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STATEMENT BY THE EUROPEAN UNION AT THE 730th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL

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Regarding the release of Mr. Sergey Parsyukevich and Mr. Andrey Kim

The European Union (EU) would like to draw the attention of the Permanent Council to the statement by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union regarding the release of Mr. Sergey Parsyukevich and Mr. Andrey Kim:

“The European Union welcomes the release of the two remaining political prisoners on the EU’s list, Mr. Sergey Parsyukevich and Mr. Andrey Kim, by the Belarusian authorities on 20 August 2008. Their release, which follows the release of five political prisoners at the beginning of this year and, more recently, of Mr. Kozulin, means that there are no longer any prisoners in Belarus internationally recognized as political prisoners.

“The European Union has repeatedly stated that it regarded the release of all political prisoners as a significant step towards Belarus’s commitment to the fundamental values of democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law. This latest development could offer the Union scope for a progressive resumption of dialogue with the Belarusian authorities and the possibility of a review of the restrictive measures which it has adopted against Belarus. In this spirit, the Union expects Belarus to continue to follow this course and fully respect human rights from now on.

“In this respect, the European Union recalls the importance which it attaches to seeing the 28 September elections take place in accordance with international and European standards in order to give renewed impetus to our relations with Belarus.”

The candidate countries Turkey, Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*; the countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate countries Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro; the European Free Trade Association countries and members of the European Economic Area Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway; as well as the Republic of Moldova and Armenia align themselves with this statement.

* Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.