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United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the Head of the OSCE Office in Yerevan, Ambassador Andrey Sorokin

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
July 16, 2015

Ambassador Sorokin, we welcome you back to the Permanent Council, and we thank you for your comprehensive report.

The United States strongly supports the work of the OSCE Office in Yerevan to promote comprehensive security as it assists Armenia in implementing its OSCE commitments across all three dimensions. We recognize and support Armenia's cooperation with the Yerevan Office at all levels of government and we welcome, in particular, the Office's efforts to engage civil society.

The United States sees Armenia as an important partner, and we are eager to see it succeed as a democratic, prosperous, and secure country. We agree with your assessment that, despite fewer libel and defamation cases against media outlets, repeated instances of violence against journalists cause grave concern about media freedom in Armenia. The United States strongly supports activities sponsored by the OSCE Office in Yerevan that engage both civil society and government officials to improve the media environment.

Involving civil society in an open dialogue on issues of governance is essential to strengthening democratic values, political stability, and regional security. The United States, therefore, noted with concern the use of excessive force by Armenian security officials against peaceful demonstrators last month. We have welcomed subsequent efforts by both police and protestors to keep the demonstrations peaceful. We commend the Armenian government's willingness to engage its citizens in open dialogue and seek to address their concerns. We appreciated the spot report from the Yerevan Office that provided participating States with timely reporting about the demonstrations and the police response, as well as the Office's public statement calling for restraint and dialogue.

The United States continues to follow closely the work of Armenia's Constitutional Reform Commission, and we welcome the OSCE Office's efforts to promote broad public participation in this important debate. With parliamentary elections on the horizon, we also urge Armenia to respect political pluralism and make progress in its electoral reform agenda, including the implementation of ODIHR's recommendations from previous election cycles.

In addition to promoting democratic development, Armenia's reform efforts can be furthered by strengthening judicial independence, which will also help economic growth. Likewise, the United States urges the government of Armenia to fulfill its commitment to uphold systematic, fair, and transparent implementation of the rule of law. Private sector investors

seek predictable rules that are uniformly enforced, transparent tax and regulatory systems, and good governance free from the stain of corruption. We recognize Armenia's efforts to simplify its tax and regulatory structures, which improved the country's business climate. As a friend of Armenia, we encourage the country to continue this positive trajectory.

We applaud Armenia's engagement with the Yerevan Office to maximize the benefits the OSCE can bring to participating States through its field missions and look forward to continued fruitful cooperation. Engagement with the OSCE, including field presences, is one way to demonstrate an ongoing commitment to implementation of OSCE commitments, and an orientation toward the stronger, more prosperous, more peaceful future toward which OSCE principles guide all of us.

Ambassador Sorokin, we thank you and your team, and pledge our support for the office's future endeavors, and we wish you well in all of your future endeavors as well.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.