



## United States Mission to the OSCE

### **Suspension of Russian NGO Golos for Failing to Register as a “Foreign Agent”**

As delivered by Ambassador Ian Kelly  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
July 4, 2013

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States is deeply concerned by the Russian Ministry of Justice’s decision on June 25 to suspend for six months the operations of Russia’s most prominent independent election monitoring organization, the Golos Association, for failing to register as a “foreign agent.” The suspension order prohibits Golos from holding public events or distributing public information and freezes the organization’s bank account except to pay for salaries, debts, taxes, and fines.

Participating States agreed in Maastricht in 2003 on the “need for confidence by the electorate in the entire [election] process, for transparency of election procedures, and for accountability on the part of authorities conducting elections.”

Golos is a highly professional, non-partisan election watchdog whose work has helped inform the Russian people and the international community about the evolving state of election integrity in Russia. Golos received funds from USAID and numerous other foreign donors since its founding, but ceased accepting new foreign funds after November 2012. Nevertheless, last March Golos became the first NGO accused of violating the “NGO/Foreign Agent Law,” and was fined for failing to register as a foreign agent – an issue we raised at the Permanent Council on May 2<sup>nd</sup>. On May 15, Russian Minister of Justice Konovalov promised to dissolve Golos should it fail to “fulfill the requirements of the law” and register as a foreign agent.

The United States is alarmed by the increasing pressure on Russian NGOs, and the succession of recently adopted laws aimed at undermining the activities of Russian citizens and civic organizations, all of which run counter to Russia’s OSCE commitments.

We do not agree with comparisons of the Russian law to the U.S. Foreign Agents Registration Act, which targets lobbyists, not civil society. The U.S. values the kind of broad debate promoted by civil society, and asserts that applying the name of ‘foreign agent’ is stigmatizing and stifles that debate. I’d like to recall that our Norwegian colleague noted here in the Permanent Council last month that the government of Norway gave U.S. NGOs in 2011 34 million euros. Not one of those 40 NGOs receiving Norwegian funds was required by U.S. authorities to register as a foreign agent.

Mr. Chairman, as participating States we reaffirmed in Astana in 2010 “the important role played by civil society and free media in helping us to ensure full respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms, democracy, including free and fair elections, and the rule of law.” All of us also reaffirmed unequivocally that human rights are not solely a domestic issue, but also a matter of “direct and legitimate” interest to other states. Accordingly, we will continue to raise our concern when governments apply inappropriate pressure against NGOs and other advocates of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.