



## EUROPEAN UNION

### OSCE Permanent Council Nr 923 Vienna, 6 September 2012

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#### EU statement on Belarus

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The European Union would like to draw attention of the Permanent Council to a number of highly preoccupying developments which have recently occurred in Belarus.

In particular, we are deeply concerned about the fact that, while already incarcerated on politically motivated grounds, Mr Zmitser Dashkevich received an additional prison sentence of four months for alleged disrespect of orders of correctional institution administration. This sentence comes only five months before Mr Dashkevich's original sentence was due to end. Instead of introducing additional repressive measures, Belarus should immediately release and rehabilitate all political prisoners.

Likewise, the EU deeply regrets that the Central Election Commission of Belarus denied registration to several opposition candidates for the upcoming parliamentary elections, thereby denying them the chance to become elected representatives of the Belarusian people. In particular, registration was denied to Mr Aliaksandr Milinkevich the leader of *For Freedom* movement and some of his colleagues, as well as to representatives of some other opposition parties and movements.

The EU is also deeply preoccupied with the latest developments related to freedom of the media and freedom of expression in Belarus. In this

connection, we would like to join the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media in calling on Belarusian authorities to drop charges against Mr Anton Suryapin, who faces up to seven years in prison for uploading photos on the Internet. Moreover, we are concerned about reports that the Belarusian KGB intervened last week against one of Belarus' main online opposition communities and that several administrators of opposition groups that were active in social media networks were arrested. We also share the deep concerns as expressed by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media on this issue.

To this end, the EU would like to stress that all these actions of the Belarusian authorities fit into a broader pattern of increased repression and harassment against regime critics and free thought and expression that currently prevails in Belarus. They do not contribute to a serene and democratic climate ahead of the 23 September parliamentary elections.

Finally, the EU would like to draw the attention of the Permanent Council to the statement of the spokesperson of High Representative, Catherine Ashton, on Belarus, issued on 10 August 2012.

The Acceding Country Croatia\*, the Candidate Countries the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia\*, Montenegro\*, Iceland+ and Serbia\*, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the EFTA country Norway, member of the European Economic Area, align themselves with this statement.

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

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