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Statement of welcome to Mr. Miklos Haraszti,
OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media,
delivered by Ambassador J. Tabibian
at the 499th meeting of the Permanent Council
11 March 2004

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

It is also our delegation's privilege to welcome our new Representative on the Freedom of the Media, Mr. Haraszti. Of course, it goes without saying, we congratulate him, and at the very least for our sake, for all of us, we wish him all the success. You might say, based on very superficial observation that the length of these welcoming remarks distinguishes those of us here who have some concerns about our future path, from those others who have no such concerns. Those who want very early on to express some opinions spoke a little longer than those who really remain within the pure formalities of a welcoming remark. I hope I place my delegation somewhere in between.

There are and there will be many-many opportunities for much more in-depth, controversial, sometimes problematic discussions. If there were not, it means we are doing something wrong in this field. Let me say something about one particular notion that may come back later and we have to deal with it. I noticed that the only colleague, who referred to that word, very dear word to me personally, was my American colleague who said not only "free", but also "independent". We are living in an environment where the attempts against freedom are still too many, but quite obvious and overt and very easy to identify and to point a finger at. Identifying threats to independence and failures of independence are much more difficult, because attempts against the independence of the press are more pernicious, more indirect, more covert; the worst thing is, quite often the lack of independence is tolerated within certain societies as a normal state of affair. On the matter of independence we may stand an old saying on its head. It says: "A chain of links is as strong as its weakest link". We might add to that that the cracks in the strongest link are as weakening the whole chain as the weakness of its weakest link. But people do not usually go around looking for cracks in the strongest link. Let me suggest simply that most of us will benefit enormously, since we are talking about media, modern and electronic media, if our Representative as much as possible uses, exploits, applies and utilizes for our collective benefit an omni-directional antenna.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.