

Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union

**Permanent Council No. 600
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EU Statement on Belarus

Dear Colleagues, I want to draw your attention to the Declaration of the Presidency on behalf of the European Union concerning the Elections in Belarus, issued yesterday. The Statement reads as follows:

The European Union has taken note of the preliminary conclusions of the OSCE/ODIHR International Election Observation Mission, which notably state that the Belarus Presidential elections failed to meet OSCE commitments for democratic elections:

The European Union agrees with this assessment. In particular, the Union deplores what the OSCE observers see as the arbitrary use of state power, the absence of a level playing field, the pattern of intimidation, the suppression of independent voices as well as problems with early voting, the vote count and the tabulation process. It also deplores the non-admittance of announced and registered OSCE and EU observers, including members of the European Parliament.

In light of these shortcomings, the European Union considers that the Presidential elections in Belarus were fundamentally flawed.

Against this background, the European Union will look into restrictive measures against those responsible for the violations of international electoral standards, in line with our Council Conclusions of 30 January 2006 and 7 November 2005. We will closely co-ordinate with our international partners, especially the United States.

The European Union is interested in developing closer relations with the Belarusian people and therefore regrets the policy of self-isolation of the Belarus authorities. The Union is particularly disappointed that the actions of the Belarus authorities prevent the Belarusian people from enjoying the benefits of the European Neighbourhood Policy.

In the course of this election campaign, the European Union has witnessed the emergence of pluralistic forces and the consolidation of a genuine Belarusian opposition as well as a politically active civil society. In very difficult circumstances and at great personal risk, opposition candidates and their supporters have offered the Belarusian population a democratic alternative. Their efforts deserve our recognition and support. The European Union pledges to further strengthen its support for civil society and for democratisation in Belarus.

The European Union urges the Belarusian authorities to allow the people of Belarus to exercise their right of assembly and freedom of expression in line with their OSCE commitments. The Union is gravely concerned that the Belarus government continues to threaten and detain those exercising their political rights. We call upon the Belarusian authorities to immediately release those already detained. The Union also calls upon its international partners, in particular Belarus' other neighbours, to follow the same approach vis-à-vis Belarus.

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

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