



## German Presidency of the European Union

### **647<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Permanent Council**

**25 January 2007**

### Statement by the European Union on the Belarus Helsinki Committee

The European Union has learnt with deep regret that the Belarus Helsinki Committee has been ordered by the Presidential Administration's property management department to vacate its office in Minsk by the end of this week. The Presidential Administration's department notified the termination of the rental agreement and refused to let other vacant rooms to the Committee. This follows the seizure on 5 December 2006 by Belarusian court authorities of equipment owned by the Belarus Helsinki Committee. The Committee is facing not only eviction from its premises but also the loss of its legal address which could lead to the closure of this, the last remaining human rights NGO registered in Belarus.

The EU also remains very concerned at the request of the Belarusian Ministry of Justice to the Supreme Court of Belarus to suspend the activities of the Belarus Helsinki Committee for alleged tax evasion in connection with the EU TACIS Programme. TACIS is exempt from taxation and custom duties according to an agreement signed in 1994 between the European Commission and Belarus.

The EU recalls its previous statements delivered in the Permanent Council on the situation of the Belarus Helsinki Committee. We value the work of this NGO, which plays an important role in promoting in Belarus the principles embodied in OSCE human dimension commitments.

Therefore the EU calls again upon the Belarusian authorities to immediately cease their campaign of harassment against an independent civil society, in breach of their

OSCE and other international commitments, and urges them to reconsider the eviction order served on the Belarus Helsinki Committee.

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, and Serbia, as well as EFTA countries Iceland and Norway, members of the European Economic Area, align themselves with this statement.

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