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**STATEMENT BY MR. DENIS SIDORENKO,
DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE REPUBLIC OF
BELARUS TO THE OSCE, AT THE MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

3 March 2011

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

Mr. Chairperson,

We should like to make a few comments on the statements we have heard from the delegations of the European Union (EU), the United States of America, Canada and Russia.

We note the interest and the steadfast attention shown by several of our OSCE partners, in particular the EU and the United States, to Belarus and to particular events and proceedings taking place in the country. At the same time, as we mentioned earlier, we should like for such interest to be expressed not only, and not so much, through criticism that is often entirely baseless, and through the introduction of restrictive measures, but through mutually respectful dialogue and mutually beneficial co-operation in the interests of common security and development.

With regard to the investigations carried out and the judicial proceedings initiated in connection with the mass disturbances in Minsk on the evening of 19 December 2010, we should like to emphasize that they are taking place in full conformity with the national laws of the Republic of Belarus. The court sessions are open, and representatives of civil society, journalists and foreign diplomats accredited in Belarus have access to them. Detailed reports from the courtroom appear virtually live on the Internet.

In Belarus, as in any other law-governed State, only the courts can give a legal assessment of citizens' illegal acts and determine the guilt and degree of responsibility of each of the accused.

This being the case, we consider today's statements by our partners as constituting direct pressure on the judicial system of Belarus. They undermine the principle of the rule of law and the independence of the judicial organs. We strongly urge our partners to refrain from such a flawed practice within the OSCE.

With regard to the aforementioned Vasiliy Parfenkov, he was found guilty by a court of taking part in the mass disturbances as part of a group, and also of damaging State property during the assault on the government building. This individual was convicted on account of the specific illegal acts he committed, and not for participating in the election campaign. Aleksandr Otroshchenkov, Dmitriy Novik and Aleksandr Molchanov also received prison terms for their participation in the mass disturbances.

I should also like to inform colleagues that Belarus, in the spirit of transparency and openness, invited the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) to send its experts to monitor these judicial proceedings. Agreements in principle have been reached with the Office on the modalities for such monitoring, which will begin next week as planned.

The Republic of Belarus, like our partners within the OSCE, considers the use of torture and inhuman treatment to be unacceptable and takes the observance of international standards and OSCE commitments in this regard very seriously. Any suspicions in this connection are investigated carefully.

At the same time, we regard as unacceptable any speculations and the unsubstantiated statements we have heard today regarding the possible use of torture in Belarus. The competent Belarusian law enforcement authorities have categorically refuted the claims by the former presidential candidate Ales Mikhalevich that he was allegedly subjected to measures of coercion that could be described as torture. It is significant that other persons facing charges in this case have stated that they personally did not encounter such things.

As for the question of freedom of the media, at the last meeting of the Permanent Council we graphically demonstrated what “freedom of the media and freedom of opinion” means for our partners in practice when dozens of Belarusian journalists are included in the so-called lists of persons banned from entering EU countries. We have still not heard any response from Dunja Mijatović’s office in this regard. We shall continue to monitor the media situation in the EU and the United States, including the case of the WikiLeaks founder.

We should like once again to point out that Belarus is in constant contact with the Office of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, conducting correspondence on the relevant matters and studying proposals by Ms. Mijatović regarding a possible visit by her to Belarus and assistance to the Belarusian Ministry of Information on certain issues concerning the functioning of the Belarusian media.

In this context our partners who are tirelessly urging Belarus to co-operate with the OSCE in this matter will be rather interested to learn that the Belarusian Parliament proposed to the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly’s Working Group on Belarus that it should hold a joint seminar on the media in March 2011 in Minsk. To our great surprise and regret, the head of the Working Group, Uta Zapf, refused to hold such an event.

One final point. Last week the ODIHR distributed its final report on the observation of the presidential election in Belarus. This fairly voluminous document and the recommendations it contains are currently being carefully studied in Minsk. Once the Belarusian authorities have prepared an official position on the final report, it will be brought to the Office’s attention. At this preliminary stage, we once again note the unacceptability of linking the evaluations of the actual elections with the post-electoral events in Belarus.

In conclusion, we should also like to call on the Lithuanian Chairmanship of the OSCE to fully take into account in its public statements the entire spectrum of opinions within the Organization and to avoid a loose interpretation of particular events, conclusions and assessments by OSCE executive structures. In particular, a number of comments have been made recently by the Chairperson-in-Office on the subject of Belarus that were incorrect, contained inaccurate information and misled the public.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.