



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council Nr 824 Vienna, 22 July 2010

EU statement in response to the Head of the OSCE Office in Minsk, H.E. Ambassador Benedikt Haller

The European Union warmly welcomes His Excellency Ambassador Haller to the Permanent Council and thanks him for his comprehensive report.

The EU appreciates the work done by the Office and welcomes its efforts to establish constructive working relations with the host country authorities and with Belarusian civil society.

The EU commends the Office for having overcome challenges caused by major personnel changes that occurred in the reporting period. We are also pleased to learn that the project registration process has been made easier and more flexible, improving the operational capacities of the Office, allowing it to make full use of its increased 2010 budget.

The EU attaches great importance to the monitoring and reporting activities of the Office, including on matters related to human rights and media issues. Therefore, we welcome the Office's efforts to improve its reporting activities.

In the human dimension, the EU fully endorses the Office's efforts aimed at supporting Belarus in building democratic institutions, consolidating the rule of law and strengthening civil society. We positively note the Office's activities related to human trafficking, juvenile justice and penitentiary conditions. Being

opposed to the use of capital punishment in all cases and under all circumstances and having consistently called for its universal abolition, we reiterate our call on the Belarusian authorities to establish an immediate moratorium on the use of the death penalty with a view to its abolition and, in this context, appreciated the workshop organized by the Office on this issue.

Mr Chairman,

Some recent developments in Belarus underline the continued importance of the Office's human dimension programme. The EU is concerned about reoccurring harassment of representatives of independent media, civil society and opposition organisations, including restrictions on the freedom of assembly and association and freedom of expression. We appreciate the Office's follow-up on developments around the new legislation on Internet use. In this context, we take note of the ongoing concerns of civil society on its implementation and we recall our statement of 11 February 2010.

The EU reiterates its readiness to assist Belarus in achieving concrete positive changes in the area of democracy, human rights and the rule of law, also in the context of the Eastern Partnership, and calls on Belarus to continue its cooperation with the OSCE Office in Minsk and the OSCE institutions. The EU expects Belarus to extend an invitation in due time to ODIHR to observe the upcoming Presidential elections, in accordance with its OSCE commitments.

The EU supports the Office's work in the economic and environmental dimension, as well as sustainable development in the Chernobyl-affected areas. The EU commends the Office for its assistance in organizing the *Second Preparatory Conference of the 18th Economic and Environmental Forum*.

In conclusion, the EU would like to once again assure the OSCE Office in Minsk of our full support and wish Ambassador Haller and his team continued success in their further work.

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

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