



## United States Mission to the OSCE

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# Statement on Belarus

Delivered by Ambassador Stephan M. Minikes to the  
Permanent Council, Vienna  
April 2, 2003

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States welcomes Ambassador Heyken in his first visit to the Permanent Council as Head of the OSCE's Office in Minsk. As a delegation, we met with Ambassador Heyken on frequent occasions last year as he worked in Vienna on building OSCE cooperation with Belarus. However, it gives us distinctly greater pleasure - as we are sure it does him - that we no longer have the opportunity to meet as frequently because he is living and working in Minsk.

Mr. Chairman, we share the concern expressed by the EU at last week's Permanent Council meeting regarding the arrest and imprisonment of a number of participants at a recent demonstration in Minsk. However, as Ambassador Heyken has focused his report on the functioning of the OOM rather than the general situation in Belarus, we too have made the functioning of the OOM the subject of our remarks today. •

The United States takes note of and welcomes the positive points Ambassador Heyken makes in his report. Among those developments most noteworthy, we include his assertion that the OOM and civil society enjoy unhindered freedom of access to each other. We hope such contact continues and is strengthened. We also are encouraged by Ambassador Heyken's statement that initial contacts with the Belarusian Government have been constructive.

We recognize as significant the OOP's stated ability to monitor key events such as trials and demonstrations. Accurate reporting on its monitoring efforts should assist the Permanent Council in following developments in Belarus relevant to fulfillment of the OOP's mandate.

We hope the creation of four working groups will serve to facilitate - and not impede - the effective implementation of projects that advance fulfillment of the OOM's mandate. We consider the early, regular, and substantive participation of NGOs on these groups instrumental to their success and welcome the stated openness of Belarusian authorities in this regard.

If I might, I would like to ask a couple of questions about these working groups. First, I understand three of the four groups have already met. Could you confirm that NGOs participated in these meetings and if not could confirm they will participate in the next meeting of these groups? Second, how are NGOs selected for participation? Third, when will the Working Group on Civil Society be established?

Returning to my statement, Mr. Chairman, we are encouraged by Ambassador Heyken's conclusion that the OOM "has good prospects to function according to its mandate." This conclusion offers genuine hope regarding the potential of the OOM to realize its full promise.

According to its mandate, one of the Minsk Office's central tasks is to "assist the Belarusian Government in further promoting institution building, in further consolidating Rule of Law, and in developing relations with civil society." Used constructively, working groups that benefit from the participation of government representatives and civil society could offer a foundation for pursuing this objective. The implementation of a concrete program of action, including projects which can be paid in part with funds recently approved by the PC, however, is essential for moving beyond words towards a substantive contribution in this field.

In this vein, Ambassador Heyken identifies improvements in the electoral system as a priority and notes the OOM's submission of ODIHR projects to address concerns. Progress towards implementation of these projects would constitute the kind of action that is necessary to demonstrate the OOM is capable of functioning effectively according to its mandate.

Mr. Chairman, Ambassador Heyken's report demonstrates the OOM is on the right track towards realizing its prospects to function according to its mandate. With good faith on both sides towards the implementation of a substantive program of action, including projects in the fields addressed in its mandate, we believe that objective is within reach. We hope Ambassador Heyken's next report to the Permanent Council will demonstrate this achievement has been made. He and his mission enjoy our full support.

Thank you.