



United States Mission to the OSCE

Reply to Yves Bargain, Head of Center in Dushanbe

As delivered by Acting Deputy Chief of Mission
Bruce Connuck to the Permanent Council, Vienna
June 18, 2004

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I should like to begin by warmly welcoming Ambassador Bargain to the Permanent Council and by thanking him for his report. We especially appreciated the overview of the political scene in Tajikistan contained in the written report, as it is a useful tool for evaluating the appropriateness of the Center's activities.

We believe that Ambassador Bargain and his staff are guided by the right priorities across the board, and we commend their emphasis on activities that cut across all three dimensions.

We welcome the Center's practical approach to addressing some of Tajikistan's most pressing needs. The information boards and support to local radio stations, for example, demonstrate that very effective solutions can also be inexpensive and low-tech. The information boards in particular strike us as a good example of an activity that could easily and inexpensively be replicated in many other places and we encourage the Secretariat to make other OSCE field presences aware of this innovation.

We encourage the Center to continue and to intensify its cooperation with the Tajik authorities, civil society, political parties and the media in anticipation of the 2005 general elections. As we have said before, getting elections right is probably the single most important thing a country can do to advance democratic reform.

Coordination with other missions is also essential to any election strategy, and we urge you to reach out to other missions in-country.

Free and fair elections, with broad voter participation, diverse candidates, and with unfettered media coverage before, during and after the voting is a goal worth pursuing. In this connection, we hope that the Center and other international actors will continue to work with the Tajik authorities to improve the election and media laws.

While the amended election law approved by the lower house of Parliament on June 16 offers many improvements and had near unanimous support, it still has significant problems. Under the amended law, local NGOs are barred from observing elections. We see this as a set back for transparency and civic involvement in the political process. In addition, the deposit required for

standing for election makes running for office prohibitively expensive. Few Tajiks will be able to afford the \$475 fee, which is more than twice the annual per capita income.

We encourage the Center to continue its efforts to promote reform of the media law so that Tajiks can enjoy unrestricted access to a broad spectrum of information in the run-up to the general elections.

The Center's work on a wide range of border activities will do much to help Tajikistan build bridges with its neighbors. From de-mining and better border control, to promoting cross-border cooperation and trade, the Center is making an important contribution to regional cooperation and stability.

Finally, we commend the Center for its proactive and preventative work in the Human Dimension. Supporting prison reform and legal and judicial reform efforts will help address existing problems. Human rights education, informing migrants about their rights and responsibilities, and targeting vulnerable groups for entrepreneurial training will help prevent future human rights problems.

In closing Mr. Chairman, I should simply like to thank Ambassador Bargain and his team for their excellent work. We wish them continued success in the future.

I thank you.