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**STATEMENT BY
THE DELEGATION OF THE REPUBLIC OF BELARUS AT THE
2010 OSCE REVIEW CONFERENCE**

Warsaw, 1 October 2010

**Working session 1: Democratic institutions, including democratic elections,
democracy at the national, regional and local levels, citizenship and
political rights**

Mr. Chairperson,
Distinguished Conference participants,

The question of democratic elections falls within one of the OSCE's most visible areas of activity and is one to which our Organization in its work devotes a lion's share of its attention and resources. Despite the fact that the implementation of commitments to hold free and fair elections is a prerogative of the participating States themselves, the OSCE's possibilities for assisting participating States within the terms of its assigned mandate should not be overlooked.

In that connection, our delegation would like to briefly inform you as to how the Belarusian Government is co-operating with the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) in the effort to improve its electoral legislation. Before turning to that subject, however, I should like to note that the Republic of Belarus has put into place the conditions required for conducting fair and democratic elections. This applies first of all to the electoral laws, which make it possible to hold such elections.

Following the parliamentary election campaign of 2008 Belarus started work aimed at improving and modernizing its electoral legislation. When preparing the amendments account was taken of relevant international experience, in addition to which considerable attention was also paid to the recommendations put forward by the ODIHR on the basis of its monitoring of elections in our country. An active working dialogue was started with the Office that involved a useful exchange of views between Belarusian specialists and experts from the ODIHR and the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe.

This work resulted in the preparation and adoption at the very beginning of 2010 of a whole package of amendments to the Electoral Code of Belarus taking into account the ODIHR's recommendations.

Specifically, the modifications to the electoral legislation were intended to:

- Provide guarantees that representatives of political parties and non-governmental organizations will be included in election commissions;
- Simplify the procedure for putting forward candidates;
- Ensure transparency in the way in which election commissions are formed, and introduce the practice of having a commission member from the Central Election Commission with the right to a deliberative vote;
- Simplify the procedure for pre-election meetings with voters in the form of mass assemblies and picketing;
- Conduct debates;
- Make possible the use by candidates of their own election funds for pre-election campaigning while retaining the right to financial assistance from the State for the preparation of printed campaign materials, free appearances on television and radio, and free publication of pre-election programmes in the media;
- Provide additional protection and security for ballot boxes;
- Ensure the reliability of early voting and greater transparency in the vote counting process;
- Introduce additional guarantees for contesting election results by increasing the time during which these results may be challenged;
- Increase the effectiveness of the protection of electoral rights afforded by the courts.

The first election campaign during which the amendments were actually put to a practical test was the local elections on 25 April 2010. In the opinion of many experts and of the actual participants in the elections, the modifications to the law had a positive effect on a whole range of aspects involved in conducting the elections, including the establishment of election commissions at various levels and the registration of candidates. Without question, the local elections also revealed some rough edges in these amendments connected with the proper practical application of the updated legislation, problem areas that have now been addressed by the Belarusian election officials.

Mr. Chairperson,

In connection with the presidential elections to be held in the Republic of Belarus on 19 December of this year, the Government has sent invitations to the Executive Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States and the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights to participate in an international observation of these elections. We think it particularly important to note that the invitations were sent literally within a day of the official announcement of the election date. It is expected that an official invitation will also be sent by the Parliament of Belarus to the Interparliamentary Assembly of the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE. It

should also be noted that the Belarusian Government is not imposing any limitations either on the duration of the observation mission or on the number of observers and is prepared to provide the necessary assistance to the international missions in their work of monitoring the elections in our country.

I should like to underscore that Belarus intends to approach the organization and conduct of the forthcoming presidential elections in the most serious manner possible and in full conformity with national legislation and OSCE commitments. The basic task will be to ensure that the results of these elections fully reflect the will of the Belarusian people.

In that context, I should like to inform you that the Central Election Commission of Belarus has already begun its work along those lines: several organizational meetings have been held by the Central Election Commission; the Commission has adopted a number of decrees of an organizational nature; and 17 groups involved in putting forward candidates for the office of president have been registered. The next stage in the electoral process will have to do with the collection by the sponsoring groups of voter signatures in support of would-be candidates for the office of president.

The election commissions at all levels will be established within the prescribed deadlines and in conformity with the law, in a way that includes the participation of representatives of political parties and public associations.

For all those who take part in the election campaign identical conditions will be created and equal access to all media will be ensured. It is expected that every presidential candidate will be given a total of four hours of airtime, broken down into one hour for television, one for radio, one for televised debates and one for debates on radio.

The Republic of Belarus is interested in conducting open and transparent elections and will make a maximum effort to that end. For our part, we also expect of the possible OSCE observation mission a responsible and constructive attitude to its monitoring effort, something that will provide the basis for an objective evaluation of the election campaign.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.