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“Implementation of OSCE Commitments”

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Energy Security in the OSCE Area and the Situation in Belarus

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INTRODUCTION

Access to sustainable, competitive and reliable energy is fundamental to the daily lives of all citizens in the OSCE area and to the stability and security of our societies. All forecasts indicate that our energy dependence will increase in the future. Growing populations, expanding economies and rising standards of living all point in one direction. At the same time, we are affected by higher prices, threats to the security of energy supply and climate changes. For these reasons, energy security has become a major concern for all governments in the OSCE area and a security issue relating to “high politics”.

Another important security policy issue with potential negative consequences for the stability in the OSCE area is the situation in Belarus. Last time the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly decided to include Belarus in its annual declaration was in Rotterdam 2003. Since then real progress with respect to democratisation, respect for human rights and rule of law has been absent. Cooperation between the Belarusian authorities and OSCE has in addition not developed as constructively as one could wish for. Belarus is for therefore a highly relevant issue to be included in the work of the 1st Committee.

The following report will for these reasons focus on the question of energy security in the OSCE area and Belarus.

ENERGY SECURITY IN THE OSCE AREA

In order to fulfil the goal of sufficient, reliable, and environmentally responsible supplies of energy at prices reflecting market economy principles the OSCE member states and the world as a whole face a number of serious challenges, which need to be coped with. These challenges include:

- World energy consumption has almost doubled since 1970. According to the International Energy Agency (IEA)¹ the 25 EU countries’ primary energy consumption rose by 41 percent since that year. In the same period the US the increase was of a similar size, while it doubled in Japan and increased almost fourfold in China reflecting the pace of accelerated economic growth.
- Energy demand is expected to rise in virtually all regions of the world. The International Energy Agency foresees total world energy consumption in 2030 to be almost 60 percent higher than it was in 2002². The growth is expected to be fossil fuel intensive accounting for about 85 percent

¹ A European Strategy for Sustainable, Competitive and Secure Energy, European Commission Green Paper, March 2006

² International Energy Agency (IEA) World Outlook 2006

of the increase. Nuclear energy will only play a marginal role while renewable energy is expected to contribute more than 10 percent of the expansion of world energy supplies.

- IEA foresees that China's energy consumption might double between 2002 and 2030. In India, energy demand is expected to rise by 90 percent in the same period of time. Energy consumption in the OECD countries is predicted to be less dramatic with an increase of about 30 percent until 2030.
- At the same, energy import dependency is rising in most countries. As an example, EU predicts³ that unless domestic energy is made more competitive in the next 20 to 30 years around 70 percent of the Union's energy requirements will be met by imported products compared to 50 percent today. The same trends may apply to a large part of the countries in the OSCE area as well.
- The world's energy reserves are concentrated in a few countries. Today, roughly half of EU's gas consumption comes from only three countries (the Russian Federation, Norway and Algeria). On current trends, gas imports would increase to 80 percent over the next 25 years. Similar tendencies would surely also apply to the greater part of the OSCE member states.
- The cost of oil and gas has risen to almost historic levels. At the same time energy prices are becoming more volatile and unpredictable. With increasing global demand for fossil fuels, stretched supply chains and increasing dependence on imports, high prices will probably not go away in the foreseeable future, which makes life difficult for consumers and might hinder economic growth.
- The climate is getting warmer due to greenhouse gas emissions. The EU Commission⁴ cites the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) for estimating that greenhouse gas emissions have made the world 0.6 Celsius degrees warmer. IPCC warns that if no action is taken there will be an increase of between 1.4 and 5.8 Celsius degrees by the end of the century. All regions of the world - including the OSCE area – will face serious consequences for their economies and ecosystems.

These inherently interlinked challenges describe some of the facets of the new energy landscape that characterizes the 21st century. It is one in which the interdependence between producing, consuming and transit countries is growing requiring strengthened partnerships and deeper cooperation between all stakeholders if energy security, stable economic conditions and effective action against climate change are to be enhanced.

G8 St. Petersburg Plan of Action on Global Energy Security

In view of these challenges the Russian Federation took the timely decision to put the issue of energy security at the centre of its agenda for its presidency of the G8 in 2006. As a result the G8 Summit in St. Petersburg in July 2006 decided on a Plan of Action on Energy Security⁵.

The plan recognises the urgent need for collective responsibility to address the world's energy challenges including supply and transit disruptions through stronger policy coordination.

The G8 countries committed themselves to a number of objectives, principles and approaches and decided to enhance global energy security through actions in the following areas:

³ European Commission Green Paper, *op.cit.*

⁴ *Ibid*

⁵ <http://en.g8russia.ru/docs/11.html>

- Increasing transparency, predictability and stability of global energy markets;
- Improving the investment climate in the energy sector;
- Enhancing energy efficiency and energy saving;
- Diversifying energy mix;
- Ensuring physical security of critical energy infrastructure;
- Reducing energy poverty;
- Addressing climate change and sustainable development.

The G8 Plan of Action is a very significant document breakthrough in developing consensus among the world leading industrial powers on a number of complex and sensitive issues. In addition it recognizes the importance of energy to the well being of societies across the globe and underlies the important role that the Russian Federation can play in promoting reliable and secure energy supply. If implemented, the G8 Plan of Action could bring the world much closer to establishing an efficient set of responses to many of the challenges the world is facing today.

The OSCE Ministerial Council expressed support of the principles and objectives of the G8 Plan of Action on Energy Security in December 2006⁶. The Ministerial Council also tasked the Permanent Council, in close co-operation and consultation with participating states, the OSCE Secretariat, to promote dialogue on energy security including on expert level, involving producing, transit, and consuming countries.

The Permanent Council and the OSCE Secretariat was also tasked to raise awareness and enhance dialogue on the G8 2005 Plan of Action on climate change, clean energy and sustainable development as well as the G8 2006 Plan of Action on global energy.

OSCE Ministerial Council decision to support the G8 Plan of Action was very appropriate and it deserves the full backing of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly.

Follow-up on G8 Plan of Action

Now, the great challenge for G8 is to make sure that all the commitments given in St. Petersburg are honoured and implemented in a timely and efficient manner. With its clear endorsement of the G8 Action Plan it could be a relevant task for the OSCE to consider setting up a follow-up mechanism that submitted a report to the Ministerial Council once a year on the status of the implementation of the Action Plan. A similar follow-mechanism could be relevant vis-à-vis the G8 2005 Plan of Action on climate change, clean energy and sustainable development.

Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on use of Energy Supply as an Instrument of Political Pressure

In January 2007 the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) adopted a resolution⁷ and a recommendation on the Peril of Using Energy Supply as an Instrument of Political Pressure. Since stable and predictable energy supplies as well as transparency in energy prices is a precondition for the smooth and sustainable development of national and regional economies PACE affirms, in its resolution, that that the risk of using energy supplies as an instrument for political pressure needs to be effectively eliminated.

⁶ OSCE Ministerial Council Decision 12/06: Energy Security Dialogue

⁷ PACE Resolution 1531 (2007) and Recommendation 1779

PACE regrets the price dispute between Russia and Ukraine in January 2006, when the Russian state-owned gas company, Gazprom⁸, significantly reduced gas supplies to Ukraine. Also Moldova was hit by a similar cut in its gas supplies from the Russian Federation.

The reduced gas supplies had spill over effects in several European countries, particularly for those states importing energy through Ukraine's extensive pipeline network. The events exposed Europe's energy supply vulnerabilities and amplified the need for clear-cut international rules on energy transit that can reduce the risk of future disruptions to supply.

Other events such as the North European Gas Pipeline in the Baltic Sea has stressed the duty always to cooperate, inform and consult among all affected countries when planning and constructing international energy pipelines and installations.

The Energy Charter Treaty

More than 52 states signed the Energy Charter Treaty (ECT) in 1994, which was a very important step towards fostering East-West energy cooperation. Its most important provisions deal with investment protection; trade in energy materials and products; transit; and dispute settlement. Andorra, Monaco and Serbia have not yet signed the treaty. The Russian Federation and Norway have signed the treaty but never ratified the treaty.

Since the adoption of the ECT the member states took the decision to negotiate an additional legal instrument that would provide greater operational clarity on the issue of international energy flows⁹. The draft Energy Charter Transit Protocol still remains to be finalized. A finalized protocol would be a great step forward since it would define under international law, the obligations on owners or operators or networks to negotiate, in good faith, on access to available capacity for transit. It could be an instrument that could ensure that the rules governing energy transit was based on the principles of market economy and never dictated by political considerations.

It would be a major contribution to the enhancement of energy security in the OSCE area if all OSCE member states signed and ratified ECT and committed themselves to a successful conclusion of the negotiations on the Transit Protocol.

OSCE as a Platform for Energy Security Dialogue

OSCE's 2003 Strategy Document for the Economic and Environmental Dimension and the 2006 Ministerial Decision on Energy Security Dialogue in the OSCE both bear witness to the priority that OSCE has given to the issue of Energy Security over the past years.

It has been discussed exactly how OSCE could play a role in enhancing the energy security. A number of international institutions to foster energy dialogue and co-operation already exist in the OSCE area.

Coordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities, Mr. Bernhard Snoy, has however pointed¹⁰ to OSCE's unique membership that brings together energy producers and consumers as well as transit countries. It is an asset which could make the organisation serve as a platform for multinational dialogue on energy security.

⁸ Gazprom accounts for 85 percent of Russian Federation's gas production and 100 percent of Russian exports according to NATO Parliamentary Assembly Report 170 ESC 06 E Energy Security, 2006.

⁹ Energy Charter Transit Protocol: Background to the negotiations
<http://www.encharter.org/index.php?id=37>

¹⁰ Bernhard Snoy, Energy Security: An OSCE Perspective, Helsinki Monitor 2006 no 4

Mr. Snoy suggests that key aspects of that could be subject to a political dialogue within OSCE could include:

- The promotion of a broader concept of energy security;
- The need for more secure legal and regulatory frameworks to make possible the huge investments required along the value added chain;
- The diversification of sources of energy and supply routes;
- Energy efficiency and energy conservation to endure environmental sustainability;
- Protection of critical infrastructure.

In addition, Mr. Snoy has proposed that OSCE also could serve as a platform to promote the implementation of the already existing processes that address energy security issues. The G8 Plan of Action on Energy Security could here be a very relevant example as suggested above.

Mr. Snoy's ideas and suggestions on how OSCE could contribute to further energy security are highly relevant and deserve the support of the OSCE PA.

Conclusion

Energy Security is an issue that has a tremendous impact on the well-being and prosperity of the people in the OSCE countries and to the stability of our societies. The OSCE region encompasses the entire value chain of the energy sector and it is therefore a highly relevant topic to be put on the top of the organisation's agenda. OSCE has an important role to play in the enhancement of predictable, reliable, economically acceptable, commercially sound and environmentally friendly energy supply. It is therefore important that OSCE PA supports OSCE in fulfilling that task.

BELARUS – POSSIBILITIES AND CONTINUED DEVELOPMENT

Belarus and the Belarusian people are part of the European family. Therefore, it is essential that dialogue and co-operation on Belarus remain on the OSCE's agenda. As part of this co-operation, it is important that the OSCE continue to support Belarus, in complying with all its OSCE commitments, not least the OSCE's standards for democracy and human rights.

The road ahead; Co-operation between the OSCE and Belarus

A positive and constructive co-operation between the OSCE and Belarus can help strengthen democracy and human rights in Belarus. Therefore, the OSCE has a key role to play in the further development of democracy and human rights in Belarus.

Under the leadership of President Aleksandr Lukashenko, who has served as President of the country since the presidential elections on 10 July 1994, Belarus has seemed more reluctant to co-operate with the OSCE. As a result, the co-operation is not as positive and constructive as it could be. The reluctance towards the OSCE was especially manifested in relation with the OSCE Advisory and Monitoring Group which was established in 1997 in Belarus. The main purpose of the Group was to assist in promoting democratic institutions in Belarus.

After the establishment of the OSCE Advisory and Monitoring Group, the relationship between the OSCE and Belarus became increasingly tense. The Government of Belarus was dissatisfied with the work and presence of the OSCE in Belarus, and eventually refused visas and renewal of visas for OSCE employees in Belarus. By the end of October 2002, the OSCE presence in Belarus no longer had any international staff.

The OSCE and the Belarusian Government negotiated a new agreement which led to the establishment on 1 January 2003 of a new mission, entitled the OSCE Office in Minsk, under a new mandate replacing the OSCE Advisory and Monitoring Group.

The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly debates have been central to the issue of Belarusian participation in the OSCE. In 1997 a new parliamentary body, the Belarusian National Assembly, was created in the wake of the controversial November 1996 constitutional referendum. The Belarusian National Assembly sought recognition by the OSCE PA. At the time, the 13th Supreme Soviet was the recognized parliamentary body. Ad hoc Credentials Committees were created in accordance with OSCEPA procedures to review the issue. On the basis of a recommendation from one of these Committees, the OSCE PA's leadership created a special Working Group on Belarus.

The issue of Belarus' representation in the OSCE PA was again considered in February and July 2001 in light of new factors which contributed to a *de facto* "empty seat" whereby Belarus was for a time unrepresented in the Assembly. The seating of the Belarusian National Assembly was further debated in 2002. The closeness of the votes on Belarusian representation at the time illustrated the divisions in the Assembly on the issue and in some ways pitted two strategies – exclusion versus inclusion – against one another. Following similar debates in 2003, the Belarusian National Assembly was seated. The OSCE PA President presiding over the meeting concluded the debate by stating that the decision was a legal – not a political – one and should in no way be interpreted as condoning the policies of the Belarusian government. This decision by no means resulted in Belarus being removed from the OSCE PA's agenda.

The seven-year long debate of Belarus' legal status within the OSCE PA did not emerge in a vacuum, but rather in the context of a constitutional and political crisis within the country. Thus, parallel to the legal debates, the OSCE PA has always maintained a focus on the political situation in the country. A number of resolutions on Belarus have been vigorously debated and passed during the OSCE PA's Annual Sessions. The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, through the Working Group on Belarus as well as Assembly leadership, has supported dialogue and cooperation with Belarus, rather than isolation.

In the Resolution on Belarus, adopted at the July 2003 Rotterdam Annual Session, the OSCE PA also welcomed the re-establishment of a presence, through the OSCE Office in Minsk on 1 January 2003 and welcomed the stated will of the Belarusian Government to work actively within the framework of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly.¹¹

Unfortunately, the Government of Belarus is still hesitant in its co-operation with the OSCE, and the concrete results of this co-operation remain limited. Among other issues, this was expressed at the OSCE Ministerial Council Meeting in Brussels on 4-5 December 2006, when Foreign Minister Martynov declared that:

"On the activities of the OSCE field presences. The Missions can not and should not be forever. It is essential to timely adapt their activities to the needs in the field and to plan the gradual completion of their activities."¹²

The above-mentioned statement is correct inasmuch as there is no need to maintain an OSCE mission in Belarus provided that Belarus fulfils all of the existing commitments within the framework of the OSCE. However, until the existing commitments of Belarus to the OSCE are fully implemented, the Government of Belarus should work to ensure that co-operation between the OSCE and Belarus develops positively and constructively.

¹¹ RESOLUTION ON BELARUS (Adopted at the July 2003 Rotterdam Annual Session), <http://www.oscepa.org/admin/getbinary.asp?fileid=300>

¹² Statement of His Excellency Mr. Sergei Martynov Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus at the OSCE Ministerial Council (Brussels, 4-5 December 2006).

Belarus and the implementation of the OSCE commitments

Belarus must fulfil the commitments it has agreed to as an OSCE participating State. The people of Belarus have the right to genuine democracy, human rights, freedom of expression, and rule of law, equal to other populations in the OSCE area. In this regard, the Government of Belarus must respect the population's right to, among other things:

- Elect their leaders democratically
- Express themselves freely, and have access to independent information in the media,
- Respect freedom of association and assembly, through simplified procedures for registration and operation of non-government organizations,
- Fair and transparent treatment by the judicial system.

There are socio-economic achievements to be mentioned in Belarus, as well. While room for reform remains, it should be noted that Belarus has maintained economic growth and basic social security for its population over the past decade, taken in the regional transition context. The gradual pace of reform in Belarus has made it possible to avoid the most extreme social costs of economic transition.¹³ However, the present situation affords Belarus the opportunity to show genuine and serious respect for fundamental rights, such as freedom of association and expression, as Belarus has committed to do under the Copenhagen Document.

The 2006 Presidential Election and the 2007 Local Election

In the Presidential election on 19 March 2006, Mr. Lukashenko was re-elected to his third term as President with 82,6 percent of the votes cast. These elections were widely condemned by international organizations such as the OSCE, EU and Council of Europe as failing to meet international standards for democratic elections. At the same time, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) described the election as open and transparent. In line with this, Russia assessed the election as acceptable and the Russian Ministry for Foreign Affairs declared that the election had been fair.

The official OSCE preliminary report released on March 20, 2006, concluded that the “(...) presidential election failed to meet OSCE commitments for democratic elections.” Moreover, the OSCE declared that Lukashenko “permitted State authority to be used in a manner which did not allow citizens to freely and fairly express their will at the ballot box” and “a pattern of intimidation and the suppression of independent voices” was evident.¹⁴ It highlighted the arbitrary use of state power; widespread detentions; a disregard for the basic rights of freedom of assembly, association and expression; and problems with early voting, counting and tabulation processes.¹⁵

¹³ UN Human Development Report, 2004-2005
http://un.by/pdf/1321_eng.pdf

¹⁴ OSCE/ODIHR, statement of preliminary findings and conclusions on the presidential election in Belarus, 19. March 2006, http://osce.org/documents/odihr/2006/03/18437_en.pdf

¹⁵ REPUBLIC OF BELARUS. PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION 19 March 2006. OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Report, 7 June 2006,
http://www.osce.org/documents/odihr/2006/06/19393_en.pdf

Within the EU, Members of the European Parliament adopted a joint resolution on the election.¹⁶ The EP resolution “strongly condemns the failed Presidential elections”. It concluded that the elections did not fulfil “the required international standards for free, fair, equal, accountable and transparent elections”. In a similar resolution, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe condemned the conduct of the elections, noting that it remains prepared to reopen appropriate communication channels “should the Belarusian authorities give clear and conclusive signs of their commitment to move closer to Council of Europe standards.”¹⁷

Although no international observers were invited to observe the 14 January 2007 local elections, they also appear to have failed to meet the commitments undertaken by Belarus within the framework of the OSCE. Political parties and local civil society groups reported obstacles to candidate registration, pressure and intimidation of candidates and members of nomination groups, difficulties in printing campaign materials and confiscation of campaign materials, detention of campaign activists and refusal of venues to hold campaign events. The fact that only 23,791 candidates competed for 22,661 seats meant that the vast majority of seats were uncontested.

The local election was held in accordance with the newly amended Electoral Code, which took effect only three months prior to election day. One of the most important amendments restricted the candidates’ right to hold open-air campaigning meetings with voters. To hold an open-air meeting with voters, a candidate must obtain permission from the local government. Such meetings can only be held in places specially designated by the local government.

The opposition groups in Belarus condemned the conduct of the local elections and claimed widespread falsification. The EU also criticised the local elections, decrying in particular the lack of democratic pluralism, restrictive rules on campaigning and the intimidation of opposition candidates. EU External Relations Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner said that “These elections therefore failed to give Belarusian voters a genuine choice.”¹⁸

In light of the Belarusian Government’s stated willingness to actively participate within the framework of the OSCE PA, it is deeply regrettable that neither the latest presidential election in 2006, nor the latest local elections in 2007 met OSCE Commitments. The Government of Belarus must live up to the OSCE principles and democratic standards.

Options for Belarus

In a Non-Paper dated 21 November 2006, the EU described what the EU could contribute to Belarus, were Belarus to engage in democratisation and respect for human rights and rule of law.¹⁹ The document was transmitted to the Belarusian authorities both in Minsk and Brussels. It contains concrete examples of how the people of Belarus could gain from a rapprochement between the EU and Belarus within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). The paper makes clear the EU’s hope that the “government of Belarus will take this opportunity to begin the reforms their

¹⁶ Belarus: The Last Dictatorship in Europe, External relations of the EP – 06-04-2006, http://www.europaparl.europa.eu/news/expert/infopress_page/030-6973-095-04-14-903-2006033IPR06898-05-04-2006-2006-false/default_en.htm

¹⁷ Belarus in the aftermath of the Presidential election of 19 March 2006, Resolution 1496 (2006).

¹⁸ Herald Tribune, EU Commission says Belarusian local elections failed to meet democratic standards, 15. January 2007.

¹⁹Non-Paper. “What the European Union could bring to Belarus,” Brussels, 21. November 2006, http://ec.europa.eu/comm/external_relations/belarus/intro/non_paper_1106.pdf

people need, and end their isolation” and how the ENP could serve to improve the quality of life of the Belarusian people.²⁰

The non-paper indicates that once Belarus fulfils international standards for democracy and human rights, the EU, through its Neighbourhood Policy, will:

- Be able to help to improve quality of life of the Belarusian people
- Be able to develop more and better contacts between the EU and Belarus
- Have deeper economic and trade relations and more business opportunities
- Significantly increase European financial assistance

For implementation of Neighbourhood Policy programmes, the Non-Paper indicates that the EU would require that Belarus demonstrate in concrete terms its willingness to fulfill the following basic points:²¹

- Respect the right of the people of Belarus to elect their leaders democratically – their right to hear all views and see all election candidates; the right of opposition candidates and supporters to campaign without harassment, prosecution or imprisonment; independent observation of the elections, including by Belarusian nongovernmental organisations; their freedom to express their will and have their vote fairly counted;
- Respect the right of the people of Belarus to independent information, and to express themselves freely e.g. by allowing journalists to work without harassment or prosecution, not shutting down newspapers or preventing their distribution;
- Respect the rights of non-governmental organisations as a vital part of a healthy democracy – by no longer hindering their legal existence, harassing and prosecuting members of NGOs, and allowing them to receive international assistance;
- Release all political prisoners – members of democratic opposition parties, members of NGOs and ordinary citizens arrested at peaceful demonstrations or meetings;
- Properly and independently investigate or review the cases of disappeared persons;²²
- Join the other nations of Europe in abolishing the death penalty;
- Make use of the support which the OSCE, the EU and other organisations offer to Belarus to help it respect the rights of its people.

These basic conditions for good-neighbourly co-operation with the EU are fully in line with the principles and values driving the OSCE and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly.

A Window of Opportunity for increased dialogue between Belarus and the International Community

²⁰ EU-Belarus: New message to the people of Belarus, Brussels, 21 November 2006, <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/06/1593&format=HTML&aged=1&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

²¹ Non-Paper. “What the European Union could bring to Belarus,” Brussels, 21. November 2006, http://ec.europa.eu/comm/external_relations/belarus/intro/non_paper_1106.pdf

²² Yuri Zakharenko (former Minister of the Interior, disappeared on 7 May 1999), Victor Gonchar (former Vice-President of the Parliament of Belarus, disappeared on 16 September 1999), Anatoly Krasovski (businessman disappeared with Mr Gonchar) and Dmitri Zavadski (cameraman for the Russian TV channel ORT, disappeared on 7 July 2000) (*Non-Paper. “What the European Union could bring to Belarus,”* Brussels, 21. November 2006, http://ec.europa.eu/comm/external_relations/belarus/intro/non_paper_1106.pdf)

Under the leadership of Ms. Uta Zapf, the OSCE PA Ad Hoc Working Group on Belarus has been working toward strengthening the dialogue between Members of Parliament from Belarus and other OSCE countries. In this connection, the 'Joint Declaration of the OSCE PA Working Group on Belarus and the Belarusian Delegation to the OSCE PA' from 2004 should be emphasized.

On 15 March 2007, the OSCE PA Working Group on Belarus and the Belarusian Delegation to the OSCE PA, in cooperation with the OSCE Office in Minsk, organized a seminar entitled 'Exploring the Opportunities for Belarus within the European Neighbourhood Policy'. Members of Parliament, representatives of the Belarusian Government, civil society representatives from Belarus as well as Representatives from the European Commission participated in this joint event. This Seminar should be seen as an important first step towards enhanced dialogue between Belarus and the international community as well as a strengthened dialogue internally in Belarus between the Government and civil society.

However, for further dialogue on the European Neighbourhood Policy, it is important that Belarus actively pursues the implementation of international commitments and principles which are inextricably linked with the notion of a free and democratic European state. The plan is to hold another seminar in Minsk as follow-up in autumn 2007 which will focus on the importance of an independent press and the freedom to disseminate information, both of which are fundamental to a well-functioning democracy.

Conclusion

The OSCE remains an inclusive, participatory organization. The OSCE PA maintains its commitment to dialogue with Belarus in assisting this participating State in meeting its OSCE commitments. The OSCE PA will continue to work to engage Belarus in a democratic dialogue within the country, as well as with Europe more generally. In light of the overall goal of developing democracy, freedom and well-being across Europe, this situation is unsatisfactory. Belarus and the Belarusian people have a natural interest in building good co-operation with Europe, rather than continued isolation.

It is therefore vital that we, within the framework of the OSCE and the OSCE PA, work consistently to end the current deadlock. To this end, the Government of Belarus must demonstrate in concrete terms its willingness to fully implement all of the relevant international standards for democracy and human rights. The OSCE PA should continue to play an active and constructive role in such a process, in which the opposition and civil society of Belarus should also be involved.