



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the Foreign Minister of Armenia, Edward Nalbandyan

As delivered by Ambassador Ian Kelly
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
March 3, 2011

We would like to warmly welcome Foreign Minister Nalbandyan to the Permanent Council, and to thank him for his remarks.

As President Sargsian has declared, the way forward for Armenia is to create "a well-developed democracy, a more active political dialogue ... and persistent adaptation of European standards into all areas of our political, social and economic lives." We hope that Armenia will make full use of the OSCE Office in Yerevan, as well as the expertise of the other OSCE executive structures, to assist it in this endeavor. We underscore the important role of Armenian civil society in fostering the democratic development called for by President Sargsian.

Only through unfettered debate and dialogue are governments and citizens alike able to make decisions and adopt policies that make their countries stronger. With that in mind, we remain concerned about a decline in the number of independent media outlets with diverse ownership and viewpoints brought about by the June 2010 amendments to the Law on TV and Radio and the reduced number of broadcasting licenses awarded in December 2010. We encourage authorities to allow the airing of diverse views and space for public debate. It is also important that any harassment of or violence against journalists be effectively and transparently prosecuted to ensure a climate where freedom of expression and an independent, pluralistic media can flourish.

We are also concerned about continued restrictions of freedom of assembly in Armenia, in particular regarding requests for demonstrations in Freedom Square. Armenian law provides for the freedom of peaceful assembly; the law should be applied fully in practice so that peaceful, lawful assemblies are not deterred, broken up or harassed.

With regard to the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, the United States remains closely engaged as a Minsk Group Co-Chair, in close coordination with France and the Russian Federation. The U.S. commitment to helping the sides reach a peaceful, negotiated settlement, and our conviction that there is no military solution to the conflict, has been reiterated most recently by Secretary Clinton in her February meetings in Munich with President Sargsian and FM Mammadyarov, and by Deputy Secretary of State Steinberg in his visits last week to Yerevan and Baku.

We also recall the 3+2 statement issued in Astana on the margins of the Summit, agreed to by Presidents Aliyev and Sargsian and the heads of delegation of the Minsk Group Co-Chair countries. We believe this statement demonstrated progress and a commitment by the sides to continue seeking a peaceful settlement. We hope to see progress as well on March 5 at Sochi, and look forward to the sides approaching this summit in a constructive spirit.

We would like to thank Foreign Minister Nalbandyan for his appearance here today, and wish him every success in his efforts to help Armenia develop further as a stable, democratic, and prosperous country.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.