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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE
1328th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

5 August 2021

**On the refusal of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights and
the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly to observe the elections to the State Duma**

Madam Chairperson,

In connection with the insinuations that have been made about the forthcoming elections to the State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation from 17 to 19 September, we note the following.

On 4 August, the Director of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), Matteo Mecacci, announced in a letter addressed to the Chairperson of the Central Election Commission (CEC) of the Russian Federation, Ella Pamfilova, that the ODIHR would not be observing the State Duma elections this September. On the same day, the ODIHR circulated a note to this effect among the participating States. Furthermore, what was essentially a joint press release by the ODIHR and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly was published explaining the reasons for not sending observation missions.

In that connection, we should like to draw attention to the fact that invitations by the Russian Federation to its foreign partners to participate as observers were sent in good time and in full compliance with OSCE commitments. For example, the ODIHR's invitation was sent on 23 June of this year, that is, almost three months ahead of the election date. In addition to the ODIHR and the Parliamentary Assembly, other international bodies engaged in election monitoring also received invitations.

The ODIHR and the Parliamentary Assembly base their refusal to send a mission to Russia on the fact that the ODIHR, in its own words, "exclusively and independently" determines the parameters of monitoring, such as the duration of observation, the number of observers and the procedures for their work in accordance with its methodology. We would remind you that this methodology is not consensus-based: it has not been approved by the OSCE participating States.

The flimsiness of the line of argument taken by our colleagues from the ODIHR and the Parliamentary Assembly is obvious – the parameters for international observation of national electoral processes are established by the OSCE participating States in accordance with domestic law. As an OSCE executive structure accountable to the participating States, the ODIHR should respect this. The participating States have no obligation to adhere to some arbitrarily set "ODIHR standard".

Let us turn to the actual obligations. Specifically, paragraph 8 of the 1990 Copenhagen Document reads: “The participating States consider that the presence of observers, both foreign and domestic, can enhance the electoral process for States in which elections are taking place. They therefore invite observers from any other CSCE participating States and any appropriate private institutions and organizations who may wish to do so to observe the course of their national election proceedings, to the extent permitted by law.” We emphasize “to the extent permitted by law”. In other words, a State is entitled to regulate the amount of observation.

As for the ODIHR’s mandate, the Supplementary document to give effect to certain provisions contained in the Charter of Paris for a New Europe (1990), subsection G, “The office for free elections”, paragraph 2, states that the Office “will compile information, including information provided by the competent authorities of the participating States, on the dates, procedures and official results of scheduled national elections within participating States, as well as reports of election observations, and provide these on request to governments, parliaments and interested private organizations”.

Direct responsibility for the lack of clear rules lies with the Western countries, which have stubbornly refused to jointly develop and approve by consensus uniform principles for election observation that would apply equally to all OSCE participating States. In so doing, they are trying to transform election observation commitments into a tool for controlling elections “east of Vienna”.

In this case, the formal cause of the complaints by the ODIHR and the Parliamentary Assembly was the decision by the competent Russian authorities regarding the need to limit the total number of foreign observers in view of the measures required to combat the coronavirus infection. This forced measure is objectively justified by the evolution of the epidemiological situation.

This decision does not discriminate against the ODIHR: it applies to all foreign observers. What is more, among all the international bodies, it was in fact the ODIHR that was given the opportunity to send the largest observation mission, with up to 50 observers.

We regret that a lack of common sense and of a sense of proportion when evaluating their own role in election observation prevented the ODIHR and the Parliamentary Assembly from taking a decision to send missions. The ODIHR’s dismissive attitude towards our efforts to counter the spread of the novel coronavirus infection is also disappointing. In its report, the ODIHR needs assessment mission chose not to reflect the point that “the size of the observation mission should be reviewed, if necessary, depending on the coronavirus pandemic situation.”

We cannot agree with the ODIHR Director’s argument that independent and credible election observation is linked to the number of observers. The Russian Federation was prepared to accept a team of observers from the ODIHR of at least the same size, for example, as was sent to observe the elections in the United States of America last year. And in no way did that prevent the ODIHR from preparing a full-length election observation report.

We would also remind you that, owing to the pandemic, the ODIHR has launched a new observation format, namely the special election assessment mission. This mission format was used at elections in Poland, Serbia, North Macedonia and Romania in 2020, where there were between seven and ten observers. Another format – the limited election observation mission – was also not considered in the case of Russia, even though it has been widely used by the ODIHR this year at elections in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and twice in Bulgaria, and last year in the United States. The numerical strength of these missions did not even reach 50 observers. In 2020, given the epidemiological situation, the ODIHR did not send short-term observers to

the elections in Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine at all. And yet it still produced final reports on all these elections.

All that has been said points once again to the long-overdue need to place monitoring activities, especially those of the ODIHR, on a firm and non-discriminatory basis agreed on by all the OSCE participating States. Russia has repeatedly proposed that the procedures for the formation and work of monitoring missions should be laid down clearly.

To date, the only obligation agreed upon is to invite foreign observers to elections, and this has been scrupulously fulfilled by Russia.

Thus, an all-or-nothing logic prevailed in the actions of the ODIHR and the Parliamentary Assembly. Such an approach to relations with sovereign States is unacceptable.

In view of the fact that the ODIHR and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly decided themselves not to participate as observers, we would point out that no statements, assessments or comments by them regarding the organization of the voting at these elections and the electoral process in general can be taken into account or considered to be independent and credible.

We are confident that all the places allocated to the ODIHR and the Parliamentary Assembly for monitoring the elections in Russia will be eagerly taken up by other foreign observers.

Thank you for your attention.