



United States Mission to the OSCE

Right of Reply to the Russian Federation on Georgia's Law on Foreign Agents

As delivered by Acting Deputy Chief of Mission Tracey Newell
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
May 30, 2024

Madam Chair, I wish to exercise my right of reply to set the record straight about U.S. law.

The U.S. Foreign Agents Registration Act, or FARA, is designed to promote transparency. FARA was enacted to inform the American public about entities operating in the United States to influence public policy or opinion on behalf of foreign persons or entities. It applies generally to agents of foreign principals and does not specifically single out NGOs, other civil society groups, or journalists. It does not limit freedom of expression or activity that may be undertaken. It is country-neutral and does not discriminate based on which foreign country is at issue. It does not stigmatize NGOs and journalists who receive foreign funding as the draft Georgian legislation does.

At the Permanent Council on May 14, Russia again tried to compare U.S. transparency statutes with Kremlin-inspired legislation restricting the work of non-governmental organizations, civil society, and media. Comparing FARA with Russian and Russian-like legislation is, simply put, nonsensical. Unlike the Russian and other similar laws, FARA does not require registration just on the basis of foreign funding. Our law does not censor or penalize those who disagree with U.S. government policies or practices, whether they happen to be NGOs or foreign governments. It does not restrict lobbying or advocacy in the United States, nor does it stop NGOs from receiving foreign funding. It does not impose impractical burdens or draconian fines on these organizations, nor does the United States require invasive and overly detailed information about all the employees who work for organizations subject to the U.S. FARA law.

The Kremlin's attempt to draw a false equivalency to the U.S. law is a cheap disinformation ploy to distract from its abuse of its own criminal justice system to silence peaceful domestic dissent.

In reality, Russia uses broad, vague legislation on purported foreign agents as a cudgel to threaten dissenting voices into silence and disable independent civil society. The Russian government's reliance on its so-called "foreign agent" law raises serious concerns about Russia's respect for its OSCE commitments and international law obligations to respect freedoms of expression and association. And this is why the United States and many of our democratic partners are so deeply concerned about similar legislation enacted or contemplated in other countries.

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