

## Support Civil Society and Genuine Democracy in Russia

The Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Party convening in Warsaw, Poland on 1 to 3 December 2016:

### Notes that:

- on 18 September, State Duma elections were carried out in Russia, where the ruling party United Russia secured a  $\frac{3}{4}$  majority. The majority allows for changing the constitution single-handedly;
- with more than half of the eligible voters not casting their vote, the voter turnout reached a historic low of 47.8% (in some regions, even below 30%) according to official, but highly questionable, figures, the lowest since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

### Considers that:

- despite the improvements of the party registration process, in its preliminary findings and conclusions on the 18 September elections, the OSCE International Election Observation Mission noted a lack of “distinct political alternatives”;<sup>[1]</sup>
- Vladimir Putin’s decision to move the election date to September from December is believed to be aimed at shortening the campaign time and lowering interest and turnout, especially undermining the opposition. No opposition parties critical towards the regime managed to win any seats.

### Stresses that:

- the OSCE Election Observation Mission further noted that “democratic commitments continue to be challenged and the electoral environment was negatively affected by restrictions to fundamental freedoms and political rights, firmly controlled media and a tightening grip on civil society,” and on Election Day, that “numerous procedural irregularities were noted during counting”;<sup>[2]</sup>
- civil society and civil rights have been severely challenged in Russia following the “undesirable organisations” legislation <sup>[3]</sup> and the “foreign agents” legislation <sup>[4]</sup>, affecting actors involved with human rights, the environment, civil and political rights as well as election observing. Just two weeks ahead of the ballot, the Levada Centre, the last independent pollster in Russia, was blacklisted as a “foreign agent”;

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- as noted by OSCE, the failure to implement legislation concerning freedoms of association, assembly and expression poses “a significant hurdle for the conduct of democratic elections”; [5]
- elections were also conducted on the territory of the illegally annexed Crimean Peninsula, thus violating international law.

### **Believes that:**

- the lack of genuine democratic representation in the parliamentary bodies combined with the attacks toward civil society shows the absence of both fundamental political rights and state stability;
- a strong civil society is needed in order to challenge and critically scrutinise ruling powers, which is fundamental for a functional modern democracy, as well as political sustainability and legitimacy;
- the domestic political tension is likely to increase ahead of the 2018 Russian presidential elections, at the same time increasing the acute need for re-establishing basic civil and political rights and democratic principles in Russia.

### **Calls for:**

- all reported irregularities during the 2016 Duma elections to be duly investigated;
- the ALDE Party, ALDE Members and the ALDE Group in the European Parliament to condemn the deconstruction of Russian democracy, the eradication of the multi-party system, and the illegal annexation of the Crimean Peninsula as well as the ongoing destabilisation of Eastern Ukraine;
- the ALDE Party, ALDE Members and the ALDE Group in the European Parliament to keep up a strong support of the civil society and the liberal opposition in Russia, in particular though demanding the end of pressuring free media and to reinstall the freedom of assembly, as well as to demand genuine democratic rights of the people to be re-established;
- the Russian Parliament to retract the 2012 'Foreign Agents' law and cease the registration of NGO's at the Ministry of Justice and relieve them of the mandatory identification as a foreign agent in their communication;
- the Russian government to recognise and implement decisions of the ECHR;
- the ALDE Party, ALDE members and ALDE Group in the European Parliament to maintain and uphold sanctions against the Russian government unless it ceases to occupy the Crimean Peninsula and fully implements all steps of the Minsk Peace Agreement.

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[1] OSCE International Election Observation Mission: Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions, p. 1. Available online at <http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/russia/265186> (accessed 2 Oct 2016).

[2] Ibid.

[3] Currently there are seven organisations listed as undesirable by the Ministry of Justice. By the law, undesirable organizations are those “posing a threat to the country’s constitutional order, defence potential and state security” and therefore are banned (full list: <http://minjust.ru/ru/activity/nko/unwanted>)

[4] Currently, 141 organisations are listed as ‘foreign agents’ (full list: <http://unro.minjust.ru/NKOForeignAgent.aspx>)

[5] See supra note 1, p. 4.

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