



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**

Brussels, 16 March 2012

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NOTE

from: General Secretariat of the Council
to: Delegations
Subject : European Parliament Plenary session in Strasbourg on 14 March :
Outcome of the presidential elections in Russia - statement by the High
Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy

Mr Søvndal, on behalf of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Ms Ashton, delivered the speech set out in the Annex.

For the political groups, the following speakers took the floor:

- Mr Salafranca Sánchez-Neyra (EPP, ES) underlined that the Russian elections were not in line with international standards. He said that the Russian people's fight for freedom was the key aspect of the resolution, and called on the EU to use all available influence to make it possible for fundamental rights in Russia to be genuinely respected.
- Mr Swoboda (S&D, AT) reiterated the need for a critical appraisal of the elections and the rejection of the actions against demonstrators. Nevertheless, he believed that the fact that demonstrations could take place represented a kind of advance in Russia, and had to be seen positively. Consequently he thought that, instead of being purely critical, the resolution should refer to existing opportunities for democratic modernisation, including the electoral reform package, and the chances of the opposition to influence the situation.

- Ms Ojuland (ALDE, EE) reiterated that the elections were neither free nor fair, questioned the legitimacy of the Duma and of Mr Putin and queried whether they, as such, could be partners of the EU and the international community.
- Mr Schulz (Greens/EFA, DE) also considered that the elections were neither free nor fair and that the official results were not correct, as Mr Putin's victory had been achieved without any opposition. He was concerned about Mr Putin's promise of stability. In his view it represented stagnation, given his former promises of economic and social modernisation that had failed. He called on the EU to support the protest movement and opposition to prove that there was an alternative to Mr Putin.
- Mr Kowal (ECR, PL) thought that the undemocratic nature of the elections should be called by its real name. If not, he saw no point in issuing the resolution. He also advocated a strong EU reaction and called for unity in the EU's response if Russia used force against demonstrators.
- Mr Scholz (GUE/NGL, DE) echoed previous speakers in their statements on the nature of the elections and considered that the issue could be solved only at the political level. He also highlighted the obvious changes in Russian society that needed to be supported. He considered that some of the conclusions on Russia drawn by some Members were not correct and that the EP needed to decide which line to follow.
- Ms Tzavela (EFD, EL) thought that a little progress had been made in bringing the EU and Russia closer to each other. She advocated a different approach to make relations easier, given that accusations and criticism were leading nowhere.
- Mr Mølzer (NI, AT) said that the EU should look at its own democratic deficit reflected in the illegitimate extension of the mandate of Mr Van Rompuy.

During the subsequent discussion, Members echoed the opinion expressed by the group leaders that the elections were neither free nor fair. They commented on the general framework, such as the freedom of media and freedom of speech, the lack of political parties in Russia, and the lack of opportunity for opposition candidates to be elected, and questioned the legitimacy of the result, as Mr Putin had been left with no opposition. Nevertheless, some Members pointed out that majority of people supported Putin and thought that the opposition alternative was not yet viable. They also mentioned some positive aspects, such as the confidentiality of the voting and the freedom to protest. Non-attached Members denied the claims about the elections and considered that the EU also suffered from a democratic deficit.

As regards the follow-up, Ms Oomen-Ruijten (EPP, NL) underlined the need to defend and support those Russians who were demonstrating (with Ms Nicolai (ALDE, RO)) and the need for mutual cooperation. Mr Fleckenstein (S&D, DE) highlighted the political awakening of the middle class and saw room for EP involvement in establishing contacts for an intensified parliamentary dialogue, encouraging Russia and offering EU experience (supported by Mr Paleckis (S&D, LT)). In this context, Mr Lisek (EPP, PL) hoped that a dialogue would be conducted with political forces outside the Duma. Mr McMillan-Scott (ALDE, UK), echoed by Mr Zala (S&D, SK) and Ms Neynsky (EPP, BG), considered that the EU should stop "business as usual" and strive for constructive engagement to advance EU values in Russia. Ms Neynsky, Mr Millán Mon (EPP, ES) and Ms Crețu (S&D, RO) believed that democracy and respect for human rights should be at the heart of cooperation with Russia. Mr Kamiński (ECR, PL) added that the EU should act decisively in its political activity, as he considered that Russia deserved its freedom.

As regards the resolution, many Members expressed their support. Nevertheless, Mr McMillan-Scott and Mr Migalski (ECR, PL) called for it to be improved. Mr Lisek thought that it should be addressed to Mr Putin instead of Mr Medvedev, as he considered that the former was the real decision-maker.

Concerning Mr Medvedev's promises of reform, Mr Brok (EPP, DE) inquired about the latest developments and warned that if they were not implemented, Russia would develop an even more dictatorial regime. Mr Tabajdi (S&D, HU) and Ms Kolarska-Bobińska (EPP, PL) added that, without fundamental changes, social stability would be endangered, which could lead to violent unrest. Mr Kelam (EPP, EE) questioned the reliability of the promises and called for cooperation with the opposition to set the date for new elections. Mr Migalski did not believe in the promises of reform at all.

Mr McMillan-Scott also said that the Council of Europe should regard the Duma's delegation as illegitimate. Ms Oomen-Ruijten went further and stated that Russia should not be allowed to be a Member.

In his concluding remarks, Mr Søvndal reiterated the EU's disappointment about the elections (the rejection of candidates, the lacking or unequal access to the media, and the manipulation of the outcome), even if there had been some positive aspects (the promises of Mr Medvedev to contact the opposition, the presence of a greater number of election observers and the right and opportunity of people to demonstrate). He supported the continued criticism, aimed at urging Russia to hold fair and free elections, and highlighted the key role of mutual dialogue in this process.

In this context, he underlined that contact had to be established with all parts of Russian society. He concluded that the EU should push for economic and political modernisation in Russia.

The resolution on the outcome of the presidential elections was adopted on 15 March 2012.

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Speech by Mr Søvndal on the outcome of the presidential elections in Russia, Plenary session of the European Parliament, 14 March 2012

Mr President, Honourable Members,

It is my pleasure to be here today to discuss with you the outcome of the Presidential elections in Russia on behalf of High Representative/Vice-President Ashton.

Let me first of all thank Parliament for the strong voice it has consistently been giving to European citizens' concerns about democracy, fair elections and human rights in Russia.

Russia is our largest neighbour, it is an important business partner and indeed a Strategic Partner for many global and regional issues. So it matters to our citizens what the situation with human rights and the rule of law is in Russia.

Parliament has followed both the Russian State Duma elections of 4 December and the Presidential elections of 4 March very closely.

It has adopted several resolutions expressing the expectations of European citizens for Russia to live up to its international commitments to ensure free and fair elections.

You have also given High Representative/Vice President Ashton several opportunities to address the Plenary on these crucial issue.

In addition, several hearings have taken place since December on these elections and on human rights more generally, organized by the Foreign Affairs Committee, by the Subcommittee on Human Rights, by the Parliamentary Cooperation Committee with Russia, and by individual political groups.

Catherine Ashton has asked me to thank Parliament for all this important work. She also asked me to in particular convey the message that she shares Parliament's concerns about the case of the arrest and death in pre-trial detention of lawyer Sergey Magnitsky.

Restrictive measures are a sensitive instrument that should be considered in specific situations and in accordance with the respective EU guidelines. The European External Action Service is currently looking into options on how to convey our expectation that the investigation of this case be taken forward properly.

The Russian presidential Elections went largely as expected.

OSCE and Council of Europe observers gave a clear evaluation: Chances were not equal during the preparations; procedural violations occurred during the voting and counting process itself.

We agree with their preliminary report and will remind Russia of its international commitments to free and fair elections.

High Representative/Vice President Catherine Ashton issued a statement the day after the elections with 5 main elements:

1. She recognised the clear victory of Vladimir Putin
2. She noted international observers' recognition of significant civic engagement in these elections
3. She referred to international observers' findings of irregularities

4. She encouraged Russia to address these shortcomings
5. She looked forward to work with the incoming president and new government on our shared modernisation agenda which should cover both economic and political reforms.

Outgoing President Medvedev the day after the elections instructed the Prosecutor General to examine the verdicts handed down to 32 convicts considered by the opposition as 'political prisoners', including Mikhail Khodorkovsky and his former business partner Platon Lebedev.

The president has also ordered the Justice Ministry to prepare a report on the legal reasons for denying the registration of Mikhail Kasyanov's, Boris Nemtsov's and Vladimir Ryzhkov's People's Freedom Party (PARNAS). These are encouraging signals. Concrete action should follow.

Next steps

We have a strong consensus in the EU that we must engage with Russia – critically, yes, but also constructively. Without Russia, we cannot solve the regional challenges in our Common Neighbourhood, in Syria, or Iran, nor most of the pressing global challenges such as climate change and the environment.

This approach has been quite successful recently. With Medvedev and the government led by PM Putin, we have been able to build more constructive relations and to achieve results. Russian WTO accession is one key result that will bind this large economy into the international rules-based framework.

The Partnership for Modernisation is another one. Many projects have already been prepared and launched, including technical and regulatory modernisation as well as reforms of the judiciary and civil society involvement.

We have also begun a process on common steps to be fulfilled before we could consider launching negotiations on a visa-waiver agreement. All of this will be to mutual benefit.

The new civic and political awakening in Russia has already led to some political reforms, with the first Duma reading of bills introduced by President Medvedev to liberalize political party registration rules and presidential candidates' registration requirements, as well as to reinstall direct elections of regional governors.

This process opens possibilities for significant further changes. Change may be slower than one would hope. But we should have patience.

It is a good thing that both authorities and protesters want gradual evolution, not revolution. A cautious but real dialogue has begun between them; the quality and dynamics of the political situation in Russia have changed.

The key issue for us now is how we can support this reform process. The bilateral initiatives just mentioned provide us with an excellent basis to build on. As Ashton has stated, the EU looks forward to working with the incoming Russian President and the new government in full support of our shared modernisation agenda.

The next major step in our Strategic Partnership, apart from all the ongoing regular work, will be the next EU-Russia Summit due to be held in Russia before the summer.

I thank you and look forward to hearing your views and to your resolution that will be adopted tomorrow.

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