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

26 March 2009

**Regarding the entry into force of the
Treaty on a Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone in Central Asia**

Mr. Chairman,

We thank the delegation of Uzbekistan for the information it has provided on the entry into force of the Treaty on a Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone in Central Asia. We regard this development as a substantial contribution by the countries of the region to the process of nuclear non-proliferation and of ensuring stability, security and sustainable development.

The information presented on the work carried out by five participating States of the OSCE to prepare and ratify this Treaty is testimony to their serious and responsible approach to the strengthening of security and co-operation in the Central Asian region and the OSCE area.

For Belarus the subject of nuclear disarmament and security is of particular importance and has special meaning. Our country was the first State to relinquish the chance to retain the nuclear weapons left on its territory after the collapse of the USSR, having acceded to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons as a non-nuclear State in 1993. In 1995 Belarus signed a Safeguards Agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and in late 1996 it completed the withdrawal of all nuclear weapons from its territory.

Belarus is pursuing a consistent and responsible policy with regard to non-proliferation. This is confirmed by, among other things, the initiative taken by the President of the Republic of Belarus, Mr. Alexander Lukashenko, in proposing the creation of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Central and Eastern Europe. This initiative was supported by United Nations General Assembly resolution A/RES/53/77/H of 4 December 1998.

In this connection, I should also like to recall the relevant provisions of the OSCE Lisbon Document of 1996 and the recommendations of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly concerning the creation of nuclear-free zones within the OSCE area.

We believe that the OSCE must more actively promote and support initiatives by participating States aimed at strengthening security and co-operation. The OSCE Permanent Council and the Forum for Security Co-operation could, in our view, play an important role in intensifying dialogue on these issues.

Regrettably, we have recently observed that the OSCE is playing less a role as a forum for open dialogue on the current security problems and challenges facing our countries. In this context, we urge our OSCE partners to analyse the relevant experience of the countries of the Central Asian region and to provide them with the necessary assistance and support. It would seem that the countries officially in possession of nuclear weapons, which are to ratify the Protocol on Negative Security Assurances, have a particular responsibility in this regard.

Providing non-nuclear States with legal assurances that nuclear weapons will not be used against them is a positive example, and one that could be further developed as part of the efforts to devise new approaches to improving the European security architecture.

We are convinced that continuation of substantive dialogue and specific work in this area, including the Russian President's idea of creating a new comprehensive European security architecture, will help to strengthen the global nuclear non-proliferation regime, enhance regional security and stability and strengthen confidence throughout the OSCE area.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.