

Canadian Delegation to the
Organization for Security & Cooperation
in Europe



Délégation du Canada auprès de
l'Organisation pour la sécurité et la coopération
en Europe

**DELEGATION OF CANADA TO THE OSCE
STATEMENT IN RESPONSE TO THE REPORT BY THE
HEAD OF THE OSCE OFFICE IN MINSK
AMBASSADOR SCHMIDT
717TH MEETING OF THE PERMANENT COUNCIL
19 JUNE 2008**

Canada joins others in warmly welcoming Ambassador Schmidt in his first visit to the Permanent Council as Head of Office in Minsk. We thank him for both his presentation and his report.

Canada greatly appreciates the political and social context provided in this report. In order to assess the programming in Belarus effectively, we stress the importance of continuing and strengthening the Office's reporting and monitoring capacity.

We hold the Office in Minsk and the work it does in high esteem. As we have noted in the past, working conditions for the OSCE in Belarus are challenging, largely because of the onerous project registration process to which the Office is subject.

We are disappointed that in 2007 not a single human dimension project was undertaken and only one has been agreed to in 2008.

It is our hope that the situation will improve in the nearest future and the Government of Belarus will cooperate fully with the Office and ease these restrictive registration processes.

Government input in OSCE programming is fundamental to effective programming, but the involvement of authorities should not undermine the work of the Organisation in assisting a host country to implement its OSCE commitments, which is the primary role of any field mission.

It is Canada's view that Belarus is in need of assistance in meeting its OSCE and international obligations. We are continually troubled by reports of the government undermining the freedom of media, dispersing peaceful assemblies and arresting protesters.

As we highlighted in our 8 May intervention in the Permanent Council, long sentences given to protesters, such as Mr. Sevyarynets, and opposition leaders, such as Mr. Kazulin, are clear human rights violations.

Further, Canada is deeply concerned by recent reports of Belarusian authorities searching the homes of seventeen journalists, and share the earlier concerns voiced in March 2008 by the Representative on the Freedom of the Media.

The right to publicly express views is not only a fundamental OSCE commitment, but it is also essential to a functioning democracy. Regrettably, President Lukashenko's recently introduced legislation imposing restrictions on the use of the Internet in Belarus, which will have an impact on independent journalists, will not assist in this regard. We urge the Government of Belarus to engage civil society seriously and govern in a manner that respects the will and the views of the citizens of Belarus.

We wish Ambassador Schmidt and his dedicated small team all the best in their challenging work ahead.