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## United States Mission to the OSCE

### **Fining of Russian NGO in Kostroma for Violation of “Foreign Agent” Law**

As delivered by Chargé d’Affaires Gary Robbins  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
June 6, 2013

The United States notes with concern a Russian NGO in Kostroma, the Kostroma Civic Initiatives Support Center, has been fined under the “foreign agent” law. We are particularly troubled that the NGO was found to be involved in “political activity” because it hosted a U.S. diplomat at a roundtable discussion on the future of U.S.-Russian relations.

Diplomats around the world routinely take part in public discussions about bilateral relations as part of normal embassy business. Russian diplomats in the U.S. routinely participate at roundtable discussions of precisely this sort. It goes without saying that no one is branded a “foreign agent” in the United States for having spoken with a Russian diplomat. Claims that the United States’ Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) is somehow analogous to Russia’s “foreign agent” law are false and misleading.

We continue to be concerned by the ongoing inspections of NGOs, and the application of restrictive laws aimed at undermining the activities of Russian citizens and organizations. The United States is committed to supporting the development of civil society and respect for fundamental freedoms around the world. We consider an independent civil society an important element for the free flow of ideas necessary for economic modernization and growth. Moreover, as participating States we agreed in Astana in 2010, on “the important role played by civil society and free media in helping us to ensure full respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms, democracy, including free and fair elections, and the rule of law.”

The United States is deeply concerned that Russian authorities continue to take actions that restrict space for civil society. The actions taken against the NGO in Kostroma appear to be an indirect but obvious attempt to prevent accredited diplomats from performing their official duties by punishing ordinary people for associating with them. We find this to be a disturbing precedent.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.