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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**

23 June 2011

**Regarding the report by the OSCE Representative on
Freedom of the Media**

Mr. Chairperson,

Our delegation welcomes Ms. Dunja Mijatović, the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, to the meeting of the Permanent Council and thanks her for her regular report.

We have carefully studied the document distributed earlier and note its fairly broad geographical coverage. This is not only and not so much thanks to our Representative, although we naturally commend her active position, as evidence of the fact that there are problems with freedom of the media throughout the OSCE area.

It is gratifying to note that in this regard Ms. Mijatović is endeavouring by and large to take a balanced approach to the implementation of her mandate and has no qualms about criticizing countries to the west of Vienna as well. Indeed, the situation regarding freedom of the media in the United States is given four lines in the report, although recently this question has been raised repeatedly at Permanent Council meetings, and specific cases of violations have been cited.

Unfortunately, we cannot share Ms. Mijatović's positive assessments regarding the Conference on Safety of Journalists recently held in Vilnius for the simple reason that Belarusian journalists were deprived of the opportunity to take part in it owing to the restrictive measures in violation of OSCE commitments imposed by the European Union (EU).

In this connection, we should like once again to express our incomprehension and objection of principle to the Representative's view that the question of including Belarusian journalists in the list of "persons denied entry" to EU countries for political reasons "is outside her mandate". We believe that this kind of selective and arbitrary interpretation of her mandate calls into question the impartiality and independence of the work of the entire institution of the Representative. Once again we strongly ask you, Ms. Mijatović, to take up

this matter immediately and provide the necessary assistance to our European colleagues in reconsidering their discriminatory decisions with respect to journalists.

Mr. Chairperson,

We note the trend identified in Ms. Mijatović's report towards increasing regulation of the Internet in the OSCE region and the objective need for participating States to regulate the Internet.

Internet regulation issues do not, strictly speaking, fall within the mandate of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media. However, we all understand that the OSCE and its institutions cannot ignore the new realities in their work. In this context, it would certainly be interesting for us to take a look at the study on Internet regulation in the OSCE region commissioned by Ms. Mijatović's Office. I might mention that Belarus, unlike quite a number of our partners from the European Union, was one of the first to submit its answers to the Representative's questionnaire on this subject.

We should also like to draw attention to the Representative's involvement in the Budapest Declaration on Freedom of Expression and the Internet, which was jointly agreed upon and adopted at the level of the relevant special representatives of the United Nations and a number of regional organizations. We are of the opinion that this initiative by the Representative is a private one, and the document adopted is not a consensual position of the OSCE.

As for the specific questions touched upon in the Representative's report with respect to Belarus, they were discussed to a greater or lesser extent within the Permanent Council not that long ago. We shall merely briefly recall that the privately-owned newspapers *Narodnaya Volya* and *Nasha Niva* continue to appeal against the warnings issued by the Belarusian Ministry of Information. In accordance with Belarusian law, judicial proceedings have been instituted against Andrzej Poczobut, who has been charged with libel. Irina Khalip, who was mentioned in the report, has received a suspended sentence and is therefore now a free woman. As for Natalia Radina, who violated a written undertaking not to leave the town where she was living, she has evaded justice and fled Belarus.

Finally, I should like to assure the distinguished members of the Permanent Council and Ms. Mijatović that the media in Belarus can work normally and that there are no artificial obstacles to their activities. The main condition for this is their due consideration for and observance of the laws in force and compliance with journalistic ethics.

In conclusion, I should like to wish Ms. Mijatović and her Office every success in their work in the future.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.