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United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on the Case of Journalist Ernest Vardanean

As delivered by Ambassador Ian Kelly
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
April 22, 2010

The United States is closely monitoring the case of journalist Ernest Vardanean, who was arrested April 7 in Tiraspol. It is essential that Mr. Vardanean's human rights and fundamental freedoms be respected. Of course, he should have the right to choose his own legal counsel; the right to be present or to be represented by counsel of his choice at pre-trial detention hearings; and the right to contact his family. These are absolutely fundamental rights, and U.S. government representatives have made these concerns known to the Transnistrian authorities. We very much regret that we have, so far, seen no positive results in getting Mr. Vardanean these absolutely essential rights. We remain seriously concerned that Mr. Vardanean has been denied these basic rights. We are also concerned that 20 to 30 individuals, including a member of the OSCE Mission to Moldova's Tiraspol office, have been subjected to hostile questioning in connection with the case.

Moreover, while no connection has been established among them, we note that Mr. Vardanean's arrest follows several others involving charges of terrorism, treason, and espionage. We are concerned that these arrests and the questioning reflect a broader effort by the Transnistrian authorities to intimidate civil society representatives and restrict their fundamental rights. Civil society and a free and independent media play a valuable role in democratic and economic development and can function effectively only when their representatives are free of the fear of arbitrary reprisal and intimidation.

In all of these cases, human rights and fundamental freedoms should and must be respected. We would welcome additional information about the handling of these arrests and will continue to closely follow the situation.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.