

Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union

**Permanent Council No. 598
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EU statement on Belarus

1. The EU recalls its previously expressed concerns about the situation in the run-up to the 19 March Presidential elections in Belarus, especially about unequal and biased media coverage of candidates, problems of domestic non-partisan election observers, and harassment of the campaign workers of Mr. Milinkevich and Mr. Kozulin. In this respect, the EU very much regrets that there have been further arrests and imprisonments of campaign activists, including of a leading member of Mr. Milinkevich's campaign team, Vintsuk Vyachorka, leader of the Belarusian Popular Front, and Anatoly Lyabedzka, Chairman of the United Civic Party.
2. The EU also deplores the extraordinary administrative measures taken by the Belarusian authorities when issuing visas for some international election observers. Regrettably, several persons from the EU countries intending to participate in the election observation were refused visas or their visas were cancelled. The EU furthermore deplores problems encountered by some international election observers and several international journalists in obtaining accreditations.
3. The EU once again calls on the Belarusian authorities to ensure that the election is conducted according to international standards and in line with Belarus' OSCE commitments.
4. Finally, we reiterate our full confidence and support for the OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission in Belarus.

The Acceding Countries Bulgaria and Romania, the Candidate Countries Turkey, Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia¹, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro, EFTA countries Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway, members of the European Economic Area, as well as Ukraine align themselves with this declaration.

¹ Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process