

STATEMENT BY THE EUROPEAN UNION AT THE 735th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL

16 October 2008

Conclusions of the General Affairs and External Relations Council on Belarus

The European Union would like to draw the attention of the Permanent Council to the Conclusions of the General Affairs and External Relations Council of 13 October 2008 on Belarus.

“1. The Council notes that, despite some improvements, the parliamentary elections held on 28 September 2008 in Belarus failed to meet the democratic criteria of the OSCE. The Council calls on the Belarusian authorities to remedy the shortcomings observed and to co-operate fully to that end with the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights.

2. The Council notes with satisfaction that some progress has been made during the electoral campaign compared with previous elections, in particular as regards co-operation with the OSCE/ODIHR and broader access for the opposition to the media. It again welcomes the release of the last internationally recognized political prisoners before the elections. The Council also notes that the opposition was able to demonstrate peacefully on the evening of the elections.

3. The European Union earnestly hopes for gradual re-engagement with Belarus and is therefore ready to develop a dialogue with the Belarusian authorities, as with all those participating in the democratic debate, with the aim of encouraging genuine progress towards strengthening democracy and respect for human rights in that country. The Council has taken note of the troika meeting with the Belarusian Minister for Foreign Affairs and, in support of these developments, has decided to restore the contacts with the Belarusian authorities which had been restricted pursuant to the Council conclusions of 22 and 23 November 2004.

4. In order to encourage dialogue with the Belarusian authorities and the adoption of positive measures to strengthen democracy and respect for human rights, the Council — while deciding to extend, for one year from today’s date, the restrictive measures provided for by Common Position 276/2006/CFSP, as extended by Common Position 288/2008/CFSP — has decided that the travel restrictions imposed on certain leading figures in Belarus, with the exception of those involved in the disappearances which occurred in 1999 and 2000 and of the President of the Central Electoral Commission, will not apply for a period of six months which may be renewed. At the end of that period, the Council will reconsider whether the Belarusian authorities have made progress towards reforms of the

Electoral Code to bring it into line with OSCE commitments and other international standards for democratic elections and other concrete actions to respect democratic values, the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of expression and of the media, and the freedom of assembly and of political association. The Council may decide to apply travel restrictions sooner if necessary, in the light of the actions of the Belarusian authorities in the sphere of democracy and human rights.

5. With a view to strengthening links with the administration and population, the Council supports the intensification of technical co-operation initiated by the Commission with Belarus in areas of mutual interest. The European Union will continue to provide assistance for Belarusian civil society in order to promote the development of a democratic and pluralist environment.

6. The European Union reiterates that it remains ready to deepen its relations with Belarus and to review the restrictive measures taken against leading Belarusian figures in the light of progress made by Belarus on the path towards democracy and human rights. The Council is ready to assist Belarus in attaining these objectives.”