



PERMANENT DELEGATION OF NORWAY TO THE OSCE

STATEMENT ON FOREIGN AGENT LEGISLATION IN THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

As delivered by Ambassador Robert Kvile
to the Permanent Council,
Vienna, 12 November 2015

Mr Chairman,

I share the concerns expressed by my US colleague about the consequences of the so-called foreign agent legislation in the Russian Federation.

Whenever this issue is brought up we are told by our Russian colleagues that this law, and the listing of organisations as foreign agents, do not prevent these organisations from operating.

Chairman, the problem with this legislation is – as also underlined by my US colleague – that it puts a stigma on the organisations in question and thereby limits their possibility to work.

Mr. Chairman,

This legislation does not only curb civil society in the Russian Federation. It is also detrimental to the cooperation and contacts between Russia and other countries, including my own.

I will give you a couple of examples:

The Nordic Council of Ministers, not an NGO, but an inter-governmental cooperation arrangement between Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden, has for several years had offices in St. Petersburg and Kaliningrad, and in addition a more limited presence in Arkhangelsk, Murmansk and Petrozavodsk.

In February this year Russian authorities found that the Nordic Council of Ministers organizes political activities in the Russian Federation, financed from abroad. Attempts by the Council to avoid having to register as a foreign agent were unsuccessful. The Nordic Council of Ministers has therefore decided to close their activities in the Russian Federation.

A great loss, I would say, for all those who want to develop the contacts between the peoples of the Russian Federation and the Nordic Countries.

Another example: Bellona is a Norwegian Foundation engaged in a broad spectre of national and international environmental issues. Their head office is in Oslo, but they are represented also in Brussels, Washington, Murmansk and St. Petersburg.

Bellona in Russia has now been asked to register as a foreign agent. The result of this is inevitable: The offices will now be closed, after two decades of operation. Another positive link between Norway and Russia has been lost.

Mr Chairman,

I represent a country that is supporting many civil society organisations, at home, in many EU countries and in OSCE participating States “East of Vienna” as well as in North America – and in countries beyond the OSCE area.

My Russian colleague argues that there is similar legislation in the USA. But no action has been taken against any of the US organisations that have received funding from Norway.

Mr. Chairman,

We have no hidden agenda. Organisations that benefit from support from Norway do not work on our behalf. They are not our agents.

Our agenda is to support the development of an active civil society – and thereby robust and well-functioning democracies, and thereby security and stability.

Thank you.