

PC.DEL/48/08
24 January 2008

ENGLISH
Original: RUSSIAN

Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY MR. VLADIMIR VORONKOV,
DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE
RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

24 January 2008

**In response to the statements by the European Union and Canada
regarding the work of the British Council on the territory of
the Russian Federation**

Mr. Chairman,

In response to the statements by the European Union (EU) and Canada regarding the closing down of offices of the British Council on Russian territory, we should like to make the following comments.

The British Council opened its offices in Russia in the early 1990s. We value the work of this institution, which does much to promote cultural, scientific and educational links between Russia and the United Kingdom. I wish to stress right away that the current difficult situation in Russia surrounding the activities of the British Council is of a legal nature.

The fact of the matter is that the British Council has been working in Russia in violation of a decree enacted by the Government of the Russian Federation in 1995 under the title "Procedure for the establishment and conditions for the operation of foreign cultural and information centres on the territory of the Russian Federation" and also in breach of the Russo-British framework agreement of 1994 on co-operation in the fields of culture, science and education. Article 13 of that agreement stipulates that: "All activity within the framework of this Agreement shall be carried out in accordance with the laws and regulations in force in the territory of the State in which the activity takes place".

As you are aware, the British Council opened its offices in Russia not only without having obtained the consent of the Russian Government to do so, as provided for under our legislation, but without even having requested that consent.

A further violation of the Vienna Conventions on Diplomatic and Consular Relations was the fact that the Yekaterinburg branch of the British Council was located on the premises of the British Consulate General.

For a number of years, the Russian Government called for the activities of the British Council to be brought into line with Russian legislation and the norms of international law. However, this was not done.

In October of last year, we were therefore forced to raise officially the question of the closing down from 1 January 2008 of the regional offices of the British Council in Russia until such time as a bilateral agreement on the procedure for the establishment and conditions for the operation of cultural and information centres is concluded. In that connection, as a sign of goodwill and its willingness to compromise, Moscow did not insist, nor does it currently insist, on closing down the Moscow office of the British Council.

Unfortunately, this legitimate demand has not been met. British Council offices have continued to operate in St. Petersburg and Yekaterinburg. When it announced last week that the operations of these offices would be shut down, the United Kingdom finally did what it should have done a long time ago.

Mr. Chairman,

Russia is in favour of promoting all manner of ties with the United Kingdom and other countries of the European Union in the areas of education, science and culture. Our position here is that ties of this kind should be developed on a basis of parity, in a civilized manner and within the framework of international law and national legislation.

We regret that the United Kingdom has attempted to artificially politicize this problem and even submitted it for discussion within the OSCE.

We call on our British partners to refrain in future from steps of this kind and to resolve legal problems within the framework of the law, calmly and without unnecessary confrontation.

Thank you for your attention.