



## **EUROPEAN UNION**

### **OSCE Permanent Council Nr 899 Vienna, 26 January 2012**

#### **EU Statement on Belarus**

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The European Union notes with deep regret the decision of the Minsk City Court, which on 24 January rejected Mr Ales Byalyatski's appeal and upheld the previous decision to sentence him to 4 and a half years of imprisonment for alleged concealment of income and tax evasion.

The EU considers that the prosecution and sentencing of Mr Byalyatski, an internationally renowned Belarusian human rights defender, founder and head of the Centre for Human Rights 'Viasna', which for a number of years has been promoting human rights in Belarus, is politically motivated.

The EU reiterates its call on Belarus to immediately release and rehabilitate all political prisoners, including Mr Byalyatski, and to stop the harassment and persecution of members of the opposition, human rights defenders, journalists and civil society. The EU welcomes the statement by the Chairperson-in-Office regarding the case of Mr Byalyatski on 24 January.

As highlighted by the discussion among Ministers in the 23 January Foreign Affairs Council of the EU, the EU continues to follow closely developments in Belarus in the area of human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law and remains committed to the support of the civil society in this country.

The acceding country CROATIA\*, the candidate countries THE FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA, MONTENEGRO and ICELAND\*\*, the countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates countries ALBANIA, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA and SERBIA align themselves with this statement.

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

\*\*Iceland continues to be a member of EFTA and the European Economic Area.