



EUROPEAN UNION

**OSCE Permanent Council Nr 870
Vienna, 23 June 2011**

EU statement on Belarus

Recalling the EU's previous statements on the situation in Belarus, we would like to draw the attention of the Permanent Council to the main points of the Foreign Affairs Council conclusions adopted on June 20 2011:

The Council expressed its deep concern at the deteriorating human rights, democracy and rule of law situation in Belarus. It condemned ongoing repressive actions against representatives of civil society, the independent media and the political opposition, and reiterated its calls for the immediate release and rehabilitation of all political prisoners. In particular, it underscored its deep concern at reports of torture and other forms of ill-treatment in Belarusian prisons and urged the authorities to respect international commitments undertaken by Belarus, notably the absolute prohibition of torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment.

The Council deplored the continuing deterioration of media freedom in Belarus, in particular referring to attempts to close down two of Belarus' largest independent newspapers *Nasha Niva* and *Narodnaya Volya*, the trial of the journalist Andrzej Poczobut, and the cancelled licence of *Autoradio*.

The Council urged Belarus to respect internationally recognised diplomatic immunities and privileges of EU diplomatic representations and their personnel in Minsk and to stop ongoing harassment and intimidation.

The Council welcomed the successful adoption of the resolution on the situation on human rights in Belarus at the 17th session of the UN Human Rights Council and called on Belarus to implement it fully. It reiterated its regret at the lack of cooperation by Belarus in the framework of the OSCE Moscow Mechanism, and noted with concern the findings of the OSCE Rapporteur's Report on Belarus regarding Belarus' fulfilment of its OSCE commitments in the human dimension.

In view of recent developments, the Council decided to designate additional persons to travel restrictions and assets freeze and to impose an embargo on Belarus on arms and on materials that might be used for internal repression. It also decided to freeze the assets of three companies linked to the regime.

The Council subjected the extension of European Investment Bank (EIB) operations to Belarus to a sufficiently positive assessment of the human rights and rule of law situation. It expressed its hope for conditions to be re-established in Belarus that would allow the country to enjoy the full benefits of EIB and European Bank for Reconstruction and Development support.

The EU reiterated its strong commitment to strengthening its engagement with the Belarusian people and civil society, welcoming the fact that the EU's special assistance package is reaching full implementation speed, providing notably support to repressed individuals, NGOs, media and students.

The Council also recalled the importance it attaches to people to people contacts to the benefit of Belarusian population at large. It took positive note of the ongoing work to fully use the existing flexibilities offered by the Visa Code and welcomed the Commission's formal invitation to Belarus to start negotiations on visa facilitation and readmission agreements, calling on the Belarusian authorities to engage constructively in these matters.

The EU reiterates its commitment to the policy of critical engagement, including through dialogue and the Eastern Partnership, and recalls that the development of bilateral relations is conditional on progress towards respect by Belarus for the principles of democracy, the rule of law and human rights. At the same time, and in the light of further developments, the EU stands ready to consider further targeted measures in all areas of cooperation, as appropriate.

The complete text of the Council conclusions has been distributed to delegations on June 21 under the reference number SEC.DEL/233/11.

We would like to take this opportunity to give our view on an issue which Belarus has raised in the OSCE framework, with regard to the decision by the Council of the European Union to adopt restrictive measures against certain persons in Belarus responsible for the fraudulent Presidential elections of 19 December 2010 and the subsequent violent crackdown on democratic opposition, civil society and representatives of independent mass media. Amongst those listed are also representatives of state media, who have been instrumental in the crackdown on the political opposition and civil society. The EU's decision does not interfere with the possibility of these individuals to carry out their work. Exemptions from the visa ban may be granted on a case by case basis, provided the applications are submitted in due time.

The candidate countries CROATIA*, the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO* and ICELAND**, the countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate countries ALBANIA, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA and SERBIA, the European Free Trade Association country NORWAY, member of the European Economic Area, align themselves with this statement.

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

**Iceland continues to be a member of the EFTA and the European Economic Area.