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Delegation of Belarus

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

19 January 2012

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

Mr. Chairperson,

We have listened attentively to the statements by the delegation of Denmark (on behalf of the European Union) and the United States of America and shall convey the points made in them to the authorities in Minsk.

I should like to comment on a number of points raised in those statements.

Yes, in fact, in Belarus since 6 January of this year amendments and supplements to the Code of Administrative Infractions and to the Code of Procedure for Administrative Infractions have come into force that provide for responsibility for infractions in the use of the national segment of the Internet when committed exclusively by economic entities in the Republic of Belarus. In this same connection, I should like to draw particular attention on the part of my esteemed colleagues from the European Union and the United States to the fact that, as far as physical persons are concerned, there is no provision for limitations, fines or other measures of responsibility in connection with access to the Internet. All physical persons on the territory of the Republic of Belarus enjoy free and unimpeded access to any Internet resources.

As regards limitations on access to sites with unlawful and extremist content, those limitations were introduced earlier only for State authorities, schools and other educational and cultural institutions.

I should like to take this opportunity to note that as a result of the systematic policy that has been implemented in the Republic of Belarus over the last few years the number of Internet users in the country has steadily increased, technical possibilities have expanded and the cost of access has been reduced. For example, according to the findings of a sociological study conducted in December 2011, in comparison with 2009 the number of citizens in Belarus who use the Internet virtually every day has increased from 62.5 per cent to 81 per cent. In the "Information Economy Report 2011" prepared by the United Nations

Conference on Trade and Development, Belarus is ranked among the first 20 countries in the world with the fastest growth in the number of Internet users.

Mr. Chairperson,

In the context of the statements we have heard here we wonder why, for example, the United States delegation, which never fails to focus attention on Belarus, does not raise questions in the Permanent Council regarding the situation with respect to freedom in cyberspace in a number of European Union countries where there are facts attesting to the criminal prosecution of citizens for using social networks on the Internet, where electronic correspondence of citizens is intercepted, and where the mandatory filtering of sites with undesirable content is an everyday event.

I should like also to inquire why my esteemed European colleagues are not disturbed by US plans to adopt legislation that would entitle law enforcement authorities to screen all Internet communications without a court order. Or the well-known draft legislation entitled “Stop Online Piracy Act” and “Protect IP Act”, which under the pretext of curbing copyright violations on the Internet would enable the government and corporations to block Internet sites and networks without any court hearings.

One again we call for a balanced discussion in the Permanent Council of this and many other subjects without resorting either to double standards or to unfounded accusations.

As regards the question raised by the delegations of the European Union and the United States concerning the Belarusian citizen Aleksandr Borozenko, according to information available to us he has been sentenced to administrative arrest for participation in an unsanctioned action. We have no information to the effect that this person is an accredited journalist within the terms of Belarusian law.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.