



EUROPEAN UNION

**OSCE Permanent Council Nr 962
Vienna, 25 July 2013**

EU statement on Belarus

The European Union takes positive note of the decision by a court in Minsk to lift restrictions imposed on Belarusian journalist, Irina Khalip. We share the OSCE Representative's on Freedom of the Media sentiments on the release of Mrs. Khalip and are relieved that Mrs. Khalip will no longer have to serve the sentence imposed over two years ago.

The European Union hopes that the cases of other persons who received similar sentences in the aftermath of the 2010 presidential elections, including that of the former presidential candidate Uladzimir Nyaklyayew, as well as that of another Belarusian journalist Andrzej Poczobut, will be resolved in a similar manner and the penalties imposed will be lifted.

At the same time, the EU has noted with concern that opposition activists Vasil Parfyankov and Uladzimir Yaromenak are facing new charges of failing to comply with the requirements of "preventive police supervision". More widely, the EU reiterates its call on Belarus to release and rehabilitate immediately all political prisoners.

We underline our firm resolve to strengthen EU engagement with the Belarusian people and civil society and to support their democratic aspirations. We also reiterate our commitment to the policy of critical engagement, including through dialogue and the Eastern Partnership, and recall that the development of bilateral relations is conditional on progress towards respect by Belarus for the principles of democracy, the rule of law and human rights. The EU remains willing to assist Belarus to meet its obligations in this regard.

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.

* 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.