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PC.DEL/281/24/Corr.1
14 March 2024

ENGLISH
Original: RUSSIAN

Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY
MR. ALEKSANDR VOLGAREV, DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF
THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE 1465th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

14 March 2024

**In response to the report by the Director of the
OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights**

Madam Chairperson,
Director,

We have studied your report and should like to comment on it.

What was heard in the Permanent Council today was an anti-Russian manifesto with the occasional thematic sprinkling of other issues. Under your leadership, Mr. Matteo Mecacci, an executive structure that already had a very poor reputation has definitively turned into a conduit for a bloc mentality and a driver of biased, one-sided attitudes – especially with regard to the countries “east of Vienna”. The present-day Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) is more reminiscent of a Warsaw-based outpost of the US Department of State than an OSCE executive structure or even an “autonomous institution”, as our opponents like to call it.

At your instigation, Director, the ODIHR is, in violation of its mandate, actively carrying out the orders of a Western group of States and working in the sphere of international humanitarian law – without any justification whatsoever. We would remind you that this branch of the law has nothing to do with the OSCE’s third “basket”. We will continue to insist that it be removed from the agenda for this area of work of our Organization.

Director,

You have allowed yourself to be blinded by your personal enthusiasm for anti-Russian activities, which is manifested in your involvement in the Moscow Mechanism, the publication of reports and numerous press releases under the ODIHR’s masthead and your supposed concern for so-called civil society activists. The Office has stopped reacting altogether to other “external sources of annoyance” that have a direct bearing on its mandate. These include the authorities of the Baltic countries depriving members of the Russian-speaking population of their residence permits and citizenship, and the Latvian Government harassing athletes for having taken part in competitions in Russia. Not to mention the lack of any criticism, for example, of the United States of America for the regular gatherings of white supremacists (for instance,

in February this year in the state of Tennessee) and the persistence of systemic racism there; of the EU bloc's violations of the rights of migrants and refugees; of religious intolerance; and much more besides.

At the same time, even the most noble idea, once in the hands of the Office's experts, becomes corrupted and takes on grotesque forms far removed from the notions and principles of the OSCE. Take the annual statistics on hate crimes, for example. Under the current leadership, this reporting has altogether overstepped the bounds of propriety and has become one of the many manifestations of the ODIHR's flouting of its mandate.

It is difficult to comment seriously at all on the part of the report dealing with the situation in Ukraine. Amid the mass persecution of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, its parishioners and clergy by the neo-Nazi regime in Kyiv, the Office received reports of five (!) such cases. This is despite the fact that the Internet is awash with countless images of clergymen being beaten up and of right-wing radicals and neo-Nazis taking over churches and parishes by force.

By a curious coincidence, in November 2023, the European Commission published a report on Ukraine's progress in European integration. It is noted there that "incidents of hate speech and intimidation due to religion are infrequent" in that country. This merely goes to confirm the ODIHR's "made-to-order" methods in compiling its report and its highly selective approach to sources of information.

We hope that the forthcoming practical guide on hate crimes against Christians will not suffer the same sad fate. We look forward to its swift publication, which will be particularly relevant in the year that marks the tenth anniversary of the tasking by the OSCE Ministerial Council in Basel in 2014, a tasking that we, as participating States, must at last fulfil. We call upon the Maltese Chairmanship to initiate the corresponding work.

Director,

Now for a few words about the issue of elections. We have already spoken at length about the reasons for our decision not to co-operate with the ODIHR in the context of the Russian presidential election to be held from 15 to 17 March this year. However, neither the representatives of the Office nor the representatives of the Western alliance countries that are curating it wanted to hear us yet again. This also applies to you, Madam Chairperson. We consider your remarks at the beginning of this meeting to be inappropriate and a flagrant violation of the mandate of the Chairmanship-in-Office – unfortunately, not for the first time. Instead, our opponents are once again following the well-trodden path of ramping up the escalation. The recent press release with its assessments of Russia's territorial structure and its conclusions on the holding of the election in certain regions of our country is further confirmation to that effect. This step is also contrary to the Office's mandate.

The obsession with two countries in the OSCE area has led to total professional blindness on the part of the Office with regard to the unlawful antics of "progressive democracies". No substantive reaction was forthcoming from this executive structure to Lithuania's segregation of observers according to their nationality. The refusal of the authorities in Vilnius to invite observers from Russia and Belarus to monitor the national election proceedings in the country as part of ODIHR missions is nothing less than a violation of paragraph 8 of the CSCE Copenhagen Document of 1990, a paragraph that you hold so dear. It turns out that this commitment is being applied selectively. The ODIHR leadership evidently regards these antics as a bit of harmless fun. The same kind of "fun" as when the Lithuanian authorities impound cars with Russian number plates.

The Office also ignored the Latvian and Estonian authorities' intimidation of Russian citizens who were intending to cast their vote at the Russian diplomatic missions in those two countries. They are being

openly threatened with “consequences” and “punishment”. However, the ODIHR is not concerned about respect for the rights of Russians on the territory of EU countries, even though the authorities in Riga and Tallinn have actually violated paragraph 7.7 of the Copenhagen Document. I should like to remind you that the paragraph in question refers to voters being able to “[cast] their vote free of the fear of retribution”.

By the way, nor have we heard any condemnation of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia from the European Union and the United States – those “champions of human rights”. We urge that the existing vacuum be filled with a meaningful reaction to the Baltic trio’s anti-democratic initiatives.

In addition to these cases of blatant double standards, the previous persistent shortcomings endure too, and the ODIHR’s election-related activities remain geographically imbalanced and inconsistent.

Since your previous report in November 2023, all full-scale missions have, as is customary, been dispatched to countries “east of Vienna” – to Moldova, Serbia and Azerbaijan. As is usual, either no one has been sent to western countries or only small groups of experts have been deployed there. The upcoming monitoring of European Parliament elections, for the sake of which the ODIHR has waived the rules of its own invention, warrants special attention. The so-called “special election assessment mission” to be deployed for that purpose is not provided for in the Office’s “methodology” and, as we were assured earlier, this type of mission was used exceptionally during the coronavirus pandemic. We should like to receive appropriate clarification. The substantive imbalances in the texts of country-specific reports on elections have not disappeared either – in a number of cases, the executive structure’s sympathies towards one of the political forces are visible to the naked eye.

This is not least due to the staffing of the missions, primarily of the core teams. An analysis of their composition over the past five years clearly shows that there is a pool of individuals from Western alliance countries who stroll from one ODIHR mission to another. At the same time, representatives of EU countries, Canada and the United States, including former ODIHR staff members, are the ones mainly selected for the posts of heads of missions.

From all that has been said, there is a simple conclusion to be drawn: the Office and you, Mr. Mecacci, have discredited yourselves, and the absence of OSCE/ODIHR representatives will have no bearing whatsoever on the quality of the international monitoring of Russian elections. Genuinely reputable bodies and organizations are able to conduct such monitoring “comprehensively, impartially and independently”. For example, a mission deployed by the Commonwealth of Independent States, which, unlike the ODIHR, has election observation rules that have been agreed upon and are acceptable to all Member States.

Perhaps if the OSCE had such rules, the current situation in this sphere would be fundamentally different and the aforementioned “methodology” would be free of politics and would ensure an objective approach. This is precisely what Russia and a number of our like-minded partners have been insisting on for many years. However, instead of solving the problem, it is much more convenient to lay the blame elsewhere, hiding behind the ODIHR’s “autonomy”.

To summarize. Russia agreed to the technical extension of the ODIHR Director’s term solely as a goodwill gesture in order to give the Maltese Chairmanship time to select worthy candidates who have not tarnished themselves with public anti-Russian statements. We will also continue to stick to this approach when considering applicants for this post.

Thank you for your attention.