



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the Head of the OSCE Office in Yerevan

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires Gary Robbins
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
June 19, 2014

The United States welcomes you, Ambassador Sorokin, back to the Permanent Council, and we thank you for your comprehensive report.

The United States strongly supports the work of the Office in Yerevan in order to promote comprehensive security. The Office provides valuable assistance to Armenia in implementing its commitments across all three security dimensions. Indeed, we applaud Armenia's close cooperation with the Yerevan Office at all levels of government and civil society.

Armenia is an important partner for the United States. We want to see Armenia succeed as a democratic, prosperous, and secure country. We are pleased by your assessment that the past twelve months have seen positive trends regarding freedom of the media; we also share your concern about instances of violence against journalists and draft legislation to control commentary on the Internet. Other important metrics for measuring democratic progress include the responsiveness of government to citizens, the working environment for civil society, and the conduct of elections. We urge Armenia to take advantage of the period between elections to make progress in its electoral reform agenda and to implement ODIHR's recommendations from previous election cycles.

An open dialogue on issues of governance and national interest involving all elements of society can play an important role in strengthening democratic values, stability, and regional security. The OSCE Office in Yerevan encourages the inclusion of civil society in the decision making process as part of its support to the host country. Support for the Aarhus Center network in Armenia is an important vehicle for promoting dialogue between local government authorities and citizens, in this case, on environmental issues. Inclusive and pluralistic societies are critical to effective democratic decision making. We are pleased to note the Office's support to Armenia in the promotion of the human rights of national minorities and the empowerment of women and gender mainstreaming.

We urge the Government of Armenia to fulfil its commitment to uphold a systematic, fair, and transparent implementation of the rule of law. Strengthening judicial independence, supported by robust judicial and constitutional reforms, would help to promote democratic as well as economic development. We are closely watching the work of the Constitutional Reform Commission and welcome the Office's efforts to promote broad public participation in this important debate. Likewise, reforms in the criminal justice system and democratic policing are important aspects in strengthening rule of law. We welcome the positive feedback to Armenia's police based on results from a public opinion poll. We encourage Armenia to maintain this positive trajectory and commend the Office's co-operation with the

Ministry of Defense to promote democratic values and ensure better protection of human rights in the Armed Forces.

In the area of economic reform, private sector investors look for an open business climate with predictable rules that are uniformly enforced, an independent judiciary, and transparent regulations, taxes, and customs. We recognize the progress Armenia has made in a number of areas, including streamlining regulatory reform, and note the Office's work to enable civil society groups to be active participants in Armenia's reform efforts.

As it provides valuable support for Armenia's democratic development and dialogue between the government and civil society based on our common commitments, the Office in Yerevan demonstrates the value the OSCE can bring to its participating States through its field offices and institutions. Ambassador Sorokin, I wish you and your team the best success in your future endeavors.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.