

March 14, 2024

Joint Statement on Russia's presidential elections

Nearly a decade has elapsed since the unlawful seizure of Crimea and Sevastopol by Russia, and we are currently two years into Russia's full-scale and vicious onslaught against Ukraine. Amid the ongoing war, that has taken a heavy toll on Ukrainian lives and brought about vast human suffering and destruction, Russia is orchestrating a so-called election to coincide with the 10th anniversary of Crimea's illegal annexation, in a clear act of provocation. Russia intends to extend these elections to the territories it has occupied and illegally annexed in Ukraine, in what appears to be an attempt to legitimize its temporary occupation of Ukrainian territory.

Since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Russia has notably intensified its suppression of political dissent, and throttled the freedom of media, and civil liberties, by further squashing any opposition, including criminalizing expressions anti-war sentiment. Prospective anti-war candidates are being barred from participating in March 2024 Russia's presidential elections.

Russia's governance, dominated by an authoritarian regime led by Vladimir Putin, is marked by widespread corruption and sham elections to feign adherence to democratic principles, and all power is concentrated solely in Putin's hands, and dissent has been ruthlessly suppressed through a compliant judiciary, media censorship, and a legislature that solely rubberstamps the ruling party.

There's no longer any room for civic or political opposition in Russia. The Russian government, especially under Putin, is not held accountable for egregious violations of human rights and political repressions, including the assassination of leading opposition figure Alexei Navalny, questioning Putin's legitimacy in both domestic and international fora. Regardless of these despicable crimes, most Russian citizens continue to support Putin's regime and the illegal war of aggression against Ukraine.

As Chairs of our respective parliamentary Committees on Foreign Affairs *we emphasize* that conducting elections in Ukraine's temporarily occupied and illegally annexed regions is a stark breach of international law and the principles of the United Nations Charter, and Ukraine's inalienable independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity. This includes consideration of the Russian Federation's constitution and its international human rights commitments, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the European Convention on Human Rights, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the report by the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in Russia released on February 22, 2024.

We firmly denounce Russia's imperialistic actions and its ongoing aggression against Ukraine. We reiterate the need for continued comprehensive support for Ukraine from the EU, its Member States, and allies globally, that encompass political, economic, financial, and military aid, as well as assistance for civil society and the reconstruction of the country. This support stands as a critical countermeasure against the Kremlin's oppressive and aggressive regime.

We call on the Russian government to annul all unfounded accusations and immediately and without conditions release all those unjustly detained or imprisoned, to cease all forms of torture and ill-treatment of detainees, and to reform conditions within its detention centres and to adhere to the most fundamental of rights norms.

We unequivocally reject the legitimacy of the elections being conducted by Russia in the occupied Ukrainian territories. Such actions by Russia on Ukraine's internationally recognized territory are entirely illegitimate and will not be recognized by the international community.

We stand in solidarity with Ukraine, affirming its full independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity within its recognized international borders, including Crimea, Kherson, Zaporizhzhia, Donetsk, and Luhansk.

The forthcoming presidential elections in Russia will neither be free or fair, and will be marred by a comprehensive crackdown on the opposition and independent media, and suffer from a complete absence of legitimate alternatives, a lack of international oversight, that will render an outcome devoid of any semblance of democratic validity.

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