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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**

7 July 2011

**In response to the statements by the delegations of the European Union and
the United States of America**

Mr. Chairperson,

We have listened carefully to the statements by the delegation of Poland on behalf of the European Union (EU) and the delegation of the United States of America and shall be bringing their contents to the attention of our Government in Minsk.

For our part, we should like to point out that the Republic of Belarus is currently going through a rather difficult time in its development. The Government is taking the necessary measures to overcome the negative economic and financial trends. It is clear that the enforced devaluation of the national currency and a certain rise in prices cannot but affect the life of ordinary people.

In Belarus, as in any other country, at such a time some actively-minded people prefer to state their position through protest or demonstrations. Unfortunately, these actions are not always peaceful and organized; many of them are unauthorized and are held in places that are not intended for activities of that kind.

Freedom of peaceful assembly is an important and inalienable civil right. However, as our Western colleagues have repeatedly acknowledged – and we are in full agreement with them – it must also be duly consistent with the need to maintain law and order, safeguard security and respect the rights and freedoms of other citizens.

The recent protests in Minsk took place in critical infrastructural areas, and if the law enforcement authorities had not intervened, the actions could have had a negative impact on the life of the city and endangered the safety of other citizens. As far as we know, a similar situation was also observed in other cities in Belarus.

Most of the people detained during these actions, including journalists who were in the thick of things, were released after their identity had been established. Some of the most active transgressors and those who refused to obey legal directions or the requests of the officials acting in an authorized capacity were charged with administrative offenses.

The actions of the Belarusian law enforcement authorities were in compliance with the relevant laws of the land and the demands for public safety. At the same time, the General Procurator of the Republic of Belarus is currently conducting an investigation in connection with statements received by the procurator's office concerning illegal actions by some members of the law enforcement authorities against participants in unauthorized acts.

To be frank, we do not altogether understand the intensity of the reaction by our colleagues from the EU and the United States of America to these events in Minsk, particularly when the situation in Belarus is compared with the really critical recent events involving a much higher level of violence in one of the countries of the European Union, which for some reason does not cause concern to the Permanent Council or OSCE Chairperson-in-Office. It appears to us that our Western partners could take a more balanced approach in their assessment of events in the OSCE region. They should not only be concerned about other people's problems but should also follow more closely what is taking place in their own countries with respect to honouring OSCE commitments.

As to the references in the statements by the European Union and United States to the functioning of the mass media in Belarus, we commented on this quite recently in the discussion of the report by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media. We should merely like to add that Andrzej Poczobut, who was sentenced to three years' imprisonment for slandering the President of the Republic of Belarus with a two-year deferral. He was fully acquitted of the charge of insulting the President and released from custody in the courtroom. An appeal may be made against the sentence in the normal manner.

In conclusion, we should like to express the hope that our Western partners in the OSCE will show proper solidarity in practice with the Belarusian people and instead of meaningless sanctions will grant Belarus the necessary assistance in stabilizing the economic situation and overcoming the current financial difficulties. This will be the best way of helping Belarusian citizens to assert their rights and freedoms.

Mr. Chairperson,

We have repeatedly drawn the attention of the United States delegation at meetings of the Permanent Council to the need to get right the various facts that they mention in connection with Belarus, particularly with reference to international documents. Here today the delegation of the United States of America is citing Belarus as a party to the European Convention on Human Rights. We should like to point out to the distinguished American diplomats that the Republic of Belarus, like the United States of America, cannot be a party to this convention because they are not members of the Council of Europe.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.