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United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to Belarus and Russia on accusations of double standards in media freedom within the OSCE

As delivered by Ambassador Ian Kelly
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
July 22, 2011

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I really didn't plan to say anything, but I feel compelled having heard the kinds of comparisons that are being set up here, which I think are completely false.

I will admit to having some biases, it's true. I am a lifelong Anglophile and Britainophile; I have a lot of respect for my British colleagues. I am also a Russophile; I have a lot of respect for Russian culture and my Russian colleagues.

However, I have to address this issue of what is being termed as a double standard, because the standard that we use when we raise freedom of media issues is inappropriate government intimidation of the media, of threats and even violence against journalists, and, equally importantly, when journalists are imprisoned because of their journalistic activities.

I don't consider hacking into the personal telephones of private citizens a journalistic activity. I don't consider the reaction of the British government to what happened in this scandal to be inappropriate.

Let's look at what the British government did: they have launched a full investigation into this gross invasion of privacy; they have had a number of open, in fact some would say even too open, parliamentary hearings into what happened; they have had hearings into corruption allegations against government officials who have been working with these media officials; and we have seen government officials brought to accountability because of these actions.

So, with all due respect to my Belarusian and Russian colleagues, I don't accept this accusation of a double standard on the part of my government when we raise freedom of the media issues.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.