



## **United States Mission to the OSCE**

### **Statement on Plight of Civil Society in Belarus**

As delivered by Deputy Political Counselor David Kostelancik  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
April 21, 2005

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Delegation of the United States thanks the OSCE Office in Minsk for its recent reports on developments in Belarus, including its spot report and press release on the closure of the Independent Institute of Social, Economic and Political Studies.

We share Ambassador Heyken's positive assessment of the professional work of the Institute and his regret at its liquidation.

The closure of this independent research institute once again highlights Belarus' continuing enactment of excessive legal requirements designed to stifle the operation of non-governmental organizations. These are disproportionately applied against independent civil society.

It is clear that the Belarusian Government is unwilling to tolerate dissent, or organizations that provide independent information that could challenge the overwhelming pro-government bias of state-owned media that was most recently documented in the March report of the OSCE's Freedom of the Media Representative.

Incidents such as the gross obstruction by authorities of the efforts of two political parties to hold a merger convention, detailed in the March monthly report of the OSCE Office in Minsk, further bring into focus for the Permanent Council Belarus' continuing flagrant disregard for its OSCE commitments.

A major part of the mandate of the OSCE Office in Minsk is to assist the Government in developing relations with civil society.

However, the Belarusian Government shows no credible interest in this part of the OSCE Office's mandate.

We note that the Director of ODIHR's Democratization Section, Dr. Vladimir Shkolnikov, visited Belarus in March and discussed with Belarusian authorities and the OSCE Office possible revision of Belarusian law on public associations.

The United States urges Belarus to cooperate with ODIHR and the OSCE Office in Minsk to replace its current oppressive rules for civil society organizations with a system that would facilitate, rather than stymie, their work.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.