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auprès de l'OSCE

PC.DEL/318/05

21 April 2005

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ENGLISH only

Permanent Council No 552

21 April 2005

EU STATEMENT ON BELARUS

The EU is concerned by the recent measures of the Belarusian authorities regarding control and liquidation of non-governmental organisations and, in particular, by the decision of the Supreme Court of Belarus to close the Independent Institute of Socio, Economic and Political Studies (IISEPS).

The Institute plays an important and indispensable role in assessing Belarusian public opinion, including on elections. It has gained an excellent reputation for its professional and objective work. The closure of the Institute will further limit the availability of information on public opinion on various aspects of political, social and economic life in Belarus.

Conducting independent research into citizens' views on topical issues is a normal activity of interest in any democratic society and we therefore urge the Belarusian authorities not to deprive its population – and themselves - of valuable and objective information about public opinion.

We note that the decision of the Supreme Court is yet another sign of the attempt by authorities in Minsk to transform the Belarusian society into a closed one. We continue to receive reports of harassment and intimidation against civil society in Belarus. Freedom of the media and access to independent information have been seriously undermined by the activities of the Belarusian Government. Freedom of association is curtailed by unduly restrictive formalities.

The Belarusian Government has, as a result of its policies, isolated itself from the offers and advantages contained in the EU's Neighbourhood policy. Once again, the European Union calls on the Government to respect the OSCE commitments freely undertaken by Belarus and to start developing good relations with civil society in a constructive manner, including using the capable assistance of the OSCE Office in Minsk.

We are grateful to the OSCE Office in Minsk for keeping the Permanent Council informed by its reporting on this and other issues and for its useful work.

The Candidate Countries Bulgaria, Romania, Turkey and Croatia¹ align themselves with this statement.

¹Croatia continues to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process