



## United States Mission to the OSCE

### Statement on Belarus

As delivered by Ambassador Stephan M. Minikes  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
June 29, 2004

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States welcomes the Minsk Economic Court's decision, based on a very sound and thorough analysis of law, to dismiss the spurious tax penalties levied on the Belarusian Helsinki Committee. We hope that the judicial decision will be followed by other steps that will help ease the climate of fear and repression that exists in Belarus today.

This positive development, however, has been accompanied by several negative developments that cannot pass without comment.

The United States is concerned over the treatment of RFE/RL Correspondent Yuri Svirko while he was covering the Belarus Parliament Debate. Despite showing his press credentials to a uniformed security guard, Svirko was twice denied entry and had his micro-disc recording destroyed.

We are equally concerned about the summary expulsion of Ukrainian journalist Mykhaylo Podolyak from Belarus, where Podolyak had lived for over a decade and been working as the deputy editor-in-chief for the independent newspaper, Vremya. The grounds for his expulsion were specious and not in keeping with principles of media freedom.

These kinds of incidents should not occur anywhere, but especially not in OSCE participating States. Journalists with accreditation credentials should not have to worry about such mistreatment.

Participating States have agreed in the past to respect freedom of the media, and all OSCE participating States are expected to be actively upholding this commitment, not merely paying lip service to it. These episodes reflect nothing less than another attempt to undermine democracy and flout OSCE principles.

As the OSCE office in Minsk has already expressed its desire to monitor these incidents, we await further reports from that office.

Once again, we call on the Belarusian government to end its assault on civil society, on an independent media, on independent trade unions, and the political opposition. Belarus alone has the power to create a society in which citizens, and journalists of all nationalities, can live without fear of having their internationally recognized human rights violated.

Thank You, Mr. Chairman.