



Warsaw, 10 December 2007

THE REPUBLIC OF POLAND
Commissioner for Civil Rights
Protection

Dr Janusz KOCHANOWSKI

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Mr Thomas Hammarberg
Commissioner for Human Rights
Council of Europe
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Dear Commissioner,

The most recent events connected with the Parliamentary elections in the Russian Federation have reminded the international community of the problem of the observance of human rights in that country.

Since 1996, the Russian Federation has been a member of the Council of Europe and at that time it accepted the responsibility to fulfil all the international obligations ensuing from its membership, above all the observance of the European Convention on Human Rights. Meanwhile, the signals reaching international public opinion concerning the observance of those rights guaranteed by the Convention are very disturbing. That is why I have taken the liberty of drawing your attention to several issues.

The Parliamentary elections which took place on 2 December 2007, together with the preceding electoral campaign, showed that, in the matter of the full observance of political rights in the Russian Federation, much remains to be done. Both organisations involved in the monitoring of the observance of human rights and journalists indicated primarily the far-reaching limitations on the freedom of assembly (including the breaking up of demonstrations, arrests of and assaults on their participants by the policing services and penal sanctions) and on the freedom of expression (repressions in relation to journalists, lack of access to media for the opposition and arrests of leaders of the opposition and of activists from non-governmental organisations).

Human rights defenders have indicated numerous violations of the fundamental rights guaranteed by the European Convention on Human Rights. The clearest example of this is the

activities of the Russian authorities in relation to the inhabitants of Chechnya and Ingushetia. This issue is more and more frequently the subject of judgements by the European Court of Human Rights. As an example, there could be indicated the judgements issued in recent months in the following cases: Bitiyeva and X v. Russia (verdict of 21 June 2007, case no. 57953/00 and 37392/03) and Alikhadzhiyeva v. Russia (verdict of 5 July 2007, case no. 68007/01). In both cases, the Court held that there had occurred violations of the right to life and to freedom from torture, inhuman and demeaning treatment. Non-governmental organisations, such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, regularly report on further situations of this kind, including assaults and kidnappings of journalists and activists of organisations involved in the protection of human rights.

It is my conviction that the scale of the violations of human rights in Russia has attained such a level that the international community can no longer remain indifferent. The decided intervention of the Council of Europe is of vital importance. That is why I am appealing to you with a kind request for the consideration of the possibility of undertaking actions aimed at improving the situation in the field of the observance of the rights of the individual in the Russian Federation.

*Yours sincerely,
Sam Beharavski*