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United Kingdom Presidency of the Council of the European Union

**Permanent Council No. 566
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EU Statement on Belarus

Mr. Chairman,

The EU notes with great concern the hostile attitude of the Belarusian authorities towards civil society, including legal and administrative measures which continue to limit the activities of NGOs and political parties. In its statement of 7 July, the EU voiced its concern about the new Belarusian law on NGOs and amendments to the law on political parties. Following presidential decree No. 382 of 17 August 2005, further restrictive measures have been adopted with regard to international technical aid. In this context the EU recalls the 30 August "Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union on Restrictions on technical assistance to Belarus" and reiterates its call on Belarus to seriously reconsider the implementation of the decree, particularly in the light of its negative impact on the people of Belarus.

The EU is deeply concerned that, in addition, Belarusian civil society continues to face other difficulties. The EU regrets that accusations targeting the Vice-Chairman of the Belarusian Helsinki Committee have resurfaced. The EU recalls the statement issued by the Presidency on 2 August in which the EU condemned recent actions by the Belarusian authorities against the Union of Poles in Belarus and the government's interference in the activities of this non-governmental organisation. The EU believes such interference undermines minority rights, thereby contravening standards of governance to which Belarus has signed up as part of its OSCE commitments. We are disturbed by the systematic persecution and harassment of individual members of NGOs in Belarus. The EU therefore calls on the Belarusian authorities to allow civil society to freely function and develop.

The EU regrets that it has, once again, to express its concerns about the lack of respect for freedom of the media and freedom of expression in Belarus. Accusations against the website of the Belarusian Third Way Youth Association serve as one of the latest examples of attempts to suppress such freedoms.

The EU recalls the declaration made by the Presidency on 12 August in which the EU welcomed the release of Professor Bandazhevski. The EU will continue to follow closely the fate of other political prisoners in Belarus.

The EU notes with satisfaction that consultations about the nomination of the new Head of the OSCE Office in Minsk have been concluded and that Mr. Ake Peterson has already assumed his duties. We wish Ambassador Peterson and his staff success in their demanding work. We hope the constructive manner in which discussions surrounding the new Head of the OOM took place will herald a new era in the OSCE's relationship with the Belarusian authorities.

The Accessing Countries Bulgaria and Romania, and the Candidate Countries Turkey and Croatia ¹, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, EFTA country Norway, member of the European Economic Area, as well as Ukraine align themselves with this declaration.

¹ Croatia continues to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process