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Delegation of Belarus

**STATEMENT BY MR. ALYAKSANDR SYCHOV,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE REPUBLIC OF BELARUS
TO THE OSCE, AT THE MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

17 February 2011

**In response to the statement by the delegation of the
United States of America regarding Belarus**

Mr. Chairperson,

We listened closely to the statement by the Ambassador of the United States of America. The content of this statement will be brought to the attention of our Government.

I should like to remark at once that we heard nothing new in the statement by the United States delegation. We see it not as an endeavour to contribute to a constructive dialogue based on mutual respect, but rather as another attempt to aggravate the situation regarding Belarus and to exert political pressure.

I wish to stress once again that the decision taken, as a matter of principle, not to extend the mandate of the OSCE Office in Minsk is final and will not be reconsidered by Belarus.

The events that took place in Minsk on 19 December 2010 are still being carefully studied by the competent bodies in Belarus. They will be duly examined in the courts in strict conformity with national legislation. In this connection, we should like to mention that, in recent weeks, a number of persons suspected of organizing, and actively participating in, "mass disturbances" have been released from pre-trial detention on the basis of a signed pledge not to leave the area. Certain individuals, including the former presidential candidate Vladimir Neklyayev, as well as Iryna Khalip, whose name has been mentioned, have had their detention orders replaced by house arrest.

With regard to the situation concerning the information media in Belarus, discussed in detail by the Permanent Representative of the United States, permit me to make the following comments.

Firstly, for the work of journalists who carry out their professional duties responsibly and respect national legislation, all the necessary conditions are ensured in Belarus, as well as

conditions for the full exercise of freedom of the media and freedom of expression in line with OSCE commitments.

Secondly, we are engaged in a permanent dialogue with the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media. We have been in correspondence with the Representative and her proposals are being studied in Minsk, *inter alia* with regard to a possible visit by her to Belarus. Following the instructions of the Government of Belarus, the delegation keeps in touch with Ms. Mijatović and her Office regarding the questions raised.

Mr. Chairperson,

In their numerous statements in OSCE forums, our partners, in particular the United States and the European Union, continually emphasize that the subject of freedom of the media is a matter of priority for them.

In this context, we are rather surprised by the selectivity shown by our Western colleagues in approaching the problems of media freedom and compliance with the corresponding OSCE commitments. While regularly criticizing other participating States, they do not appear to give any thought to the actions of their own Governments and to what happens in their own countries.

For those who are not aware of this, it will be interesting, for example, to learn that more than ten Belarusian journalists have been affected by the recent restrictive measures directed by the European Union against Belarus. This is presumably because their view of events in my country did not coincide with that of Brussels. Another clear example was the dismissal last December of the deputy director of the fourth Polish radio channel, Mateusz Piskorski, for “failing to observe the standards of journalistic independence”, as manifested in his public statement that, in the course of the observation of the elections in Belarus, he personally had not witnessed violations of electoral legislation. We are also closely following the situation surrounding the founder of the Internet platform WikiLeaks, Julian Assange, against whom the competent authorities of the United States are not excluding the institution of criminal proceedings under an article providing for the death penalty.

This is probably an example of respect for the right of a journalist to his own opinion and of media freedom in action, from the viewpoint of the European Union and the United States. We must admit, in this connection, that we find it hard to understand the position of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, whose mandate covers the whole OSCE area and who has not reacted at all to the above-mentioned case.

Mr. Chairperson,

Not so long ago, the annual World Report for 2011 of the international organization Human Rights Watch was published. We read with great interest the section concerning the United States. The report mentions a whole range of problems to which the executive structures of the OSCE might devote attention – violations of human rights in such spheres as criminal justice and the rights of women, migrant workers and non-citizens. The question of the closure of Guantanamo still remains open. There are a large number of questions relating to the fulfilment by the United States of its obligations in the areas of freedom of assembly and freedom of expression.

Reference was made in the Permanent Council not long ago to the situation involving the arrest in November 2010 of 26 participants in and witnesses of picketing at the Fort Benning military base in the state of Georgia. Those arrested were convicted of unauthorized assembly. Some of them received sentences to six months of corrective labour, and others fines of up to 5,500 dollars. The previous day, the office of the organization “Students for a Democratic Society”, which took part in the organization of the demonstration, was raided in an operation by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). The students were threatened with expulsion from their universities. This is another striking example of “a victory for democracy and respect for fundamental freedoms”.

It is also a matter of concern that, on 14 February, the United States Congress once again extended the application of the well-known Patriot Act, giving the government and the police broad powers for the surveillance of United States citizens. This federal law, adopted in the United States in October 2001, has, *inter alia*, expanded the powers of the FBI with regard to wiretapping and electronic surveillance, something which many see as a violation of the Fourth Amendment of the United States Constitution.

Mr. Chairperson,

I have cited all this to illustrate the fact that we all need, at the end of the day, to accept that it is impossible to orient all the OSCE’s work, and our dialogue within the Organization, exclusively towards one part of the common security space. One cannot start out from the mistaken principle that all problems, threats and challenges to security are confined to the countries “to the east of Vienna”.

We also have serious doubts as to whether the Western countries, where there also exist serious problems, including problems in the field of human rights, are morally entitled to admonish and teach others, still less to impose sanctions on their partners in violation of the Helsinki Final Act. This is quite incompatible with the logic of common standards of assessment, equal treatment of OSCE participating States and an open and constructive dialogue. Such an approach is a fallacious one and can only undermine our shared values and principles.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.