

PC.DEL/274/10
19 April 2010

ENGLISH
Original: RUSSIAN

Delegation of Belarus

**STATEMENT BY MR. ALYAKSANDR SYCHOV,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE REPUBLIC OF BELARUS
TO THE OSCE, AT THE MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

15 April 2010

In response to the statement by the European Union on Belarus

Mr. Chairperson,

Our delegation will inform our capital of the statement heard from the delegation of Spain on behalf of the European Union. I should like to point out in particular that Minsk has already been made aware of the points raised in the quoted declaration by Ms. Catherine Ashton, the High Representative of the European Union, which was made two weeks ago on 31 March, and that the reaction and comments of the Belarusian Government have been brought to the attention of our partners in Minsk and Brussels. Nevertheless, we should like to comment on certain specific points raised in that statement.

We are once again forced to note the flawed practice of hanging labels and levelling sweeping accusations in the assessment by European Union countries of the situation in Belarus as regards democracy, human rights and fundamental freedoms. The High Representative's declaration is reminiscent, to use a "culinary" term, of a hodgepodge soup. Unable to find sufficient facts, the European Union decided to also include in the text of the declaration issues having to do with human rights, fundamental freedoms, civil society, local government elections and even the death penalty. It appears that in their desire to include under any pretext on the agenda of the Permanent Council the question of the situation in Belarus, some countries of the European Union have been more of a hindrance than a help to Ms. Ashton.

I should again like to note that Belarus takes an extremely conscientious attitude towards the performance of its obligations in terms of the OSCE human dimension and is prepared to engage in a committed dialogue on all aspects in the forums suitable for that purpose. However, we categorically reject the approach taken by our partners, who characterize as "repression" any actions by the Belarusian law enforcement authorities vis-à-vis individual representatives of the media, civil society and the Belarusian opposition, taken within the terms of the existing legislation and on the basis of the principle of the rule of law. We think it inappropriate to examine and comment on these kinds of subjective and politically inspired assessments in the Permanent Council.

As regards the preparation for and conduct of the local elections on 25 April of this year, that election campaign is the first one to be held since the inclusion in the country's Electoral Code of a considerable number of amendments and additions. The changes that have been adopted are aimed at simplifying the procedures for putting forward and registering candidates for parliamentary seats, for including in the membership of the election commissions representatives of political parties and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), for holding mass meetings with voters, for the way candidates organize their own campaign budgets, etc.

We should like to point out in particular that the amendments go along way towards taking into account the recommendations of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and of the Belarusian political parties. We have already provided detailed information on the main points involved in these changes to our partners, including representatives of the diplomatic missions of EU member countries accredited in Belarus. The improvement of the electoral laws and the way in which they are applied is a subject of our ongoing constructive collaboration with the ODIHR, as evidenced by the visit to Minsk by experts from the Office at the end of March and beginning of April of this year.

Returning to the concern expressed in the EU declaration regarding the establishment of election commissions and the representation in them of "democratic and independent NGOs", I should like to note that if we compare the figures for participation of political parties and civil society in local elections in 2007 and 2010, we shall find that once the updated electoral laws began to apply the representation of political parties and NGOs increased considerably. In accordance with the new legislation, representatives of political parties and non-governmental organizations must make up no less than one-third of the members of the election commissions, a requirement that has been met in full. We are prepared to share detailed statistical information on this matter.

A few words on the subject of the death penalty. The position of the Republic of Belarus on this subject was set out in our statement at the meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council on 30 July 2009 (PC.DEL/656/09), including as regards the specific cases mentioned. I should like merely to note that the public discussion on the subject of capital punishment continues unabatedly in the Republic of Belarus. In particular, this year a special working group has been established within the national Parliament, and a number of public information events, including some organized jointly with the OSCE Office in Minsk and the Council of Europe, have been held. We shall be prepared to provide information on the further progress and results of that discussion.

In conclusion, permit me once again to assure our European partners of the readiness of the Belarusian Government to continue dialogue with the European Union, including within the framework of the "Eastern Partnership", provided that that dialogue is based on mutual respect, mutual advantage and parity and is aimed at achieving practical results.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.