

Finnish Presidency of the Council of the European Union

**Permanent Council No. 620
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EU Statement on Belarus - sentence of Mr. Alexander Kozulin

The EU would like to inform the Permanent Council of the Presidency statement on the sentencing of the former presidential candidate Alexandr Kozulin, which reads as follows:

The European Union is deeply concerned about the sentencing of the former Belarusian presidential candidate Aleksandr Kozulin to five and a half years in prison on July 13, 2006. The European Union sees Mr. Kozulin's sentence, which is based on accusations of "hooliganism" and disturbing public order, as politically motivated. It is yet another example of the Belarusian authorities' attempts to punish the democratic opposition for exercising their democratic rights. The sentence is in no way commensurate with the alleged offence. Consequently, EU calls on the Belarusian authorities to immediately free Mr. Kozulin and all other political prisoners.

The EU reminds the authorities and citizens of Belarus that it remains open to developing its relations with Belarus, including in the context of the European Neighbourhood Policy, provided that the Belarusian authorities prove a sincere willingness to respect human rights, the rule of law and democratic values and initiate democratic reforms.

The Acceding Countries Bulgaria and Romania, the Candidate Countries Turkey, Croatia ¹ and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, EFTA countries Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway, members of the European Economic Area, as well as Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova align themselves with this statement.

¹ Croatia and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process