



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
The Representative on Freedom of the Media
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Statement to the Permanent Council

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As I have stated in my previous report to the Permanent Council, I was planning to make an assessment visit to Belarus regarding the media situation. On that subject, I will share some information with you in my regular report to this forum. However, my report will not contain the views of the Government of Belarus because I was not able to go to Belarus.

I would like to brief you on the unprecedented circumstances surrounding my failed trip to Belarus.

In July, I informed both the Foreign Minister of Belarus and Ambassador Gaisenak of my intention to visit Belarus in order to hear the views of the Government. Throughout July and August, I successfully discussed all the details with both the Delegation in Vienna and the Foreign Ministry in Minsk. On 17 August, I was even provided with a detailed draft programme by Ambassador Gaisenak.

The Belarus authorities asked me to change the dates of my trip so that I could address a media-related training seminar organised in conjunction with the OSCE Office in Minsk. I did comply with this request. We changed the dates.

Then, the Belarus authorities decided to change the structure of this seminar by merging it with a meeting I planned to organise with independent journalists. They asked if I would agree to this change. I did agree and the two events were merged.

Once again, I was asked to shorten the duration of my meeting with the independent media. I agreed and complied with this request as well.

Then the very seminar, which was the reason why we had previously changed the date of our visit was altogether cancelled, and I was asked if I would still be interested in coming to Belarus. I said: "Of course I am."

I have to stress that throughout this entire process, the Permanent Delegation of the Republic of Belarus to the OSCE fully co-operated with my Office. The Delegation informed me that the itinerary to which we had mutually agreed needed a final OK from Minsk.

I was supposed to leave for Belarus yesterday. I had officially requested an entry visa, which I never received because there had been no instruction from Minsk.

Up to date, I still have not received a final OK from the Minsk authorities. Neither have I received any kind of answer.

I hope that in the not too distant future I will be able to report from inside Belarus and report about a more successful dialogue with the authorities.