



International Observation Mission
of the Committee on International Control over
the Situation with Human Rights in Belarus

Statement No. 6
“On the obstruction to the activity of
foreign mass media in the Republic of Belarus”

Acting on behalf of the Committee on International Control over the Situation with Human Rights in Belarus (CIC), which unites representatives of national and international human rights organizations from the OSCE countries,

monitoring the overall situation with the observance of fundamental human rights in the Republic of Belarus, as well as the issues of realization freedom of speech, journalists' protection and ensuring their professional activities;

emphasizing that human rights are subject to the direct and legitimate concern of the international civil society;

noting that the free and highly developed media are the keystone of a stable and peaceful society, and freedom of expression constitutes one of the most important foundations of a democratic society and one of the main conditions for its progress;

urging the government of the Republic of Belarus to follow the international obligations undertaken in the field of human rights, in particular to guarantee the conditions under which journalists can work without legal or administrative restraints;

the International Observation Mission:

1. Expresses deep concern about the fact that recent months have demonstrated the negative effects of the Law of the Republic of Belarus “On Mass Media” in the part of regulating the professional activities of foreign mass media. Thus, the need to obtain mandatory accreditation from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Belarus for foreign journalists not only significantly hampers their urgent work on the coverage of dramatic events, but also a shift from accreditation rights to the “right to accredit” leads to abuses and manipulation by the authorities, leading to gross interference in the freedom of speech. The absence in the law of the norms guaranteeing the citizens of the Republic of Belarus unimpeded access to reports and materials of foreign mass media also doesn't comply with the international standards.

2. Recalls that according to the commitments assumed by the OSCE member states, “the legitimate pursuit of their professional activity will neither ender journalists liable to expulsion nor otherwise penalize them” (Helsinki Final Act of the CSCE, 1975) and the member states “will refrain from taking restrictive measures such as withdrawing a journalist's accreditation or expelling him because of the content of the reporting of the journalist or of his information media” (Concluding Document of the Vienna Meeting of the CSCE, 1989).

3. In view of the above-stated considers the following facts as obstruction to the activity of foreign mass media and the dissemination of information among the OSCE member states:

- ban on leaving the Republic of Belarus (on March 24th, 2011) for the Polish “Gazeta Wyborcza” correspondent Andrzej Poczobut and further institution of criminal

prosecution against him under Art. 368, Part 1 of the Criminal Code “Insulting the President of the Republic of Belarus”;

- detention (on March 24th, 2011) in Orsha and subsequent administrative arrest of a Russian national Alexander Lashmankin, editor-in-chief of the human rights information agency “Svoboda” (Freedom), and the subsequent decision of the Belarusian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to withdraw his accreditation as a foreign journalist;

- detention (on March 24th, 2011) in Gomel region of the head of the Moscow correspondent’s office of “Deutschlandradio” Robert Baaga and the reporter of “Rheinische Zeitung” Doris Hayman and issuing warnings to them for breaking the rules of entry, sojourn and travel in the border zone;

- detention (on May 30th, 2011) in Minsk of a special correspondent for the Russian TV channel “Dozhd” (Rain) Rodion Marinichev and giving him orders to leave the Republic of Belarus within 24 hours with the ban on entry for 5 years;

- official statement made by the President of the Republic of Belarus Alexander Lukashenka (on May 27th, 2011) on a possible suspension of the activities of a number of media, including Russian ones, which in his view escalate the situation on the currency and consumer markets.

The International Observation Mission demands:

- bringing the law “On Mass Media” in line with the recommendations of the Office of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media (2008);

- cessation of expulsion and unjustified deprivation of accreditation of foreign journalists;

- compliance by the authorities of the Republic of Belarus with their international commitments in the sphere of freedom of the media, concerning, in particular, the facilitation of entry and granting accreditation to foreign journalists;

- guarantees from the Republic of Belarus to prevent similar cases of pressure towards journalists in the future.

The Mission expresses its hope that the state of the Republic of Belarus is ready to demonstrate to the international community its commitment to the universally accepted norms and strict observance of the human rights obligations under the ratified international agreements guaranteeing the freedom of speech and carrying out professional activities by the journalists in strict compliance with the international human rights standards.

*May 31st, 2011
Minsk*

**Head of the Mission
Andrey Yurov**