



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to Ambassador Haller, Head of Office in Minsk

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

Ambassador Haller, the United States warmly welcomes you to the Permanent Council today. We appreciate your comprehensive report and the opportunity to hear directly from you what the Office in Minsk is doing to promote work in the OSCE's three dimensions. We strongly support the mandate of the Office and welcome the achievements cited in the report in the human and economic and environmental dimensions, in the media, and in outreach activities.

The Office, we believe, should continue to encourage the development of civil society and support constructive relations between government bodies and civil society. We believe there remains suspicion on the part of many government officials regarding the positive role of civil society and that likewise there is a lack of understanding among the general populace of the benefit of active NGO participation. Your report details the commendable work the Office has done to bridge this gap. In doing so, we believe the Office can do more within its mandate to function as a resource and an ally for those seeking to promote fundamental freedoms, human rights, and the rule of law.

We believe the monitoring and reporting role on domestic developments remains a vital function of the Office. We appreciate the timely and objective Spot Report on the situation regarding the Union of Poles in Belarus as well as the Office's comprehensive monthly activity reports. While we commend the Office's work in this regard, and realizing resource restraints, we would welcome even more Spot Reports on domestic developments.

We also appreciate engagement with state and independent media to try to assist the Belarusian government to promote institution-building and the rule of law, as well as the Office's efforts to verify and report on key media-freedom-related developments. We agree with you that the Office should keep as a priority assistance to Belarus in ensuring journalists' unimpeded access to information, developing practicable registration and accreditation requirements and procedures for print, electronic, and online media, and providing for fair and economic and regulatory treatment of the media, in accordance with OSCE commitments.

We take note of your statement that the registration process for projects has become easier and more flexible. We continue to believe, however, that OSCE field missions should be free to develop and undertake programs within their mandates, without having individual projects micro-managed.

While election observation is not part of your mandate, we also note that presidential elections will take place in Belarus later this year or early next year, and we expect the government of Belarus to provide timely notification and support for a robust long- and short-term international observer presence.

Ambassador Haller, the United States, given its constrained diplomatic presence in Minsk, understands the challenges the Office faces in using limited resources to fulfill its mandate and we hope that the apparently technical issues that have impeded the deployment of your Human Dimension Officer are soon overcome. Nevertheless, outreach to and engagement with human rights activists, independent trade unionists, independent political parties and NGOs is one of the most important functions of your office. This work is particularly vital in Belarus, given the challenges there in gaining respect for democracy and human rights and we urge the Office to continue to expand its efforts in this area.

Ambassador Haller, we wish you continued success in your endeavors.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.