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NDI SUPPORTS OSCE/ODIHR DECISION TO DECLINE INVITATION TO OBSERVE RUSSIAN DUMA ELECTIONS BECAUSE OF RESTRICTIONS

WASHINGTON, DC – The National Democratic Institute (NDI) today supported the decision by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) to decline an invitation to observe the Russian State Duma elections on Dec. 2.

OSCE/ODIHR, which has conducted approximately 150 election observations over the last decade, announced on Friday that, regrettably, it would not observe the election because of delays in receiving the invitation and restrictions on the number of observers that would prevent it from using standard practice OSCE methodologies needed to carry out a credible observation.

NDI noted that ODIHR's observation methodologies are consistent with the criteria and methodologies contained in the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation, which is supported by 32 intergovernmental and international nongovernmental organizations, including ODIHR and NDI. The Declaration's principles for impartial and credible international election observation reflect a critical international consensus about this important activity.

“The restrictions imposed by the invitation to observe the Duma elections run counter to the Declaration of Principles criteria,” NDI said. “Unreasonable restrictions, including those created de facto by delays in issuing invitations, visas and accreditation, and placing limitations on the numbers of observers that an organization may decide to organize, run counter to good faith commitments of OSCE participating states to promote democratic elections and to accept the important role of credible election observation.”

Last week, on Nov. 14-15, at the second international meeting on implementing the Declaration of Principles, held at the Organization of American States here, more than 20 organizations in attendance reiterated their support for the Declaration's principles and for each other's efforts to maintain the integrity of election observation and to contribute to the international community through impartial and credible observation.

“The Declaration of Principles,” NDI said, “highlights that election observation must be conducted over the critical pre-election period as well as during the days immediately surrounding the election itself and during the resolution of any electoral complaints.

“It also states that no governmental authority should interfere in the selection of individual members of election observation missions or attempt to limit their numbers. As the Declaration of Principles states, countries should issue an invitation or otherwise indicate their willingness to accept international election observation missions ‘in accordance with each organization’s requirements sufficiently in advance of elections to allow analysis of all of the processes that are important to organizing genuine democratic elections’.”

The text of the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation may be found at http://www.accessdemocracy.org/library/1923_declaration_102705.pdf

The National Democratic Institute (NDI) is a non-profit organization working to strengthen and expand democracy worldwide. NDI works with democrats in every region of the world to build political and civic organizations, safeguard elections, and promote citizen participation, openness, and accountability in government.

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