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**RIGHT OF REPLY BY
MR. ALEKSANDR VOLGAREV, DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF
THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE 1466th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

21 March 2024

The Russian Federation's presidential election

Madam Chairperson,

I should like to exercise my right of reply in connection with the statements that have been made.

We have already spoken about our reasons for refusing to collaborate with the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) – in particular, we did so when addressing ODIHR Director Matteo Mecacci personally at the Permanent Council meeting on 14 March this year. We repeat: that executive structure and its leadership have completely discredited and tainted themselves by their bias. Russia has no confidence in the ODIHR. As for OSCE commitments, the Russian Federation implemented these in good faith by inviting, in accordance with paragraph 8 of the CSCE Copenhagen Document, international observers from various prestigious organizations and bodies, together with experts from our Organization's participating States.

Madam Chairperson,

We could not care less about the bellicose statements by the representatives of States that are waging a proxy war against Russia – and that, *inter alia*, are supplying the Kyiv regime with lethal weapons and equipment – when it comes to their assessments of the expression of the people's will that took place in our country. We recommend them to worry about the suspension of the presidential election in Ukraine, where their protégé Volodymyr Zelenskyy will forfeit, already in May, what little is left of his legitimacy. It was very much thanks to the Western alliance countries' "efforts" that the Russian presidential election was overshadowed by numerous aggressive attempts to disrupt the electoral process.

Here are some concrete examples. At the very start of the voting, on 15 March, certain Western officials organized a "flash mob" on social media to criticize the electoral process in Russia. Before the voting had even finished, the representatives of "progressive democracies" brazenly pronounced a verdict that suits them and is in line with their politicized stances. They were not particularly interested in how the election would actually shape up. In that regard, we are not at all surprised by the uniform critical statements that have been churned out in carbon-copy fashion.

The passages included in them about “not recognizing” the voting in certain Russian territories are legally null and void. The Republic of Crimea and the federal city of Sevastopol, the People’s Republics of Donetsk and Lugansk, and the Zaporozhye and Kherson regions are integral parts of the Russian Federation. Their reunification with Russia occurred as a result of referendums that were held in strict compliance with international standards. During the current presidential election, the people living there exercised their basic political and civil rights. Those who talk about not recognizing the results are trying to deny these rights to them and also to the Russian citizens living in Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Transdnistria.

Madam Chairperson,

Despite the unprecedented pressure, the election was held with a record turnout, even abroad.

In Russia itself the election was overshadowed by a number of provocations. Russian citizens in some regions cast their ballots under a barrage of indiscriminate shelling by the Western-sponsored Kyiv regime. As we have already mentioned today, these indiscriminate attacks on civilian infrastructure were carried out to intimidate people and to try to influence their voting decision. They resulted in civilian casualties among current and future voters and the staff of electoral commissions. A week before the start of the voting, a member of a local electoral commission in the city of Berdyansk in the Zaporozhye region was killed in a terrorist attack using a car bomb. We demand that the OSCE leadership condemn attacks on the civilian population of Russia.

Contrary to one of the fundamental OSCE principles, that of non-intervention in internal affairs, attempts of that sort were also undertaken. Among those at the top of that sad ranking we find the United States of America along with Germany, which made use of their diplomatic missions in Moscow, though they also relied on media resources and non-governmental organizations. For example, through the foreign agent Voice of America, a radio station controlled by the United States Agency for Global Media, a “checklist for voters” was disseminated to intimidate people and exhort them to spoil their ballots. Similarly, there were persistent calls for collaboration from the US Embassy in Moscow and the CIA. They were echoed by British diplomatic and consular missions. Essentially, they were all engaged in inciting voters to spoil electoral materials on election day. This is confirmed by the testimony of citizens arrested for such acts.

There were likewise numerous attempts, originating in Germany, the United Kingdom, the United States, Finland and Lithuania, to influence the election through cyberattacks on the Central Election Commission’s websites and the platform for remote electronic voting.

Madam Chairperson,

On the election days, voters, members of the electoral commissions and international observers also noted numerous examples of efforts to disrupt the electoral process and intimidate Russian citizens abroad. Fake news about the casting of ballots at Russian diplomatic missions were disseminated through social media accounts and media outlets controlled by Western countries. Malicious actors tried to portray the queues at polling stations captured on video as protests so as to reduce voter turnout. Or they simply engaged in crude photoshopping. At the instigation of Western-financed violent “expats” and self-styled representatives of the non-systemic opposition, uniform protest actions were organized outside Russian embassies and consulates.

The most outrageous incidents took place in Moldova and on the territory of Transdnistria. In Chişinău there was an attempt to set fire to a polling station. A drone strike was carried out on Tiraspol by

the Kyiv regime. The regime's goal was obvious: it sought to undermine the situation in the region and sow panic during the election.

However, as is customary, the Baltic countries outdid everyone else. In Latvia, where officials had previously voiced threats directed at Russian citizens, law enforcement personnel checked and selectively confiscated the residence permits of voters who had come to the Russian Embassy to cast their vote. This is no longer just mere pressure – it is a sophisticated form of abuse against a country's residents that amounts to a flagrant violation of standards in the protection of human rights. The authorities in Tallinn exerted psychological pressure on Russian citizens living in Estonia. Similarly, the Estonian border service agencies created bureaucratic obstacles for our compatriots voting in localities in the Leningrad and Pskov regions and in the city of Kaliningrad. Similar things happened in Lithuania too: border guards set about interrogating citizens who were heading for polling stations in Russia. All this took place against a general backdrop of threats and repression in these countries, with people fearing persecution by the local authorities for exercising their choice at the ballot box.

Madam Chairperson,

The attempts by unfriendly countries to influence a Russian election and discredit its outcome have failed completely. This must above all be attributed to Russia's citizens, the expression of whose will is the sole source of legitimacy for elections. Our compatriots displayed bravery, civic courage and firmness of conviction. The results of their voting demonstrate full support for the Russian leadership's domestic and foreign policy course.

In that regard, the critical statements by Western alliance countries are nothing but a cry of despair at their own impotence. Instead of indulging a compulsive obsession with the prospects of "a free Russia", we would recommend you to pay attention to your growing domestic problems and to the elections due to take place in your own countries this year, notably the US elections and the European Parliament elections. And to have the courage to recognize the obvious – that Russia did indeed vote for Vladimir Putin and would do so again right now under any circumstances.

Thank you for your attention.