



## United States Mission to the OSCE

### **Ongoing Efforts to Silence Independent Voices in Russia**

As delivered by Charge d'Affaires, a.i. Kate M. Byrnes  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
March 2, 2017

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The United States remains concerned by ongoing efforts to silence independent voices in Russia, where the government fails to uphold the country's OSCE and other international commitments regarding democratization, as well as its commitments and obligations to human rights and fundamental freedoms. We are concerned by the guilty verdict handed down on February 8 against opposition politician Aleksei Navalny. The current prosecution of Mr. Navalny is a replica of a 2013 case, which Russia's Supreme Court overturned and the European Court of Human Rights ruled had been based on arbitrary and politically motivated application of the law, and had deprived him of basic guarantees of a fair trial. The latest guilty verdict appears to be another example of the Russian government's ongoing crackdown on independent voices, including members of the political opposition. The Russian people, like people everywhere, deserve a government that supports an open marketplace of ideas, transparent and accountable governance, fair and equal treatment under the law, and the ability to exercise their rights without fear of retribution.

We are concerned by reports that doctors recently diagnosed Vladimir Kara-Murza, a politician, journalist, and frequent critic of the Kremlin, with "acute poisoning by an undetermined substance" after he suddenly fell ill on February 2 and experienced kidney failure. This is the second time in two years that Mr. Kara-Murza was hospitalized in critical condition with nearly identical symptoms. We note that in January 2016, Mr. Kara-Murza petitioned the Russian Investigative Committee to conduct an investigation of deliberate poisoning, including a comprehensive toxicological evaluation. No investigation or criminal case was ever opened. Last week, Mr. Kara-Murza's attorney again petitioned the Investigative Committee to conduct an investigation into the most recent incident. Following his recent release from the hospital, we wish Mr. Kara-Murza a full and quick recovery and call for a clear and transparent accounting of what may have been the source of his illness.

We note that Russia's Supreme Court has ordered the release of opposition activist Ildar Dadin. We are encouraged by Mr. Dadin's February 26 release, but concerned that he was jailed in December 2015, having served two-and-a-half years for a series of peaceful protests. The United States urges Russia to respect its international obligations and OSCE commitments to protect the rights of everyone to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. The United States reiterates its concern about reports that Mr. Dadin was

subjected to threats, mistreatment, and torture in prison. We repeat our call on Russian authorities to conduct a thorough and impartial investigation into Mr. Dadin's disturbing allegations of torture and abuse in the IK-7 penal colony in Karelia, and to bring to justice those found responsible for any abuses.

Colleagues, February 27 marked two years since Russian opposition leader Boris Nemtsov was murdered just steps from the Kremlin by assailants alleged to be members of the Chechen security services. The United States reiterates its call on Russian authorities to investigate this crime fully and to bring to justice all of those responsible. Doing so would demonstrate that political murders cannot be carried out with impunity.

In closing, we urge the Russian government to make clear that it does not condone threatening behavior by government officials, and to ensure that no harm should come to members of the opposition and civil society activists. We urge the Russian government to provide a fair playing field for all political parties seeking to participate in Russia's government. We reiterate U.S. concern with Russia's so-called "foreign agents" law, which, along with the law on "undesirable foreign organizations," contravene Russia's OSCE commitments to guarantee freedom of association and expression. The people of Russia deserve transparent and accountable governance, equal treatment under the law, and the ability to exercise their rights without fear of retribution.

We remind the Russian government of its international obligations and OSCE commitments to protect and promote the human rights and fundamental freedoms of everyone, regardless of political affiliation or personal views.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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