



United States Mission to the OSCE

Reply to Ambassador Yves Bargain Head of Center in Tajikistan

As delivered by Ambassador Stephan M. Minikes
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
October 30, 2003

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would also like to extend a warm welcome to Ambassador Bargain and to thank him for his very comprehensive report. Moreover, Ambassador Bargain, as this is your first appearance before the Permanent Council, I'd like to officially welcome you to the OSCE family.

Your report vividly illustrates how much the OSCE can bring to a country when the mandate exists for a broad range of activities, when the host government actively engages with the Center, and when staffing is sufficient to get the job done. I wish the OSCE could replicate the Tajik model elsewhere in Central Asia.

In our view, the Center is focusing on the right activities, and has good results to show for its efforts. We are somewhat discouraged, however, that election reform has not progressed as far as it should, and urge the Tajik authorities to respond quickly and implement ODIHR's recommendations for electoral reform. We concur that the very high turnout for the recent referendum - a staggering 96 percent - raises concerns about the accuracy and the reporting of results. It is very much in the Government of Tajikistan's interest to ensure that the conduct of its elections does not call into question their results.

We also encourage the Center to emphasize to the Tajik authorities that the war on terrorism should not be used as a license to persecute dissenters, and that peaceful political and religious groups must enjoy full freedom. We applaud the Center's role in de-mining. Ridding Tajikistan of mines is important on both political and humanitarian grounds. The most formidable closed border, both physically and psychologically, is the one that is mined.

In line with commitments taken in Bucharest, and with the PC decision on terrorist financing, we welcome Tajikistan's concrete steps to combat money laundering and terrorist financing, and to create a legislative framework in line with international norms, within which such acts can be prosecuted.

The United States is particularly pleased with the Center's activities in the Economic and Environmental Dimension, especially in the areas of SME development, women's access to business opportunities, the Aarhus Convention resource center, and the excellent and on-going civic education youth camps.

The Center and Tajik authorities are rightly collaborating on the difficult but essential issues of prison reform, media freedom and enhanced access to information, as well as comprehensive legislative reform. In these areas in particular, it is not just a matter of course of changing the laws, it is necessary also to change attitudes and to create an environment that, for example, encourages media freedom and access to information, and where prison officials, for example, reject torture. This is often the most difficult task, and we urge the Center and the Tajik authorities to redouble their collective efforts to identify ways to instill democratic values throughout Tajikistan.

In closing, let me thank Ambassador Bargain again and his team for their excellent work, and wish them every success in the future.