



## United States Mission to the OSCE

# **U.S. Statement in Response to Head of the OSCE Office in Minsk, Ambassador Eberhard Heyken**

As prepared for delivery by Acting Political Counselor David Kostelancik  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
July 15, 2004

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

We too would like to welcome Ambassador Heyken to the Permanent Council and thank him for his comprehensive report.

We welcome the Joint Declaration that was agreed during the summer session of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly in Edinburgh, and echo Ambassador Heyken's hopes that this will lead to more substantive cooperation between the Working Group on Belarus and the Belarusian Parliament.

However, we wish there were more positive developments to speak of. We are still concerned about the events in the past weeks concerning the treatment of journalists, such as the summary expulsion of a Ukrainian journalist who was a long-term resident of Belarus. We hope that the Government will immediately halt its pressure on the media, especially on the publication and distribution of independent newspapers. In addition, it is curious to us that Belarusian state television avoided reporting on the issue of a hunger strike by three deputies of the parliamentary group "Respublika," although the issue did attract international attention.

We also object to the continued harassment of and attacks on NGOs, political party activists and opposition members of Parliament. The attempted abduction of former MP founder of the independent Free Trade Union and member of the political opposition, Sergei Antonchik, is a recent disturbing example.

We hope that the government will take decisive steps to ensure that the parliamentary elections are held according to OSCE standards. A timely invitation to ODIHR to observe the parliamentary elections would be a step in the right direction. We were disturbed to hear that the Ministry of Justice has proclaimed that the Five-Plus coalition, which has steadily been gaining support, is now considered unregistered, and therefore illegal, and must cease all activities until it is registered. All members of this coalition are already registered parties, and should not have to go through this process.

We are very concerned with proposed legislative changes that would grant law enforcement and security personnel the right to enter into any premises without a search warrant. We urge the Government of Belarus to adhere to its OSCE commitments regarding civil and political rights, including respect for private and family life.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, the report Ambassador Heyken has presented to us today and the comments from some in recent days concerning the field operation activities of this organization bring to mind the need for cooperation -- from the OSCE and from host government authorities -- with OSCE missions.

Ambassador Heyken's report makes clear that he is doing his best to carry out the terms of his mandate. We commend him and his team for the cooperative hand they have extended to Belarusian authorities in promoting work with Belarusian society.

However, in connection with the Belarusian statement regarding the OSCE Office in Minsk reporting, "non-interference in the internal affairs of Belarus," and staffing issues, we support the views previously expressed by the Director of our Conflict Prevention Center, Ambassador Zannier.

In these matters, the OSCE Office in Minsk should be guided by the mandate adopted by this Permanent Council, the Memorandum of Understanding signed by the OSCE and the Government of Belarus, and the policies and procedures of the OSCE.

Our thanks to Ambassador Heyken for his report. Please pass on our appreciation to your excellent team in Minsk.

Thank you.