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EUROPEAN UNION

**OSCE Permanent Council Nr 925
Vienna, 15 October 2012**

EU statement on the situation in Belarus

The European Union would like to draw the attention of the Permanent Council to the Joint Statement by EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the Commission Catherine Ashton and Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy Štefan Füle on the parliamentary elections in Belarus, issued on 24 September 2012 in Brussels:

"Yesterday's parliamentary elections represent yet another missed opportunity to conduct elections in line with international standards in Belarus.

The EU has followed closely developments during the pre-electoral period and on Election Day. There were some improvements in the electoral process, such as an improved Electoral Code, but regrettably the elections took place against the background of an overall climate of repression and intimidation.

We note the ODIHR's assessment that the elections were not administered in an impartial manner, with key OSCE commitments not fully respected, including citizens' rights to associate, to stand as candidates and to express themselves freely.

We encourage the authorities to take steps to fully implement Belarus' international commitments to democratic principles and human rights, and stand ready to assist Belarus to this end."

The EU is also concerned that prominent opposition figures who might have played a role in elections remained imprisoned or were not eligible to register due to their criminal record. Furthermore, the EU is alarmed by recent reports about the increasing harassment and intimidation of political prisoners in Belarus and about reports concerning the deteriorating health of some political prisoners, in particular Mr Ales Byalyatski and Mr Zmitser Dashkevich.

We welcome the recent conditional release of political prisoner Syarhey Kavalenka, while regretting that he had to ask for Presidential pardon for this to happen. We call on the Belarusian authorities to release unconditionally all remaining political prisoners and to remove all the restrictions on the enjoyment of their civil and political rights.

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

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.