

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**

14 April 2011

In response to the statement by the European Union on Belarus

Mr. Chairperson,

We have listened carefully to the statement by the delegation of Hungary on behalf of the European Union (EU). Its content will be brought to the attention of our capital.

Regrettably, we are forced to note the continuation of the practice of overt political pressure on the Republic of Belarus by the European Union, which from meeting to meeting continues with surprising persistence to harp on about the same issues regarding Belarus. We should like once again to urge our EU colleagues to stop artificially inflaming the situation with respect to our country.

As for the media in Belarus, they are working perfectly normally, as they are in the overwhelming majority of EU countries. Belarusian citizens have a wide range of possibilities for receiving diverse and varied information via newspapers, radio, television and the Internet.

Yet again we urge the EU to refrain from loud and opinionated statements about “flagrant violations of freedom of the media in Belarus” on the basis of individual and questionable cases. There is no need for contrived generalizations or name calling. No one in Belarus interferes in the work of particular journalists, publications or radio stations without good reason or grounds for doing so, let alone creates obstacles for them. The main guarantee for freedom of the media is their observance of the law.

As for Andrzej Poczobut, to whom reference was made in the EU statement, we should like to point out that he is not officially accredited in Belarus as a correspondent for the Polish newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza*. Mr. Poczobut stands accused of libel and defamation with respect to the President of the Republic of Belarus and was detained on 6 April 2011 after violating a written undertaking not to leave his place of abode. This matter is currently under investigation.

The European Union and the Office of OSCE Representative on the Freedom of the Media have made frequent reference in their statements to the situation of Irina Khalip and Natalia Radina. We should like to inform you that the charges against Ms. Khalip concerning the organization of “mass disturbances” have been dropped. The charge has been reclassified under the article concerning the organization and preparation of action that flagrantly violates public order or active participation in such action. As for Ms. Radina, it is possible that our distinguished colleagues from the European Union are not up to date on this matter. Given the fact that she has violated the conditions of a written undertaking not to leave the country and has left Belarus, we would be interested to hear the European Union’s view now on her situation.

The radio station *Avtoradio* and the newspaper *Narodnaya Volya*, both of which were mentioned in the EU statement, have had every opportunity to appeal against the complaints made about their work by the Ministry of Information of Belarus. We shall not comment on the decisions reached by the Supreme Economic Court of the Republic of Belarus and we would advise our partners from the European Union to do the same. Let us respect the independence of the judiciary in accordance with OSCE commitments.

For our part, we should like to point out that the European Union’s concern about freedom of the media and the rights of journalists remains one-sided. The EU continues to deliberately ignore our concerns regarding the inclusion of a good number of Belarusian journalists in the list of persons to be denied entry to the EU. To our regret and surprise, the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media has informed our delegation that this matter does not apparently fall within her remit. We are at an absolute loss to understand how different criteria regarding freedom of the media and a different set of rules can be applied to different journalists. It would appear that there are “first-class” and “second-class” journalists. We shall return to this question of principle when Ms. Mijatović delivers her next regular report to the Permanent Council.

All in all, since the European Union, like the delegations of the United States of America, Canada and Norway, constantly makes reference in its statements to the opinion of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, we would also be interested to hear about the situation regarding freedom of the media in those countries and their response to appeals that have been addressed to them by the Office of the Representative in connection with specific violations. In particular, this applies to the EU countries mentioned in the March report by Ms. Mijatović and recent press releases issued by her Office.

If these countries continue to ignore this and fail to provide all participating States with this information, our delegation will regard such a position as a refusal by our partners to engage in dialogue on human rights and freedom of the media within the Permanent Council. It is our hope that our request and concerns will be given the attention they deserve.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.