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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 PERMANENT COUNCIL**

17 March 2011

**Regarding the regular report by Ms. Dunja Mijatović,
OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media**

Mr. Chairperson,

We welcome Ms. Dunja Mijatović, OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, to the Permanent Council and thank her for her latest informative report.

In 2011, on the initiative of the Lithuanian Chairmanship, greater attention is being paid within the OSCE to the issues of freedom of the media and freedom of expression. We are certain that these issues merit comprehensive and balanced consideration, especially in view of the imperative need to ensure safety, including in cyberspace.

We are all probably agreed that the OSCE is not meeting its commitments in this regard optimally in its area of responsibility. This also fully applies to the countries to the west of Vienna. Today's report by Ms. Mijatović is also a clear testament to this, as are a number of her recent public announcements. In that connection, we welcome the improved balance in the Representative's work.

However, we should like to pinpoint what we consider to be the two main aspects in considering the situation of the media in the OSCE region.

Firstly, our partners and even the Office of the Representative very often confuse the issues of freedom of the media with behaviour on the part of journalists that has nothing to do with their professional activities, but rather with economic and criminal offences and involvement in unauthorized acts and even criminal groups. There are constant attempts to associate this behaviour with the freedom of the media and freedom of expression. Let us not confuse these issues, and take a professional approach to each specific case, carefully studying and analysing the facts.

Secondly, such an important matter as the responsibility of the media and journalists themselves to society and the existence of ethical and moral standards are often ignored. Then the freedom of the media becomes a cover for unscrupulous articles, calls to violence,

incitements to hatred, discrediting and libel. We believe that the Office of the Representative is still paying too little attention to this issue.

Mr. Chairperson,

The statement and the written version of the report touch on issues related to Belarus that have frequently been the subject of discussion in the Permanent Council of late. We do not see any need to reiterate our position in detail.

We should just like to mention that Belarus is currently considering the proposal of the Representative on organizing a visit to Minsk and on providing assistance to the Belarusian Ministry of Information.

Regarding Irina Khalip and Natalya Radina as mentioned in the report as well as in the statements by the European Union and the United States of America, the fact of the matter is that the investigation and the court will have to decide whether their activities were illegal and whether they had any connection with journalistic activities. By the way, Natalya Radina is currently not “under strict house arrest” but confined to her home town.

Mr. Chairperson,

At a previous meeting of the Permanent Council, we drew the attention of delegations and the Office of the Representative to a situation that is completely unacceptable from the point of view of the freedom of the media, where several journalists from Belarus were placed on a list of those denied entry to the European Union for an opinion they expressed. Our delegation called on the Representative to investigate the incident and respond accordingly to these actions by the European Union that are at odds with OSCE commitments. Unfortunately there has been no response so far.

The picture is similar in relation to the blatantly politically-motivated persecution of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, who is facing extradition to Sweden, then the United States. We do not entirely understand why it is, when the grounds for hounding the head of a well-known Internet publication are apparent to everyone, that the Office of the OSCE Representative prefers to remain silent.

We expect Ms. Mijatović to show consistency and take the appropriate measures in relation to both situations.

Obviously these and other issues falling within the Representative’s mandate will require significant efforts in the near future, therefore, in conclusion, we should like to wish Ms. Mijatović and her team every success in their future endeavours.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.