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**STATEMENT BY MR. VALERY VORONETSKY,  
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE REPUBLIC OF BELARUS  
TO THE OSCE, AT THE 923rd MEETING OF THE  
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

6 September 2012

**Regarding the election campaign in the United States of America**

Mr. Chairperson,

We should like today to continue the discussion of the subject of elections, using as an example the United States of America, where the presidential election campaign is currently picking up speed.

Specifically, we were interested to read the report of the needs assessment mission of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), which visited the United States. Our attention was drawn to a number of problem areas identified by the ODIHR experts.

First. The legal basis for the holding of elections in the United States is decentralized and complicated. There is in the country no federal body with responsibility for monitoring the entire election process. In some states, changes can be introduced into election laws during the pre-election period (virtually up to only a few weeks before election day), something that may have an effect on the understanding of the provisions of the law by those taking part in the election or on the ability of voters to properly perform their voting functions.

Second. More than 4 million United States citizens living in overseas territories do not have the right to vote, while 600,000 citizens who reside in the District of Columbia have the right to vote only in presidential elections. In addition, more than 2 million citizens who are in detention have no right to vote.

Third. The ODIHR report notes the absence of uniformity in the system for drawing up voter registration lists and the use of so-called "conditional ballots" for citizens who have not been able to find their names on those lists. There are also some critical comments regarding the boundaries of election districts.

Fourth. High-ranking officials of states and districts are able to register their candidacy for elections for the conduct of which they themselves are responsible, something that leads to a direct conflict of interests.

Fifth. In a number of states, voters voting abroad can cast their vote by fax or email, which implies an abandonment of voting secrecy.

Sixth. Commercial structures and trade unions have the possibility to make available to their preferred candidates financial resources in virtually unlimited amounts.

Seventh. Election observation or monitoring is regulated under state laws that for the most part do not provide for the presence of international observers, as required in paragraph 8 of the OSCE 1990 Copenhagen Document. Only in four states have laws been enacted clearly permitting the presence of international observers during elections.

It is noteworthy that despite the so-called follow-up on the results of the last elections in the United States, which has been enthusiastically commented on by our American colleagues, the final section of the ODIHR report notes that the Office's previous recommendations have for the most part not been taken into account by the United States authorities.

It is also significant that despite the many comments and the absence of progress in implementing its recommendations, the ODIHR experts felt it sufficient to dispatch to the United States only a limited observation mission, whose mandate does not provide for the systematic monitoring of the voting process on election day itself.

We shall continue to follow closely the election campaign in the United States. We would welcome comments and explanations by the United States delegation regarding the issues raised in the ODIHR report.

On the whole, we think it necessary to continue a focused dialogue within the OSCE on the subject of elections and election monitoring, *inter alia* the question of how the work of the ODIHR in this area might be improved, further developing the discussion that took place in July of this year during the OSCE's Second Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting in Vienna.

We should like also to note that we endorse as useful the initiative taken by a number of OSCE participating States to conduct a comparative analysis of election legislation and practices in all the OSCE participating States. An appeal along those lines to the ODIHR is contained in the resolution on improving election observation in OSCE participating States adopted at the annual session of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly in Monaco.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.