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Permanent Delegation of the Republic of Belarus to the OSCE

**STATEMENT BY  
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THE REPUBLIC OF BELARUS TO THE OSCE, AT THE MEETING OF  
THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

5 May 2005

**Monitoring of the general election in the United Kingdom**

Mr. Chairman,

Today a general election is being held in the United Kingdom.

Quite early on, at the meeting of the Permanent Council on 14 April, we raised the question of the parliamentary election to be held in the United Kingdom, and we are grateful to Ambassador Munro for the detailed information he gave us in this connection.

Today we should like to focus our attention on the problem of international monitoring of this election, by the OSCE as by others.

Responding to the kind invitation of the United Kingdom delegation distributed at the Permanent Council on 7 April, and also taking into account the proposal by Mr. Bruce George, President Emeritus of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, announced at the meeting of 21 April, to send a representative of Belarus to the United Kingdom for the purpose of sharing as an observer in the experience of 150 years of democracy, Belarus announced its intention of participating in the monitoring of this election.

Not having any official information about the reaction of the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) to this invitation, we applied directly to the ODIHR for information about the deployment of an OSCE mission to the United Kingdom for the purpose of observing the election and the possibility of including in it representatives of Belarus.

To our astonishment, however, it emerged that the ODIHR had already set up a so-called Election Assessment Mission for the United Kingdom consisting of ODIHR "experts", without having given appropriate information on this subject to participating States. We were informed that no representative of Belarus could be included in the mission because no representative of Belarus appears on the list of ODIHR "experts".

In this situation there could be no question of sending observers from Minsk and we endeavoured independently to accredit representatives of the Republic of Belarus as international observers of the elections in the United Kingdom, addressing ourselves with an appropriate application to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

However, as it now appears, British law not only does not permit the presence of international or domestic observers at the polling stations but in fact does not even prescribe a procedure for accrediting such observers; in other words, they would have no rights and no powers whatsoever.

The only thing we were permitted to do was to have representatives of our London embassy attend the vote counting in a number of electoral wards (on the condition that they obtained prior agreement for that, an arrangement which naturally quite excludes any possibility of the observers deciding independently what electoral wards they wish to visit and at what time). We are grateful to the Department for Constitutional Affairs in the United Kingdom for the co-operation they have shown, but, as you will well understand, this is not even a half measure. This being so, I would urge the United Kingdom delegation to pass on our thanks to Bruce George for his invitation and explain to him why we were unable to engage in a full-scale observation of the election.

Incidentally, we would be interested to know why the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly was, for some reason or other, also unable to send its observers.

Returning to the question of co-operation with the ODIHR, I should like to mention that our embassy in the United Kingdom was, as it happens, unable to meet with representatives of the ODIHR Assessment Mission to exchange views on the forthcoming election or to obtain any additional information about the ODIHR's work on site.

There was no opportunity for representatives of our embassy to attend the final briefing, allegedly because of a shortage of space (although our representatives applied to the relevant British departments in good time).

In the context of observation of the election in the United Kingdom, we once again saw for ourselves the absence of transparency and uniformity in the work of the ODIHR, its biased approach to certain participating States as well as the need for serious improvement in its working methods.

I am referring to the cases already mentioned above regarding failure to inform the Permanent Council about the adoption of a decision on whether or not to send observers or about the form the observation mission might take. I should like to note that we drew attention to the new, fifth edition of the ODIHR Election Observation Handbook (also produced without any consultation with participating States). What stands out in particular is paragraph 2.4.2 clarifying the criteria on the basis of which an assessment mission is to be deployed. It turns out that this kind of mission is to be sent to work in "long-standing or more established democracies and will focus on individual aspects of elections only". Full-scale missions are to be sent to all other countries. What is this if not evidence of double standards in the approaches of the ODIHR?

Returning once more to the question of "experts" recruited by the ODIHR, we have no reason to doubt their competence, but the criteria for their selection are unclear and there

is no written procedure for the assignment of experts to the ODIHR (the ODIHR website only has information about how to become a short-term observer).

There is also clearly a need to conduct a comparative analysis of election laws in OSCE participating States, at least in connection with certain aspects of them such as election monitoring (the rights of international observers, their accreditation) in order to avoid any repetition of situations like those that occurred during the election in the United Kingdom.

In the light of what I have already said, and taking due account of the Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting recently held in Vienna on elections and of the detailed discussion which took place there, we trust that the Chairman-in-Office will take specific and prompt steps in this area, in particular by establishing without delay a special working group under the auspices of the OSCE Permanent Council.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.