

Delegation of Belarus

**STATEMENT BY MR. DENIS SIDORENKO,
DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE REPUBLIC OF
BELARUS TO THE OSCE, AT THE MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

10 June 2011

**Regarding the Conference on Safety of Journalists in the
OSCE Region held in Vilnius**

Mr. Chairperson,

With regard to the information we have heard about the Vilnius Conference on Safety of Journalists in the OSCE Region held under the auspices of the OSCE Chairmanship and the Office of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, we wish to express our concern about the fact that a number of Belarusian journalists who were recently banned for politically motivated reasons from entering European Union (EU) countries were not permitted to attend this event.

In particular, the Lithuanian Embassy in Belarus refused to issue a Lithuanian entry visa to Vadim Gigin, the editor-in-chief of the magazine *Belaruskaya Dumka* and a member of the Belarusian Union of Journalists. The reason given for this was that “the Schengen Information System had issued an alert for the purposes of refusing entry to Lithuania”. Another conference participant from Belarus, the first deputy editor-in-chief of the newspaper *Sovetskaya Belarus*, Mikhail Lebedik, was given to understand that his entry to Lithuania was not guaranteed, despite the fact that he had a valid Schengen visa.

Our delegation has repeatedly raised the matter of the illegality and groundlessness of placing Belarusian journalists on the EU “blacklist”, including in correspondence with the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media. However, we did not, as it happens, receive any intelligible answers to the questions we asked. It appears that this is simply because, *a priori*, there cannot be any. This time we have in practical matters within the OSCE encountered manifestations of discrimination and the violation of the rights and freedoms of journalists, including freedom of movement. We are still awaiting an objective response and specific actions from the Office of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights with regard to ensuring the fulfilment by European Union countries of their OSCE commitments.

It is sad and at the same time symbolic that Belarusian journalists who were selected by the Belarusian media community and included in the official delegation were unable to

attend the conference, which the Lithuanian Chairmanship depicted as a key event this year on the subject of the freedom of the media and freedom of expression and ensuring the rights of journalists in the OSCE region.

We regret that Lithuania, which holds the Chairmanship of our Organization, did not find the political will to positively resolve the issue of the participation of all representatives of the Belarusian media in the OSCE event in Vilnius. Furthermore, we believe this was in violation of one of the fundamental principles of our Organization, according to which participating States themselves determine their representation at OSCE meetings.

In this situation, Belarus does not consider itself bound in any way by the recommendations of the conference and will take a similar attitude to further work on the subject of the media within the OSCE, including in the preparation for the final events of 2011.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.