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

24 March 2011

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

Mr. Chairperson,

We have listened carefully to the statements on behalf of the European Union and the United States and will inform Minsk of their content.

As we have already provided clarification on most of the issues highlighted today by the United States and European Union delegations, we, unlike our partners, do not see the point of reiterating our position, which has not changed.

We regret to note the ongoing overt political pressure on our country, the use of the rhetoric of threats and the application of sanctions. It seems that in relation to the situation in Belarus, the European Union and the United States have no qualms about appointing themselves prosecutor and judge rolled into one. They draw their own politicized conclusions and, without trial or investigation, call for the release of persons convicted of specific crimes. Such actions on the part of the European Union and the United States run counter to the key OSCE commitments in relation to the rule of law and the independence of the judicial branch, including the provisions of the Moscow Document of 1991. Incidentally, I shall be coming back to the Moscow Document a little later in this statement. All of this is being done in an extremely peremptory way. The official point of view and the arguments and facts put forward by us are completely disregarded. Only the opinions of various representatives of civil society and at times even what we consider to be utterly dubious organizations are taken in good faith.

Thus we have the following comments on the “International Observation Mission of the Committee on International Control over the Situation with Human Rights in Belarus” mentioned in the United States statement.

The activities of this Mission in Belarus are being carried out illegally and in breach of the legislation in force on the procedure for establishing and operating the offices of foreign organizations. According to the available information, the members of the Mission have repeatedly interfered in the investigation of the criminal case in relation to the events of

19 December 2010 and have drafted extremely biased statements and reports. In these circumstances, the national law enforcement agencies were bound to respond accordingly to prevent further interference in the trial and damage to the interests of Belarus.

Mr. Chairperson,

At the last meeting of the Permanent Council, I drew delegations' attention to inaccuracies in the statement by the representative of the European Union. Today also, in the statement by the distinguished representative of the United States, we note an attempt to distort and take out of context certain provisions of OSCE documents. Specifically, the United States delegation refers to paragraph 43.2 of the Copenhagen Document in relation to visits to participating States by non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

I should like to start by pointing out that there is no such paragraph in the Copenhagen Document. What is meant is the Moscow Document. Paragraph 43 of the Moscow Document states: "The participating States will recognize as NGOs those which declare themselves as such, according to existing national procedures, and will facilitate the ability of such organizations to conduct their national activities freely on their territories". As you can see, a key provision of this paragraph is "according to existing national procedures". The United States delegation fails to mention this important requirement and is swift to accuse Belarus of violating paragraph 43.2 of the Moscow Document, pursuant to which the participating States will "endeavour to facilitate visits to their countries by NGOs from within any of the participating States in order to observe human dimension conditions". As the saying goes, no comment is required.

Mr. Chairperson,

The statements by the European Union and the United States also contain references to alleged "sentencing on political grounds" and "court irregularities" in Belarus. In the context of the ODIHR experts starting work on monitoring legal proceedings, such claims look like an attempt to exert pressure and prematurely foist ready-made assessments and conclusions on the Office.

I should also like to inform you that the Office of the Procurator General is continuing to verify the evidence submitted in the appeal of former presidential candidate Ales Mikhalevich and has sent a statement to the office of the Belarusian military procurator on dealing with those detained in connection with mass riots, who are at the Committee of State Security pre-trial detention facility and the Ministry of Internal Affairs pre-trial detention facility No. 1.

Another point we should like to bring to the notice of the Permanent Council is the expansion of the list of Belarusian citizens not permitted entry visas to the European Union. The European Union is clearly completely unconcerned that such actions are in breach of the Helsinki principles and OSCE commitments on freedom of movement, are closing windows and doors to pursuing co-operation, are creating divisions and are undermining the very logic of the dialogue within the framework of our Organization. We trust that the addition of the latest Belarusian journalist to the expanded list of those not permitted entry visas will be an added incentive for the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media to respond impartially to the ongoing conscious violation by the European Union countries of commitments on the freedom of the media and freedom of expression.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairperson, I should like to call on our Western European partners to take a more responsible approach in their statements, refraining from the language of threats and sanctions and aiming to set up a dialogue of mutual respect.

Here, I should like to bring in the well-known expression, incidentally beloved of many Americans – “You can lead a horse to water but you can’t make it drink”. Translated into Russian, this could be taken to mean that coercive measures have their limits.

Thank you.