

**P R E S S   R E L E A S E**

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**Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union on Belarus**

As the 20th of July 1999 marks the end of the first mandate of Alexander Lukashenko, President of the Republic of Belarus, who was elected for five years in July 1994, the European Union reaffirms its support for the hopes of the people of Belarus to create a free, open and democratic society, and expresses the wish to be able to create constructive bilateral relations with this country.

The Union recalls that it does not recognize governments, and even less political personalities, but States, according to the most common international practice.

However, the European Union emphasises that for all the European democracies, the legitimacy of political power can only be achieved by the results of free, democratic and fair elections, which have been seen as such by the international community and the voters themselves.

This is why, like the OSCE, whose advisory mission in Minsk it supports, the European Union is convinced that only the organisation of such free elections will permit Belarus to emerge from the difficult situation where it now finds itself.

In this perspective, the European Union calls on all parties concerned to engage in dialogue and hopes sincerely that the indications recently expressed by President Lukashenko in favour of dialogue with the opposition in order to create an open and democratic society in Belarus will soon be followed by concrete proposals which enable, for the year 2000, the organisation of parliamentary elections which have been planned for this date, in such conditions conforming to the principles defined in Copenhagen and concerning particularly the electoral law, access for all to audiovisual media and the freedom of written press.

Finally, the European Union reiterates its urgent appeal for the release without delay of those political personalities and parliamentarians currently detained, in particular Mr. Michail Chigir, and its hope to see Belarus, following the necessary democratic reforms, some day being able to take its rightful place in the European family.

The associated countries of Central and Eastern Europe, the associated countries Cyprus and Malta and the EFTA countries, members of the European Economic Area, Iceland and Liechtenstein, align themselves with this declaration.