



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the Head of the OSCE Office in Yerevan, Ambassador Andrey Sorokin

As delivered by Ambassador Ian Kelly
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
July 18, 2013

The United States welcomes Ambassador Andrey Sorokin back to the Permanent Council and thanks him for his comprehensive report.

The United States strongly supports the work of the Office in Yerevan in order to promote comprehensive security. Indeed, the Office provides valuable assistance across all three dimensions of security.

Armenia is an important partner for the United States. As we noted when Foreign Minister Nalbandian appeared at the Permanent Council on June 6, the United States and Armenia have a strong relationship spanning a broad range of shared interests including preserving peace and regional security, promoting trade and investment and advancing democratization and the rule of law. Armenia has achieved progress in combating human trafficking. In the area of rule of law, we have worked together on a draft criminal procedure code awaiting Parliament's approval. The United States appreciates Armenia's contributions to our shared mission in Afghanistan and to peacekeeping operations in Kosovo. And, we wish Armenia success in its first chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe.

We want to see Armenia succeed as a democratic, prosperous, and secure country. The foundation of any truly democratic state is respect for the rule of law, human rights, and fundamental freedoms. Dialogue with civil society plays an important role in promoting democratic values, stability, and regional security. We are pleased that the OSCE Office in Yerevan encourages their role in the decision making process as part of its support to the host country. During more than twenty years of independence, Armenia has taken some positive steps toward democratic development, such as enhanced respect for fundamental freedoms, though much remains to be done.

We urge the Government of Armenia to live up to its commitments to the systematic, fair, and transparent implementation of the rule of law. Strengthening judicial independence would help to promote democratic as well as economic development. In the area of economic reform, private sector investors look for an open business climate with predictable rules, an independent judiciary, and transparent regulations, taxes, and customs. We recognize the progress Armenia has made in a number of areas including in the field of streamlining regulatory reform. The United States looks forward to continued cooperation with Armenia to further improve its business climate.

We urge the Working Group established in connection with last May's parliamentary elections to work closely with ODIHR on the remaining eight electoral reform recommendations, and to pay special attention to those recommendations related to the voter registration list. We also urge Armenia to fulfill its promises to investigate problems in the presidential election, including those highlighted by the ODIHR final report. We remain particularly concerned by ODIHR's conclusion that the CEC's final results "show a tendency of considerably better results for the incumbent in the majority of stations with above-average turnout. This indicates possible serious problems with voting and counting and raises concerns about the integrity of the electoral process."

The OSCE Office in Yerevan provides valuable support for Armenia's democratic development, and dialogue between the Government and civil society based on our common commitments. Its work in all three dimensions continues to make substantial and positive contributions to Armenia's development. Ambassador Sorokin, I wish you and your team the best success in your future endeavors.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.