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Permanent delegation of the Republic of Belarus to the OSCE

**STATEMENT BY MR. VIKTAR GAISENAK,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE REPUBLIC OF BELARUS,
AT THE MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

16 September 2004

**In reply to the statement by the
OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media**

Mr. Chairman,

Our delegation welcomes Mr. Miklos Haraszti, OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, to today's meeting of the Permanent Council and thanks him on his latest activity report. We note with satisfaction that, as is clear from the report, the work of the Office of the Representative on Freedom of the Media is becoming more systematic and comprehensive.

Nevertheless, as we see it, there continue to be regional imbalances in the Office's activities. For example, in the report that has been submitted to us a disproportionately large amount of space is devoted to the media situation in Belarus. In that connection, we should like to make a few comments.

At the last meeting of the Permanent Council, we furnished explanations regarding the difficulties that arose in agreeing on the modalities and timetable for the visit to Minsk of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media. Those problems were of a purely technical nature and have now been resolved. I can only repeat that, as already said, Mr. Haraszti is welcome to come to Belarus at any time that suits him in order to discuss those issues that were touched upon in his statement today.

Further, permit me a few words regarding the document entitled "Media Freedom Violations in Belarus in 2004", which was prepared by the Office of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media.

We find unacceptable the practice, which has in fact been more than once criticized in recent years by ourselves and by other delegations, under which the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media circulates under his own name within the OSCE unproven facts of alleged violations that have been reported to him exclusively by representatives of non-governmental organizations and the media. We note with regret that the list of these alleged violations was not submitted in advance to the Belarusian authorities for comments, as provided for under the mandate of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media.

As Mr. Haraszti could see for himself this week, these very same “respectable” sources that provided him with these facts also provided Belarusian public opinion with information known to be false regarding the current situation in connection with his visit to Minsk, even involving references to members of his office staff.

I shall not comment in detail on the facts mentioned in the document since many of them have no bearing on freedom of the media, are of a technical nature and reflect relationships between economic actors and legislative procedures in the Republic of Belarus. We have already furnished detailed clarifications at Permanent Council meetings regarding certain of these facts, in particular the suspension of the publication of a number of newspapers printed in small numbers. I emphasize the word “suspension”, which is not the same as “shutting down”, as stated in the report.

Let us take another example — the raising by the Belarusian State information agency BelTA (a State agency and not, as indicated, an agency operating out of the Office of the President) of the price for the right to publish television programme schedules in the media. It would be interesting to know what in this case seems to Mr. Haraszti to represent a violation of Belarus’s commitments with regard to media freedom.

We also fail to understand the reason for the haste in drawing conclusions regarding the media freedom situation in Belarus and the point in publishing a report of this kind on the eve of the Representative’s visit to Minsk.

At the same time, we note again Mr. Haraszti’s willingness to co-operate constructively with the Republic of Belarus in the future and we hope that his forthcoming visit to Minsk will provide an opportunity for discussing all the issues and removing the concerns felt by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media. The Belarusian authorities are ready for open and constructive dialogue.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.