



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement Regarding Russian Violations of the Right to Freedom of Expression, Peaceful Assembly, and Association

As delivered by Political Counselor Michael Kelleher
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
September 4, 2014

The United States remains deeply concerned about the recent increase within the Russian Federation of harassment and intimidation towards expressions of peaceful dissent against Russia's involvement in Ukraine.

We are disappointed to see that the NGO "Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg" has been registered as a "foreign agent" by the Ministry of Justice, just three days after the organization's head, Ella Polyakova, spoke out about Russian casualties in Ukraine. This designation follows the passage of amendments to the so-called "foreign agent" law that allows the Ministry of Justice to declare, unilaterally and without a court order, that a non-governmental organization is a "foreign agent." The designation imposes bureaucratic restrictions intended to impede and obstruct civil society. The United States sees the implementation of this law as an illustrative example of the Russian government's attempts to hamper the peaceful activities of members of civil society who challenge its policies and practices.

We are also alarmed by reports that within the last two weeks at least five Russian journalists and a local assemblyman were savagely beaten when they attempted to report on bodies returning home from Ukraine and unidentified graves near Pskov. On August 27, OSCE Representative on the Freedom of the Media Dunja Mijatović condemned these attacks, stating that they "serve as a grim reminder of the appalling situation regarding journalists' safety in Russia. Journalists are being targeted because of their work and this contributes to an atmosphere of fear, which undermines the very pillar of free expression and free media – investigative journalism." Two days later, on August 29, Lev Shlosberg, Chief Editor of the Pskovskaya Guberniya and Deputy of the Yabloko party in the Pskov Oblast Legislature, was assaulted in Pskov and beaten to unconsciousness by two unknown assailants. Shlosberg has been one of the most active journalists and politicians working to publicize Russian casualties in Ukraine. These recent attacks are a dangerous manifestation of the trend of violence used to silence political dissent. We especially note the lack of a strong Russian government response to these brutal assaults.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.