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**Permanent Council No. 574  
27 October 2005**

**EU Statement on Belarus: Belarusian Helsinki Committee**

Mr. Chairman,

At the Istanbul Summit in 1999, participating States of the OSCE pledged themselves to enhance the ability of NGOs to make their full contribution to the further development of civil society and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. Contrary to these pledges 2005 has revealed that Belarusian authorities continue to prevent the development of a pluralistic society.

The EU has repeatedly expressed its concerns about the lack of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in Belarus. We remain disturbed by the persecution and harassment of civil society. Developments throughout 2005 have demonstrated that Belarus is significantly moving away from the democratic principles all our countries share. The EU is once again compelled to reflect on the worrying picture of events.

In this context, the EU regrets that it must once again raise in the Permanent Council the case of the Belarusian Helsinki Committee.

The EU deplores the latest action taken in the Belarusian Supreme Economic Court against representatives of the Belarusian Helsinki Committee. The EU considers this a politically-motivated attack and further evidence that the Belarusian authorities show no sign of ending their repressive policies towards independent NGOs.

The EU values the work of the Belarusian Helsinki Committee, which has played an important role in promoting in Belarus the principles embodied in OSCE human dimension commitments.

The EU will continue to follow this case closely and again urges the Belarusian authorities to cease their campaign of harassment and to respect their international obligations.

The Acceding Countries Bulgaria and Romania, the Candidate Countries Turkey and Croatia<sup>1</sup>, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro, EFTA country Iceland, member of the European Economic Area, as well as Ukraine align themselves with this declaration.

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<sup>1</sup> Croatia continues to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process