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

13 January 2011

**In response to the statement by Mr. Audronius Ažubalis, Minister for
Foreign Affairs of Lithuania and Chairperson-in-Office of the OSCE**

Mr. Chairperson,

The delegation of the Republic of Belarus welcomes Mr. Audronius Ažubalis, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Lithuania and Chairperson-in-Office of the OSCE, to today's meeting of the Permanent Council.

Lithuania is a direct neighbour and close partner of the Republic of Belarus, and we are sincerely pleased that it is your country that will chair our Organization during the current year. We are looking forward to interesting and constructive work together.

We listened with great interest to your statement, Mr. Minister, with its outline of the Lithuanian Chairmanship's priorities and programme of work. A significant number of the areas and subjects you noted coincide fully with the priorities of Belarus within the OSCE.

We assume that our joint efforts in 2011 will be primarily concentrated on the implementation and development of the results of the Astana Summit. This work must be carried out within the existing formats in a planned and balanced manner and with equal attention to all the elements of the so-called "Astana package".

We think it extremely important that in Astana our leaders unequivocally spoke out in favour of enhancing the role of the OSCE in strengthening Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian security. In that context, during the period ahead it is necessary, in our view, to undertake concrete steps and measures to further heighten confidence in our Organization, to increase the need for the OSCE, and to modernize and improve the tools at its disposal. We hope that the recent Summit meeting will impart a fresh impulse to this important work.

We continue to be convinced of the need to adopt an OSCE Charter. This will make it possible not only to complete the process of transforming the OSCE into a fully fledged international organization but will also regulate its work in conformity with generally accepted international practices, making it understandable, transparent and predictable.

The OSCE, in our view, needs a long-term agenda focused on real threats and challenges and taking into account the interests of all its participating States. The Organization's work must be balanced in respect of all three dimensions as well as in geographic terms.

As we see it, the key priorities of the OSCE over the long term must continue to include the countering of transnational threats and challenges such as terrorism, organized crime, human trafficking and illegal migration, and trafficking in narcotic drugs. We agree also with the need to improve cyber security.

It is important not to slow down the work of improving the tools available to the OSCE in the area of confidence- and security-building measures, arms control and non-proliferation. We note with satisfaction the shared understanding that has emerged regarding the need to update the Vienna Document of 1999 of the Negotiations on Confidence- and Security-Building Measures, an understanding that was confirmed at the Astana Summit. Considering what has been accomplished in 2010, we regard as altogether realistic the possibility that the Vienna Document may be updated during 2011.

We also regard as a priority task within the terms of the "first basket" the combating of the illegal trade in small arms and light weapons, a cause to which the Republic of Belarus is also making its contribution by, among other things, implementing within the country a joint United Nations Development Programme and OSCE project along those lines. It is our hope that this project will continue to enjoy the support of the participating States.

We believe that the OSCE should devote greater attention to issues having to do with the economic and environmental dimension. We share the Chairmanship's view as to the need for the further intensification of joint efforts to increase energy security. At the Astana Summit the Republic of Belarus proposed the drawing up and approval of key principles for co-operation in this area that would provide a common denominator for the interests of energy producers, transit countries and consumers. We are also in favour of strengthening the role of the OSCE in protecting the energy infrastructure, making use of alternative and renewable energy sources, and ensuring that all countries have access to advanced technologies in the energy sector.

Concerning the human dimension, we continue to regard as priority tasks the OSCE's work to combat trafficking in human beings along with its efforts to promote tolerance and non-discrimination.

We are convinced of the need to focus due attention in 2011 on the problem of freedom of movement and the liberalization of visa regimes. We have already voluntarily assumed unequivocal commitments to simplify interpersonal contacts, commitments that must be fulfilled.

A central theme of the OSCE's human dimension, namely that of elections, also requires greater attention. During the presidential elections held in Belarus last year we once again encountered certain flaws in the so-called election monitoring "methodology" of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). In this regard, our delegation was also surprised at the statement by Mr. Ažubalis, the esteemed Minister for Foreign Affairs of Lithuania and the Chairperson-in-Office of the OSCE, to the effect that the

presidential elections in the Republic of Belarus were not in line with the Copenhagen principles. If you turn to the preliminary conclusions of the international election observation mission, you will find no such assertion. We believe that in their personal assessments and perception of the outcome of elections participating States must exercise maximum correctness and must not distort the conclusions that have been presented. What is more, this fact only strengthens our belief as to the need to formulate universal standards and criteria for the assessment of elections and also general principles for election monitoring.

As regards the issues of media freedom raised in today's statement by the Chairperson-in-Office, these questions must be considered comprehensively and in a balanced manner, particularly taking into account the need to ensure security and stability, including in cyberspace. Freedom of the media and freedom of expression do not cancel out the need to observe the law, proper professional behaviour, responsibility to the public, and ethical and moral standards.

We certainly agree with the need for further efforts to ensure progress in resolving "frozen conflicts" within the OSCE area.

We are also impressed by the task set by the Lithuanian Chairmanship of seeking general "points of contact" in the work of regional organizations, since many of the issues being discussed today within the OSCE could be more effectively tackled through close and co-ordinated co-operation at the regional and subregional levels.

Mr. Chairperson,

Regarding the question raised in the statement by the distinguished Lithuanian minister as to the OSCE presence in Belarus, we should like once again to note that the decision taken by the Belarusian Government not to extend the mandate of the OSCE Office in Minsk is a conscious decision, which follows from the absence of any objective grounds for maintaining that mission in the country. This position has been set out over a number of years in official statements by the Belarusian Government.

A comprehensive assessment of the results achieved by the OSCE Office in Minsk during the time that it has been in existence shows that on the whole the Office's mandate has been performed. As indicated by the experience of Latvia, Estonia and Georgia, where at the proper time OSCE field missions were closed down, OSCE project activities can be successfully and effectively conducted through direct contacts with the Organization's Secretariat and institutions.

In this same connection, we reaffirm Belarus's earlier stated readiness to engage in further constructive collaboration with the participating States, the Secretariat and the institutions of the OSCE in all areas of mutual interest, including those that formerly fell within the mandate of the OSCE Office in Minsk.

In conclusion, permit me to wish Lithuania and you personally, Mr. Minister, every success in your important and responsible work in chairing the OSCE.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.