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RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE 2010 OSCE  
REVIEW CONFERENCE**

Warsaw, 1 October 2010

**Working session 1: Democratic institutions, including democratic elections,  
democracy at the national, regional and local levels, citizenship and  
political rights**

Distinguished Conference participants and guests,  
Mr. Chairperson,  
Distinguished colleagues,

My statement should not be seen as a report by the Russian Federation on its implementation of OSCE commitments as regards elections, although this principle, namely “accountability”, has, to the surprise of specialists, become one of the basic democratic principles for the organization of national elections in sovereign States in accordance with the sixth edition of the ODIHR Election Observation Handbook published in June of this year.

I wish to share with my colleagues and partners some information on how the Russian political and electoral system has evolved over the past year since our previous meeting, and how in actual practice we are dealing with the problems involved in bringing about a fuller and more optimal exercise by citizens of their electoral rights in accordance with the policy of democratizing our society as set out and confirmed in a whole host of international documents. By way of demonstrating the commitment of the Russian Federation to the policy of developing and strengthening the CSCE/OSCE process, I shall put forward a number of proposals having to do with our further progress towards the solution of the problems involved in the exercise and protection of political rights and freedoms and also for the continuation of the democratization process in the OSCE region.

This year the Russian Federation marked the twentieth anniversary of the first free elections to the Congress of People’s Deputies of Russia. It is noteworthy that this anniversary coincided with another important date – the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Document of the Copenhagen Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the CSCE. For those involved in organizing the Russian elections, the fact that these dates fell as close together as they did is natural, reflecting the start of qualitative changes in the area of elections. The adoption of the Copenhagen Document marked the beginning of the elaboration of common approaches to the joint search for and establishment of criteria of

democracy as a system of governance based on the will of the people as expressed in free and fair elections.

Over the last two decades the Russian electoral system has been gradually developing, guided by international commitments, including those that are enshrined in international treaties and are a part of the legal system of the Russian Federation. The Russian Federation is ensuring the development of its electoral process, which is based on the sovereign will of its people as set out in the national Constitution, and is doing so in strict accordance with its international commitments to conduct democratic elections. Considering all the years in the history of the development of a democratic Russia, the diversity of representation in the current, fifth, State Duma is the greatest it has ever been. Given the absence of any sanctions for a failure to vote, the turnout at elections for State government institutions remains within a range between 55 and 69 per cent of the total electorate.

Our election laws are in conformity with international electoral standards, including all the provisions of the Copenhagen Document, not excluding the provisions calling for international openness and transparency in the electoral process so as to permit objective international monitoring.

On the eve of the latest cycle of federal elections in the Russian Federation, the latest stage in the optimization of election laws is drawing to a close, the aim being to ensure greater exercise of electoral rights and a higher quality of political representation. In response to the initiatives launched by the President of Russia, Mr. Dmitry Medvedev, in 2009 and 2010, federal lawmakers adopted a number of decisions to provide additional guarantees for electoral rights, to gradually relax the election eligibility requirements, to simplify election procedures, to provide for maximum openness and transparency in the voting process, and to further enhance political pluralism and multiparty politics.

Even before they were adopted, all these changes were published and discussed widely both within Russian society and, as you are aware, even far beyond the borders of the Russian Federation.

The reforms were mainly concerned with furthering the democratization of our society and increasing political pluralism and diversity (a reduction in the number of signatures required, the admission of representatives of political parties to legislative bodies provided they have cleared the five per cent hurdle, and much else).

The year 2009 saw the adoption of the Federal Law on the Guarantees of the Equality of Parliamentary Parties in the Coverage of Their Activities by State-Controlled Public Television Channels and Radio Stations. This unique law, nothing like which exists in practice outside Russia, ensures equality in the amount of coverage given to the activities of political parties on federal State-controlled television channels and radio stations, including a mechanism to make up airtime deficits in the event that instances of unequal coverage come to light.

The Russian electoral system is not standing still, but is continuing to develop in the direction clearly charted in the Copenhagen Document. However, it is developing gradually, without no sudden fits and starts or social upheavals, in a way that takes into account the specific features of its economic, social, historical and cultural development.

The electoral process in the Russian Federation is marked by an ever bolder approach towards the use of technology and technical systems in the voting process, including the vote count. A programme has been adopted for the accelerated technical retooling of the electoral system, the aim being the technical modernization of the electoral procedures in accordance with the requirements of the times and the proposals by the actual participants in the electoral process. In this connection, modern technical solutions continue to ensure freedom in the expression of will by the electorate and the secrecy of the ballot and vote count. The need for further work in this area was also pointed out at the OSCE expert seminar on electronic voting held in Vienna on 16 and 17 September.

Obviously, the points I have mentioned do not provide an exhaustive description of the substantive, progressive and democratic development of the Russian electoral system, the objective of this development being to genuinely ensure the expression of the will of the electorate and the constitutional nature of free elections as one of the key instruments for the expression of the power of the people and a manifestation of State sovereignty.

The practice of international election observation, first conceived in the Copenhagen Document, has now “come of age” and deserves an “identity card” of its own. This is behind the proposal that the OSCE should draw up and adopt a document on the principles of international election observation in general and on the status of international observers under international law in particular. Here we are not talking about a need to revise or rewrite the Copenhagen Document. What we are proposing is that that Document should be dialectically developed. It would be altogether possible to set out the goals, objectives and principles of international election observation and the legal status of international observers in certain situations and to do this in the Election Observation Handbook, which is periodically updated by the ODIHR, taking pains to change the way the Handbook is drafted and adopted and to ensure that its purpose is to foster our further co-operation and not become a bone of contention.

Above all, it is of fundamental importance that this kind of document should be the product of a collective effort. All interested parties must therefore become involved in its preparation, notably representatives of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, international organizations whose practical activities in this area have been reflected in recognized international instruments (I have in mind the Interparliamentary Assembly of the Commonwealth of Independent States) as well as specialists and experts from OSCE participating States. In any case, the ODIHR, as the key OSCE institution in the field of elections, should, in our view, officially propose to all participating States and OSCE collective bodies that they should take part in this work.

A fairly small ODIHR working group might summarize the proposals and recommendations received, prepare a draft updated Handbook and present it to the OSCE Permanent Council or an even higher level for approval.

With an approach of this kind to the task at hand, one that is collective and open, we should be able to produce a genuinely authoritative document outlining the goals, objectives and principles for international monitoring and establishing specific areas of competence and clear rules of conduct for international election observation missions with a view to assisting States in the exercise of the electoral rights and freedoms of their citizens.

It would be useful if at the forthcoming summit of the heads of the OSCE participating States a decision were taken calling for the approval of a new edition of the

Election Observation Handbook by one of the collective decision-making bodies of the OSCE.

This proposal reflects the need to switch to a generally recognized international model for the adoption of documents of this kind. Such a model is used for the adoption of similar international instruments in all influential international organizations working in this area (the United Nations, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, the Commonwealth of Independent States, the European Union, the Organization of American States, etc.).

In this same context, we are compelled once again to note the absence of a common approach by all OSCE participating States to election observation under the auspices of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. We are concerned at the inadequate normative basis underlying the ODIHR's activities with respect to elections as well as at the Office's attempts to impose on OSCE States rules to which they have never put their signature, the result being that the ODIHR's work is perceived differently by different people and gives rise to a mass of contradictions, including within the OSCE itself.

We firmly believe that the Office's activities in the area of election monitoring need to be placed on a clear normative basis that has been approved by the collective decision-making bodies of the OSCE. Our proposals to draw up common "rules of the game" have been on the negotiating table in Vienna since 2007. I am referring to the draft Basic Principles for the Organization of ODIHR Observation of National Elections, on the basis of which one of the decision-making bodies of the OSCE could draw up and approve the relevant rules.

The full implementation of Brussels Ministerial Council Decision No. 19/06 on strengthening the effectiveness of the OSCE retains its relevance and provides for the adoption of specific measures to rectify the functional and geographical imbalances in the work of the Office with which we are all familiar.

These are in our view some of the conclusions and proposals that can be drawn from this review and that should bring us closer in our pursuit of stricter compliance with the principles of democratic development and the international standards that have been proclaimed – standards that are equally recognized by States, that are based on the recognition of the sovereignty of countries in dealing with the problems of how best to organize democratic institutions, and that exclude double standards in the way they are interpreted and applied independently of the current political situation.

Thank you for your attention.