



EUROPEAN UNION

**OSCE Permanent Council Nr 918
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EU statement on the first anniversary of the presentation of the OSCE Rapporteur's report on Belarus

The European Union would like to draw the attention of the Permanent Council to the fact that on 16 June one year has passed since the presentation by Professor Emmanuel Decaux of the OSCE Rapporteur's report on Belarus, prepared in accordance with the OSCE Moscow Mechanism.

One year later we have to conclude with deep regret that recommendations contained in the OSCE Rapporteur's report have not been implemented by the Belarusian authorities and that the overall human rights situation in Belarus has been worsening steadily. Last year's legislative changes, introducing additional restrictions on the activities of civil society and political opposition in Belarus and increasing the powers and prerogatives of the KGB, constituted a further step backwards in Belarus' respect for human rights and the rule of law.

The EU has welcomed the release of former presidential candidate Mr Andrei Sannikau and his colleague Mr Dzmitry Bandarenka and now calls for the immediate release and rehabilitation of all remaining political prisoners. We wish to restate our strong condemnation of the conviction and imprisonment of Mr Ales Byalyatski, an internationally renowned Belarusian human rights defender. The EU is deeply concerned about reports of torture and inhumane prison conditions of political prisoners. The EU is particularly preoccupied with the treatment of

those of the candidates in the last Presidential elections who remain incarcerated.

The EU reiterates its call on the Belarusian authorities to stop all harassment of members of the opposition, human rights defenders, journalists and civil society, and not to hinder their freedom of movement. We are deeply saddened by the constant harassment of journalists in Belarus, who are frequently victims of intimidation and threats, physical attacks, arrest, damage or confiscation of their equipment. In this context, we deeply regret the brutal action of the police against those who on 1 June 2012 participated in a peaceful protest in Grodno over the imposition of the Russian language at a Polish language school. Many of them, including journalists, were detained and some tried and sentenced, including to administrative detention, simply for taking part in or reporting on this event.

The shortcomings in the application of fair trial standards in Belarus, raising serious questions about the impartiality and independence of the Belarusian judiciary, remain unaddressed by the authorities. Such deficiencies were revealed, in particular in the 10 November 2011 report of ODIHR's monitors who attended trials of some of the defendants charged for their participation in a demonstration in Minsk on the night of the last Presidential elections. The report shows clearly systemic problems with the Belarusian justice system, which is in need of a substantial reform to bring it into line with international obligations of Belarus.

We urge Belarus to establish close co-operation with the ODIHR in order to address the Office's numerous recommendations on Belarus, and to allow a meaningful OSCE presence in the country. The EU expects an early invitation from Belarus to ODIHR for the monitoring of the announced Parliamentary elections of 23 September 2012.

Against this background, the European Union calls once again on the Belarusian authorities to fully utilise the OSCE Rapporteur's report and to do their utmost to implement recommendations contained therein.

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 EU will continue to follow closely developments in Belarus.

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 countries Liechtenstein and Norway, members 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.

