

Presentation of Ambassador Vladimir Chizhov, Permanent representative of the Russian Federation to the European Union, at the session of the Subcommittee on human rights of the European parliament on 28 February 2011

Let me start by expressing my appreciation to the Subcommittee for devoting this session to an important issue of analyzing and assessing the effectiveness of one very important element of our political dialogue, namely consultations on human rights. The quorum in this room reflected by the number of members of the Subcommittee is indeed an expression of the particular attention of the European Parliament to that particular forum. However, one question that I would immediately pose to the chair is whether the Subcommittee has enough competence to analyze the full scope of our consultations on human rights. Because at least half of the agenda of those consultations covers the situation in the field of human rights within the European Union, which is something that falls outside the competence of the Subcommittee. I was not particularly surprised therefore that the report initiated by the Subcommittee concentrated on just one side of the picture, namely on the human rights situation in Russia. So in order to draw conclusions on whether the consultations are effective we should look at them from different angles, rather than just a single one.

Of course nobody is perfect in this imperfect world of ours. I don't know a single country that can claim that its human rights situation is perfect. And certainly no political dialogue between countries and organizations such as the European Union is perfect by definition. I can say that we are not neither fully satisfied with the human rights consultations with the EU, but we feel that they represent a genuine effort on the part of both sides to get a clearer picture of each other's situation and also to establish points of reference for cooperation in the international fora, like for example the UN Council on Human Rights which opened its session earlier today in Geneva.

I would add that, comparing the human rights consultations with other elements of our political dialogue, these consultations are among the most detailed and lengthy, sometimes lasting for more than a working day.

Among the questions raised by the authors of the report was whether they should be called consultations or dialogue. I think it's a formal element of terminology, because the consultations are a part of a dialogue, our political dialogue, and it would look a bit strange to structure a dialogue within a dialogue.

Also on the issue of representation of the two sides, particularly the Russian side. I was a bit puzzled by the suggestion that inclusion of representatives of law-enforcement agencies would increase the democratic nature and the transparency of this dialogue. I am sure that those of my colleagues who represent Russia at these consultations, being professional diplomats, are fully briefed and fully competent to express the Russian point of view.

Also the suggestion that these consultations should alternatively take place in Moscow. Let me turn to an official EU document, "EU Guidelines on Human Rights Dialogues with Third Countries", and I quote: "Traditionally, dialogues whose primary purpose is to discuss issues of mutual interest and to strengthen human rights cooperation are held in Brussels. That tradition should preferably be maintained".

Russia, being an open and transparent society, has a young civil society, growing and expanding, and of course willing to establish and promote ties with counterparts in the European Union and elsewhere. Russian NGOs are already maintaining close ties with their respective counterparts in European countries. But suggestion that the European Union, the European Commission should act as a mediator between the Russian authorities and Russian NGOs is certainly not conducive to improving our relationship, because, let me say quite bluntly, Russian authorities do not need mediators to deal with Russian NGOs. If you watched closely enough you may have witnessed a number of meetings held by the President, the Prime Minister, members of the Government with representatives of the Russian civil society, with Russian NGOs and actually taking on board a lot of their suggestions in legislative work and political decisions.

Now coming back to the main issue raised by the report and the main issue that is on the agenda of this Subcommittee today whether the consultations on

human rights are effective. I wouldn't look at it as a black and white situation. I would rather turn to the issue of establishing the criteria of effectiveness. Where are those criteria and who has established them?

Finally I hope that today's meeting will assist to a more transparent and a more effective dialogue between Russia and the EU. But let us avoid "the syndrome of transistor". Anyone of you who has studied physics will understand what I mean. A transistor allows the electric current to proceed in one direction only. So let's make our dialogue a two-way street. That is the way to success. Thank you very much.

Final conclusions of Ambassador Vladimir Chizhov

I would first of all say that the dialogue on human rights is not confined to the consultations that we are discussing the effectiveness of today. There is also of course the parliamentary dimension. The Russia-EU Parliamentary Cooperation Committee, as far as I know, is devoting a lot of time to discussing human rights issues.

On the issue raised by the distinguished member of the European Parliament from the United Kingdom. Well, the situation appears to be quite different from our point of view. The British judicial authorities have consistently and repeatedly declined to cooperate with Russian investigators on the Litvinenko case. I don't believe that there has been a court ruling saying that he had actually been murdered. So It is at least premature and incorrect to say that. Russian prosecutors are willing to cooperate with their UK colleagues but to no avail. Great Britain has long been known to be a safe heaven for fugitives from all kinds of regimes prevailing in Russia. In tsarist days it was the Bolsheviks who hid in London, now it is people like Boris Berezovsky, Ahmed Zakayev and others, so I think this is not among the best traditions of the United Kingdom. I will limit myself to those comments. Thank you.