

**EUROPEAN UNION****OSCE Permanent Council No 1139
Vienna, 30 March 2017**

**EU Statement on “Restrictions on the Freedoms of
Expression, Association, and Assembly in Belarus”**

The European Union is deeply concerned with the way the Belarusian authorities responded to the recent peaceful protests taking place throughout Belarus, including the demonstrations in Minsk on the occasion of Freedom Day on 25 March 2017.

The arbitrary and indiscriminate actions of the Belarusian authorities, both in the days before March 25, on the day of the demonstrations and immediately thereafter, included numerous detentions, arrest of opposition leaders, intimidation of journalists and activists of independent organizations, including the Human Rights Centre "Viasna". There is no justification for the use of force or intimidation against those exercising their right to peaceful protest. Such repressive actions are in contradiction with Belarus' stated policy of democratisation and its OSCE and other international commitments.

The EU echoes the call of the Director of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, Michael Georg Link, on the authorities of Belarus to abstain from using any form of sanction or unnecessary force to stifle legitimate dissent and the right to freedom of expression. We call for an immediate release of all peaceful protestors remaining in detention.

Observance of democratic standards, human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of expression, association and assembly, are the basis on which the EU wants to build stable relations with Belarus. Steps taken by the Belarusian authorities to respect and uphold these principles will remain key for the shaping of the European Union's relationship with Belarus.

The European Union remains committed to a stable, democratic and prosperous future for Belarus, for the benefit of its people, and will continue its work with all the stakeholders with this objective firmly in mind.

The Candidate Countries the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO* and ALBANIA*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, and the EFTA countries ICELAND and NORWAY, members of the European Economic Area, align themselves with this statement.

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