

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 Belarusian election**

The EU would in response to the announcement by Belarus to hold presidential elections on September 9 like to reiterate its support for a democratic development in Belarus and underline the importance of free and fair elections.

As stressed on several occasions, the up-coming elections represent an opportunity for Belarus to improve its relations with the EU and the international community. The EU therefore asks the authorities to take necessary measures so that a fair campaign and, later on, election can be held.

The EU would in this context urge the Belarusian government to honour its commitments under the OSCE Copenhagen Document and refrain from interfering in the work of the political opposition and independent movements. Respect for the principle of freedom of assembly is here central. The EU would also like to remind the Belarusian government about the need for objective reporting on all candidates in the state media. Independent newspapers should be able to work under the same conditions as state owned newspapers and not be subject to discrimination.

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Democratic elections could be promoted by taking fully into account recommendations by the OSCE, for example as regards the implementation of the election law. In this context, the EU recalls that the right of Belarusian citizens to engage in domestic election observation is guaranteed by law. The government should therefore not counteract the building and training of domestic networks of non-partisan observers. The EU reiterates its concerns about decree no 8 and its possible implications on the activities of non-governmental organisations, in particular in the institutional building and training fields.

The role of the OSCE during the election period is of great importance. The EU fully supports the work of the OSCE Advisory and Monitoring Group (AMG) working within its mandate, and will closely consult with the OSCE during the election period. The EU expects the Belarusian authorities to up-hold a dialogue with the AMG and to co-operate constructively with Ambassador Wieck.

The EU is ready to engage in a dialogue with the Belarusian government in order to promote democratic presidential elections. The EU would be willing to take a first step in normalising its relations to Belarus, should the election be assessed as free and fair by domestic and possibly also an ODIHR mission according to international standards.

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