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Subject: Summary record of the meeting of the European Parliament **Committee on Foreign Affairs** and the **Delegation to the EU-Russia Parliamentary Committee**
Chairman: Mr Brok (EPP, DE)
Brussels, 8 February 2012

Hearing on "The Outcome of the Elections to the Russian Duma and the Upcoming Presidential Elections"

Hannes SWOBODA (S&D, AT), AFET Rapporteur for the new EU-Russia Agreement, introduced the hearing by saying that an important EU strategic partner like Russia should have an internal democracy reflecting the real will of its citizens and a foreign policy defending human rights. But it had to be said that the results of the parliamentary elections did not reflect the votes cast and that Russia's position on Syria was deeply disappointing. He added that those who criticized the authorities should not automatically be considered enemies of the State and allies of the US.

Knut FLECKENSTEIN (S&D, DE), Chair of the Delegation to the EU-Russia Parliamentary Cooperation Committee, expressed the EP's solidarity with the Russian citizens who were demonstrating in the streets. He considered that Russian modernization should go beyond economic modernization to encompass society as well.

Elmar BROK (EPP, DE), Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, stressed that the EU had a clear interest in close relations with Russia, as it was a very important partner. For that reason, it was crucial to have a genuine dialogue with it.

Ambassador Vladimir CHIZHOV, Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the EU, tried to give a positive picture of what was going on in Russia. He said that elections were the quintessence of democracy, but that democracy had its own specific characteristics depending on the country involved and there was no ideal recipe for democracy. Concerning the Duma elections, he said that opposition parties were happy with the results and that those that had taken part in the elections had won more seats. As far as street demonstrations and rallies were concerned, they were the proof that there was a civil society in Russia and that it was maturing. Moreover, there were no reports of any violence. He acknowledged that civil society had some reservations on the conduct of the elections but stressed that it was far from a united movement, as some even supported the government. Finally, Ambassador Chizhov declared that, as with the parliamentary elections, international election observation missions were welcome in Russia for the presidential elections on 4 March.

Andrei BUZIN, GOLOS organization, was extremely critical of the political situation in Russia. He mentioned the large-scale irregularities reported during the elections, whose results did not reflect the will of the majority, the non-registration of candidates and parties, the State control of all TV channels, the impossibility of challenging irregularities in court because the judicial system was itself not independent and the changes promised by the authorities, which were merely cosmetic (like putting cameras in the polling stations).

Ilya YASHIN, Member of the Solidarnost Movement, stressed the fact that the Russian authorities were no longer trusted by the citizens and that the regime had lost its legitimacy. The forthcoming presidential election would be neither fair nor free and Mr Putin was in a position to decide on his own fate.

Mikhail KASYANOV, Co-chair of the People's Freedom Party, also argued that there was no democracy in Russia: there was no separation of powers, no independent parliament, no independent judicial system, no free media. Opposition parties were not able to register to participate in parliamentary elections and under the Russian Constitution the same person could not be President for more than two terms, while Putin would be running for his third.

But Mr Kasyanov pointed out that the situation was different from the Arab spring. In Russia the middle classes in the big cities were not calling for revolution, only for their constitutional rights to be respected and for presidential elections to be conducted according to international standards. He concluded that, under the present circumstances, Mr Putin would not be a legitimate President after the 4th of March.

Michael PULCH, Head of Russia Division, EEAS, put some emphasis on the welcome reforms of the electoral law and on the political awakening of civil society in Russia. He added that Brussels would follow closely the Presidential elections, considered as a test for Russia, and hoped they would be free and fair.

During the debate that followed, the speech by Ambassador Chizhov was seriously criticized and with only one exception (Mr. Mirsky (S&D, LV)), MEPs expressed full solidarity with the representatives of the Russian opposition. Mr. Migalsky (ECR, PL) alluded to the Ambassador's "sense of humour", regretting that political prisoners in Russia could not share it.

MEPs declared that there was no democracy at all in Russia - it was not just that there were problems with Russian democracy (Ms Ojuland (ALDE, EE)). According to Mr Gahler (EPP, DE), the elections in Tunisia had proved to be more democratic than in Russia, a European country. The issue of the legitimacy of the Duma was raised. For some (Mr. Brok (PPE, DE), Mr. Peterle (EPP, SI), there was a credibility and legitimacy gap and they went as far as to call into question the wisdom of still having a joint parliamentary committee of the EP and the Duma, so as not to apply double standards with respect to Belarus (Mr Schulz (Greens/ALE, DE)). But others took a different view: for Ms Gomes (S&D, PT), even if the Duma was not democratic, dialogue should not stop; for Mr Swoboda (S&D, AT), one had to be cautious about declaring that the Duma as a whole was not democratic, because in half of the polling stations no irregularities had been registered and therefore some Members of the Duma had been elected properly. Ambassador Chizhov said that, even if there were some irregularities (which had to be proved), the Duma represented the will of the majority of the Russian people. He added that not only were there serious democratic problems in some European countries - i.e. Hungary, but the legitimacy of the European Parliament itself was also questioned by some. This last declaration made some MEPs furious and the Ambassador reacted by saying he had been misunderstood, as this was not his position but that of some constitutional lawyers in Brussels.

Concerning the presidential elections, Ambassador Chizhov reminded MEPs that Mr. Putin had decided not to run for election in 2008 so as to abide by the Constitution, which forbade three consecutive terms as president. Now there were different candidates and even if the elections were not perfect, Mr Putin would win in any case as nobody could rival him. But the opposition representatives disagreed: Mr. Yashin argued that strong politicians did not fear free and fair elections, nor public political debates. For Mr. Kasyanov, if the elections were to be free and true competition did take place, Putin's re-election would be at risk. Asked by Ms Gomes how solid the regime was, he replied that he gave it three years, but should the oil price go down, even less. The lack of unity of the opposition was also debated. Mr Yashin acknowledged that the weakness and fragmentation of the opposition was at least partially responsible for Putin's unlimited powers, but he added that things were changing in the right direction.

Mr Salafranca (EPP, ES) asked what consequences the EEAS would draw from the irregularities during the parliamentary elections. Mr Pulch said they were threefold: first, the EU would continue to back the ODIHR and other international election observation missions; second, the EU would continue to raise the issue of the electoral process with the Russian authorities; third, the EU would continue to have contacts with Russian civil society.

Mr Swoboda (S&D, AT) disagreed with those who called for fresh parliamentary elections (Ms Ojuland): he felt that the electoral law had to be changed first; only then would it be time to call early elections.

The issue of foreign financial support for Russian NGOs was another hot topic of debate. Ambassador Chizhov said that the EU and the US were financing Russian NGOs and democratic programmes. Opposition representatives denied this and qualified it as regime propaganda, pointing out that foreign funding was not allowed under Russian law.