



Permanent Mission of Ukraine
to the International
Organizations in Vienna

PC.DEL/346/18
22 March 2018

ENGLISH only

Statement on “Presidential elections in Russia”

As delivered by Ambassador Ihor Prokopchuk,
Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the International Organizations in Vienna,
to the 1180th meeting of the Permanent Council,
22 March 2018

Mr. Chairperson,

The OSCE participating States have agreed that peace and security in our region is best guaranteed by the willingness and ability of each participating State to uphold democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights. Democratic elections are at the foundation of a pluralistic democracy based on the rule of law.

In stressing the importance of democratic elections, participating States have detailed a wide-range of commitments of what is required, in practice, for elections to be genuinely democratic.

Distinguished colleagues,

The legitimacy of the presidential elections in Russia has been cast into serious doubt from the outset in view of illegal conduct of voting in the Crimea and Sevastopol, which are temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine. This illegal action constituted a flagrant breach of Ukraine’s legislation and of norms and principles of international law.

As highlighted in the statement of the OSCE International Election Observation Mission, issued on 19 March 2018, the period running up to the elections and the election day were marked by serious shortcomings and violations of the respective OSCE commitments and international standards for democratic elections. The conclusions point out to an overly controlled legal and political environment, continued pressure on critical voices, restrictions on the fundamental freedoms of assembly, association and expression, as well as on candidate registration. A large number of mass media, including major television broadcasters, which are founded, owned or supported by the state or affiliated structures, have provided extensive and unchallenged reporting in favour of the incumbent, thus further significantly undermining any notion of what should be a “level playing field” for the candidates.

It does not come as a surprise that the OSCE IEOM observation mission drew a conclusion about a lack of genuine competition. We concur with the assessment of Michael Georg Link, Special Co-ordinator and leader of the short-term OSCE

observer mission, that “choice without real competition, as we have seen here, is not real choice” and “where the legal framework restricts many fundamental freedoms and the outcome is not in doubt, elections almost lose their purpose – empowering people to choose their leaders.”

This exercise, which was called in Russia “elections”, was, in fact, a political farce that had nothing to do with elections, free and fair, in the democratic sense of this process. All happened without real political competition, without freedom of speech, without equal opportunities.

Distinguished colleagues,

Instead of elections what was witnessed in Russia on 18 March was rather a ritual for setting a democratic facade for an authoritarian regime. In the last years this regime has clamped down on human rights and fundamental freedoms in Russia as well as resorted to aggression against the neighbouring states and beyond. Developments in Russia prove a link between internal oppression of human rights and external aggression of the Kremlin which makes it imperative for the international community to show support and solidarity with the civil society and professional community in Russia who are resolved to defend their human rights and freedoms.

In the interests of peace and security it remains critical for the international community to hold Russia to account for its deliberate and flagrant non-compliance with undertaken international obligations and commitments, including in the area of democracy and human rights. The President of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko called upon international partners “to increase the sanctions pressure on the Kremlin. And not only for the aggression against Ukraine, but also for the hybrid war against the entire European and Euro-Atlantic community, for political assassinations abroad and for suppression of democracy in Russia itself.”

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.