



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council Nr 849 Vienna, 3 February 2011

EU statement on Belarus

Recalling the EU's previous statements expressing concern about developments in Belarus, we would like to draw the attention of the Permanent Council to the main points of the Foreign Affairs Council conclusions adopted on the 31 of January 2011:

The Council deeply regretted that, according to OSCE/ODIHR, the Presidential elections demonstrated that Belarus still has a considerable way to go in meeting its OSCE commitments.

The Council particularly deplored that the election night was marred by violence by the Belarusian authorities and strongly condemned the arrest and harassment of the opposition, independent media and civil society on political grounds.

The Council reiterated its demands for the immediate release of those detained on political grounds following the elections on 19 December, and their rehabilitation. The Council urged Belarus to respect the rights of detainees and their families, and called on the Belarusian authorities to end the persecution of democratic forces, independent media and representatives of civil society.

The EU regrets the decision of the Belarusian authorities not to renew the mandate of the OSCE Office in Minsk and calls for its urgent reversal.

In view of these recent events and developments, the Council has decided to impose travel restrictions and an asset freeze against persons responsible for the fraudulent Presidential elections of 19 December 2010 and the subsequent violent crackdown on democratic opposition, civil society and representatives of independent mass media. The Council has also decided to reinstate the travel restrictions imposed on certain persons in Belarus, which had been suspended since 2008. These restrictive measures and the list of persons targeted will be kept open and under constant review. The release and rehabilitation of all people detained on political grounds, progress towards further reforms of the Electoral Code, compliance with commitments regarding the freedom of expression and of the media, the freedom of assembly and association, would pave the way for lifting these restrictive measures.

The European Union remains strongly committed to strengthening its support for the Belarusian people and civil society, including through the International Donors' Conference in Warsaw on 2 February.

The Council recalled the importance it attaches to facilitating people-to-people contacts with Belarus to the benefit of the Belarusian population at large and will encourage the optimal use of the existing flexibilities offered by the Visa Code, in particular the possibilities for Member States to waive and reduce visa fees for certain categories of citizens.

The EU remains committed to its policy of critical engagement, including through dialogue and the Eastern Partnership, and recalls that the EU has consistently offered to deepen its relationship with Belarus subject to progress towards respect by the Belarusian authorities for the principles of democracy, the rule of

law and human rights. The Council will regularly re-examine the situation in Belarus and stands ready to consider further targeted measures in all areas of co-operation as appropriate.