United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to Ambassador Schmidt, Head of Office in Minsk

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires Kyle Scott
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
July 16, 2009

Thank you, Madam Chairwoman.

We also appreciate the opportunity to hear from Ambassador Schmidt on 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 dimension, on the media, and in combating trafficking of human beings.

A key role of the Office should be to encourage the development of civil society. Ambassador Schmidt's report details the work the Office has done in this respect. We believe the Office can and should do more to function as a resource and an ally for those seeking to advance OSCE principles. As such, we urge the Office to broaden its base of contacts within Belarusian civil society.

Ambassador Schmidt also notes the Office's presence as an observer at a number of demonstrations and public rallies. While we commend the Office's work in observing these public events, we would hope to see a greater role for the Head of Office in this regard. We continue to be concerned by the long process needed to get proposed projects approved by the government. We encourage the Belarusian authorities to work cooperatively with the Office on project approval as well as with Belarusian civil society to advance the respect for OSCE principles in Belarus.

Ambassador Schmidt, the United States, given the severely constricted diplomatic presence in Minsk we ourselves face, understands the challenges the Office faces in using limited resources to fulfill its mandate. Nevertheless, outreach to and engagement with human rights activists, independent trade unionists, independent political parties and NGOs is one of the most important functions. This work is particularly vital in Belarus, and we urge the Office to expand its activities in this area.

Thank you, Madam Chairwoman.