



United States Mission to the OSCE

Protecting the Integrity of OSCE's Election Observation Methodology

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires, a.i Courtney Austrian
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
August 5, 2021

The United States regrets that Russia's restrictions resulted in ODIHR's decision that it would be unable to effectively observe the Duma elections in September. We fully support ODIHR's independence and autonomy in making its professional determination that "the decision by the Russian authorities to introduce limitations to the election observation made credible independent observation impossible". We also fully support the OSCE *Parliamentary Assembly* in its determination that it cannot observe under these circumstances.

ODIHR meticulously gathers and analyzes objective criteria when conducting a *Needs Assessment* of the size and format necessary for a mission to effectively observe any election.

In each individual case, ODIHR impartially determines the appropriate number of Long-Term and Short-Term Observers required to conduct a credible OSCE Election Observation Mission while maintaining the highest professional standards.

Each deployment plan designed and proposed by ODIHR is specifically tailored to that country, that moment, and, in this case, that epidemiological situation.

It is irrelevant to compare other *Election Observation Missions* with the one ODIHR proposed for Russia in September 2021. Such political considerations should have no role in ODIHR's mission planning.

We hoped Russia, having invited the OSCE to observe the September Duma elections, would engage in good faith and work with ODIHR on practical arrangements to facilitate the observation mission, including in light of the pandemic situation.

Successfully hosting an ODIHR Election Observation Mission demonstrates a participating State's confidence in its own elections process. It is also an opportunity to benefit from ODIHR's technical expertise with a view to improving one's electoral process. We can ALL improve our electoral processes.

Even though OSCE observers cannot be present, the international community will be watching the Duma elections process—in the run-up to the elections as well as on Election Day—to see whether the environment is conducive to the holding of free and fair elections. Are Russian citizens able to freely exercise their civil and political rights? Is there a level playing field to ensure competitive elections? Is there fair access to media and did parties and candidates who wanted to compete have an equal opportunity to do so?

These and other key considerations will be in the international spotlight, despite the Russian government's regrettable limitations preventing OSCE from observing the elections.

Thank you, Madam Chair.