order of the Russian Federation and matters related to the organization of opportunities for Russian citizens to express their will are a purely internal affair of our country. I would emphasize that, in accordance with the United Nations Declaration on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and Co-operation among States (1970), “[e]very State has an inalienable right to choose its political, economic, social and cultural systems, without interference in any form by another State”. In the CSCE Helsinki Final Act of 1975, States committed themselves to “respect[ing] each other’s right freely to choose and develop its political, social, economic and cultural systems as well as its right to determine its laws and regulations”.

As for the terms of office of the current Head of the Russian State, I must point out that the next President will be determined through an election that has yet to take place. One should not enter into speculations. Given the clan-like system of political power in the United States of America itself, any insinuations on that score seem inappropriate, to put it mildly. Everyone knows about the instances in which the post of US President was, in effect, transferred from father to son, one glaring example being Presidents Bush senior and junior, not to mention the repeated occurrence of such transfers of power at the level of individual states. And what about congressmen and senators, quite a few of whom have been serving continuously for upwards of 40 years? All this hardly gives the US authorities the moral authority to lecture others. Quite the contrary: it is the former who should be troubleshooting their own system.

In the case of Crimea, too, our US colleagues have clearly lost touch with political reality. I would remind you that Crimea is an integral part of the Russian Federation. Incidentally, all those who are still in any doubt should take note of the following: over 90 per cent of voters on the Crimean peninsula supported the constitutional amendments proposed by the President of Russia. That is one of the highest figures in our country. It would be correct to say that, in this way, the people of Crimea once again confirmed their democratic choice in support of reunification with Russia. That is where the truth is to be found, not in your fabrications and fake news.

Thank you for your attention.