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Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the OSCE

**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER YU. ALEKSEYEV,  
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,  
AT THE MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

29 January 2004

Mr. Chairman,

We wish to associate ourselves with the words of welcome addressed to Mr. Christian Strohal, the distinguished Director of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and to express our gratitude to him for his report on what are to be the main areas in the work of the Office in 2004.

An analysis of the human rights situation in the OSCE area confirms how timely it is that the Organization — which I might even say is something of a latecomer in this regard — has turned its attention to the issue of tolerance and the search for ways of countering racism, xenophobia, discrimination and anti-Semitism. The latest public opinion poll conducted by the Italian newspaper *Corriere de la Sera* in the countries of the European Union and timed to coincide with the 60th anniversary of the liberation of the concentration camp at Auschwitz has revealed dangerous trends in the spread of latent and overt anti-Semitism and in the increase in the number of those who would deny (or at least minimize the importance of) the Holocaust in the history of the Jewish people. For that reason, we support the intention of the Office to become more actively engaged in the area of monitoring, preventing and combating all manifestations of ethnic and religious hatred.

We further support the ODIHR's focus on providing assistance to participating States in carrying out the Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings that we have adopted, and we greatly appreciate the Office's readiness to concentrate on the protection of the rights of trafficking victims in the countries of destination. We hope that these States will co-operate actively with the ODIHR in implementing as well as financing the appropriate projects. Further on this subject, I should like to inform the Permanent Council that a few days ago the First All-Russian Assembly of Non-Governmental Organizations to Counter Trafficking in Human Beings was held in Moscow. Testimony to the Russian authorities' attitude towards this problem can be seen in President Vladimir Putin's welcoming address to the Assembly, in which trafficking in persons is branded as "one of the most dangerous threats to civilization, along with organized crime, terrorism, drug addiction and drug trafficking".

Mr. Chairman,

The work of the Office encompasses many areas, and it is difficult to comment on these activities in full. One of them, however, namely election monitoring and assistance to States in organizing and conducting democratic elections and in implementing the recommendations of the monitoring missions, continues to be one of the Office's most important priorities. For that reason, we should like to comment on it in greater detail.

The Office's last, final report on the parliamentary elections in the Russian Federation has been studied most carefully both by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and by the Central Election Commission. I shall not comment on the positive aspects that were noted by the observers in the area of legislation and as regards the organization of the elections, the high level of transparency in the work of the election commissions, including the Central Election Commission, and the interaction by the Russian executive authorities, on the one hand, and the international observers, on the other. We believe that it would be considerably more useful to focus on the critical comments, and here, Mr. Chairman, I must say the following.

Among the critical comments there are those that are fair and there are those that are at odds with the facts. To be sure, mistakes are inevitable when carrying out a monitoring exercise of this scale. I would like merely to note in that connection the following points. Despite all the loud claims by certain parties and candidates who were defeated at the polls, no legal actions contesting the legitimacy of the election results have been brought before the courts. As regards the tens of thousands of copies of result protocols from precinct election commissions that are said to exist and in which the figures differ from those that were published, some 200 of them, which were actually provided by persons contesting the results, are being scrutinized by qualified officials, involving the Central Election Commission of Russia. The results of that check will certainly be brought to the attention of the public.

The problem, however, lies not in critical remarks directed at the Russian Federation. The problem is in the politically motivated tone, in the attempt to create the impression that the violations detected call into question the fairness of the elections and the irreversibility of the democratic processes in Russia. This we cannot accept for the reason that there is clear evidence here of elements of a discriminatory attitude towards Russia. As I have already said at the Permanent Council: Where so-called "traditionally democratic" States are concerned, the same breaches of the provisions of the Copenhagen Document are regarded at best in a neutral way, without reference to non-compliance with OSCE obligations. We have cited examples when similar violations in other countries have been noted only "in passing" and have certainly not been interpreted as marking a retreat from democracy or non-conformity with "European standards". There is no separate section devoted to recommendations on how to rectify violations of this kind as there is in the report on Russia, and the fairness of the elections is not called into doubt.

Let us take a single concrete example. Our colleagues are almost certainly aware, on the basis of reports carried in the Swedish press, that hearings were to be held in the Swedish Parliament regarding the unprecedented pressure brought to bear by Government authorities on the television channel TV-4 during the parliamentary elections held in 2002. We endeavoured, through working channels, to obtain detailed information and the expert opinion of the ODIHR on this matter. We were not successful, nor did these elections and the instances of non-compliance with OSCE standards in Sweden come to the attention of the ODIHR. Similarly, there was no ready answer to our inquiry from the Office of the

Representative on Freedom of the Media. If our partners so desire, we can prepare a whole list of violations of this kind and of an often flagrant failure to meet OSCE standards as regards election laws and practices in many so-called “traditional democracies”. All of this has drawn absolutely no comment, neither from the ODIHR nor from the OSCE. Explain to me why an exception is made in the case of Russia?

Mr. Chairman,

The value of commitments undertaken by consensus lies in their universality for all OSCE participating States and, accordingly, in the even-handedness with which the Organization holds States to account when those commitments are violated. In this regard, a comparison of monitoring mission reports provides extremely interesting food for thought.

We expect that, acting on the basis of invitations received from States that are planning to hold elections in 2004 and that until recently have not received proper attention from the Office, the ODIHR will find it possible and advisable in the very near future to conduct a full-scale and comprehensive monitoring of these elections as a priority matter. It would seem to us that the results of this monitoring and the lessons learned would be of extraordinary importance. The so-called transitional-period States will then be able to improve their electoral legislation, taking into account both the positive and the negative factors that come to light in the course of this kind of in-depth monitoring. We wish Mr. Strohal every success in this work and we shall support him in every way we can.

In conclusion, allow me to say a few words regarding the remarks made by the distinguished representative of the United States of America with respect to the Chechen Republic. Although this problem was not raised in Mr. Strohal’s report, nevertheless the United States touched upon this question, as is their right. I believe that the members of the Permanent Council are aware that the Russian Federation, together with many international organizations and non-governmental organizations, is engaged in a serious and consistent effort to normalize the situation in Chechnya, including the state of affairs in the area of human rights. I should like to note, however, that the Russian Federation is no less interested in the human rights situation in the United States itself — for example, with regard to what is happening at Guantanamo Bay or with regard to the provisions of a number of new pieces of legislation in the United States, which raise not a few questions as to their effects on the rights and freedoms of citizens living in the United States, etc. The material on these matters that has been provided by influential international non-governmental organizations is more than enough to warrant the ODIHR’s taking a serious interest in issues connected with the erosion of the observance of human rights in the United States, all the more since the country in question is the generally recognized leader of the democratic world and one from which many so-called transitional period States wish to take their lead.