



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Belarus

As delivered by Deputy Representative Douglas Davidson
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
May 6, 2004

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States would like to express its deep concern about the arrest of prominent politician and business activist Mikhail Marinich that was described in the OSCE Office in Minsk's latest spot report. We call upon Belarusian authorities to release Mr. Marinich immediately.

It may be argued that this arrest does not represent an act of persecution, but rather the enforcement of Belarusian law. We would find this claim easier to accept if we saw a just and impartial legal process at work. Instead, what we observe is a pattern of selective enforcement that targets opposition figures, political parties, the independent media, and NGOs attempting to exercise their right to freedom of speech, assembly, and association as reflected in OSCE commitments.

To this end, we convey, once again, our concern about the persecution of the Belarusian Helsinki Committee, an NGO that embodies the principles of this organization, as well as Anatoly Lebedko, the Chairman of the United Civic Party, and a leading opposition figure.

Recently, the United Nations Commission on Human Rights and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe adopted decisions highlighting the degradation of human rights in Belarus. The United States fully agrees with the conclusions and recommendations reached in both bodies.

Mr. Chairman, despite our frequent entreaties here, the crackdown on civil society in Belarus continues. We once again call on the Belarusian government to end its assault on civil society, the media and the political opposition. Belarus alone has the power to end its self-isolation and to create a society in which citizens exercise their rights without fear.

I thank you.