



EUROPEAN UNION

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EU statement on the situation in Belarus

In its statement on the first anniversary of the presentation of the OSCE Rapporteur's report on Belarus delivered at the Permanent Council meeting of 21 June, the European Union reiterated, *inter alia*, its call on the Belarusian authorities to stop all harassment of members of the opposition, human rights defenders, journalists and civil society.

Nevertheless, we have recently witnessed the sentencing of Euroradio reporter Pavel Sviardlou to 15 days of administrative arrest for allegedly swearing in public, as well as the arrest of prominent journalist Andrzej Poczobut for alleged libel against the President. As stated by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media in her press release of 22 June: "The only fault of Poczobut was that he dared publish his views of important developments in Belarus of indisputable public interest. He is one of few remaining critical voices in the Belarusian media and should be able to continue his important work".

Recent legislative developments in Belarus related to draft laws that aim at increasing the repressive powers of the KGB and restrict independent monitoring of public opinion are another cause for serious concern, particularly in light of the upcoming Parliamentary elections.

Against this background, the EU urges the authorities of Belarus to reverse the current repressive policies and to stop all acts of harassment of the opposition, media and civil society. We repeat our call for the

immediate release and rehabilitation of all remaining political prisoners. We urge Belarus to establish close co-operation with the OSCE Institutions and to allow a meaningful OSCE presence in the country. The EU also expects an early invitation from Belarus to ODIHR for the monitoring of the September Parliamentary elections.

Finally, the EU reiterates its firm commitment to strengthening its engagement with the Belarusian people and civil society and to supporting the democratic aspirations of the Belarusian people.

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, 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.