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Permanent Delegation of the Republic of Belarus to the OSCE

**STATEMENT BY
MR. ALYAKSANDR SYCHOV, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF
THE REPUBLIC OF BELARUS TO THE OSCE, AT THE MEETING OF
THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

15 September 2005

The construction of a radioactive waste depot near the Belarusian border

Mr. Chairman,

At the last meeting of the Permanent Council our delegation made a statement in which it underscored the importance of environmental protection issues and the adoption of concrete measures at the national, regional and global levels to protect the environment. There are any number of OSCE documents in which we have jointly declared the protection of the environment to be a high-priority task and have committed ourselves to co-operation in that area.

Today, the delegation of Belarus is forced to turn once again to the subject of environmental security. Unfortunately, this is connected not with further actions to protect the environment but rather with events that are giving rise to deep concern in the Republic of Belarus.

On 31 December 2004, as part of the fulfilment of its obligations to the European Union, Lithuania removed from service the first nuclear unit of the Ignalina nuclear power plant, the second unit being scheduled to be taken off line in 2009. In connection with the removal from service of the Ignalina nuclear power plant, the Government of Lithuania passed a decision to build a radioactive waste depot in the immediate vicinity of the Belarusian border, creating a potential radio-environmental danger for the public and territory of Belarus. This is all the more true since it is precisely here, in this region, that the nature reserve known as the "Braslavsky Lakes National Park" is located.

Despite repeated contacts through bilateral channels since the beginning of this year, up to now the Lithuanian authorities have failed to provide any detailed information on the questions connected with the construction and operation of the depot. It was also not possible to gain a complete picture of what is going on during contacts involving experts in this area, including a number of high-level experts.

Meanwhile, the fragmentary information that is being received regarding Lithuania's plans to locate a radioactive waste burial site in the immediate vicinity of the Belarusian

border has already led to heated discussions in political, scientific and public circles within Belarus. A campaign is under way in Braslavshchina to collect signatures against the construction of the radioactive waste burial site near the Belarusian border.

Lithuania's intention to locate in the immediate vicinity of the Belarusian border a potentially hazardous radiation facility is causing very serious concern on the part of Belarus. We regard the construction of a facility of this kind as a factor directly affecting the national interests of the Belarusian State and the other countries of the Baltic region.

For us it is vitally important that the interests of Belarus as a neighbouring State that suffered from the accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant should be taken into account at all stages in the adoption by Lithuania of decisions whose consequences might have a transborder effect.

This being the case, we should like to call on the Lithuanian authorities to usher in a genuine dialogue without delay between the appropriate agencies of both countries with a view to ensuring transparency and taking full account of the interests of Belarus in this matter.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.