



## **EUROPEAN UNION**

**OSCE Permanent Council 887**  
**Vienna, 10 November 2011**

### **EU statement on Belarus**

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The European Union is gravely concerned about the arrest, detention and prosecution for alleged concealment of income of renowned Belarusian human rights defender Ales Byalyatski, founder and head of the Centre for Human Rights 'Viasna' and vice president of the International Federation for Human Rights.

'Viasna' for a number of years has been promoting human rights in Belarus, providing support and assistance for victims of political repressions, including legal assistance in the aftermath of the presidential elections in 2010.

The EU considers the prosecution of Mr Byalyatski to be politically motivated. The funds under his custody were in fact for 'Viasna's human rights work in Belarus, not his personal use. They could not be officially declared because Belarus has repeatedly refused to register 'Viasna' as an NGO. During his trial, no evidence was presented to substantiate the claim that the funds were for his personal use or criminal activity.

The EU, which is following the trial of Mr Byalyatski closely, is concerned that a number of members of international NGOs who were going to observe the trial of Mr Byalyatski have been denied visas.

The trial of Mr Byalyatski fits into a broader picture of widespread repression of, and increasing restrictions on, the activities of civil society, human rights defenders and the political opposition in Belarus. Such actions of the authorities of Belarus, which have escalated dramatically since the presidential elections in December 2010, are not in line with OSCE commitments and international human rights standards.

The European Union calls on the Belarusian authorities to immediately release Mr Byalyatski and to drop all charges against him. The EU also reiterates its call for the immediate release and rehabilitation of all political prisoners.

The candidate countries CROATIA\*, the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA\*, MONTENEGRO\* and ICELAND\*\*, the countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate countries ALBANIA, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA and SERBIA, the European Free Trade Association country NORWAY, member of the European Economic Area, align themselves with this statement.

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

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