

P R E S S R E L E A S E

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European Union declaration on Belarus

The General Affairs Council of 29 April 1997 has taken note of the letters of President Lukashenko and Foreign Minister Antonovich of 10 April 1997, responding to the report of the EU Fact Finding Mission and the Council Conclusions of 24 February 1997.

The EU notes a clear discrepancy between the undertakings as expressed in the abovementioned letters and recent developments in Belarus. The EU expresses its deep concern at the wave of arbitrary arrests of demonstrators and members of the opposition in recent weeks. Furthermore, the EU rejects the various statements made by representatives of the Belarusian authorities since 10 April 1997 to the effect that the present political situation in Belarus should be accepted by the international community as a fait accompli.

The abovementioned events raise doubt on the declared willingness of the Belarusian Government to work constructively with the European Union and relevant international organizations towards establishing a political system which respects the internationally accepted norms for human rights and political freedoms.

Recalling its conclusions of 24 February 1997, the EU reiterates its position that cooperation between EU Member States and institutions and Belarus cannot proceed in the absence of convincing efforts to establish such a system.

The EU remains committed to a process whereby Belarus, in due course, can play a meaningful role on the European continent.

The European Union welcomes the formal undertaking by the Belarus authorities to initiate consultations with all the deputies of the elected 13th Supreme Soviet to establish a proper balance between the functions and duties of the members of the

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legislative, executive and judicial powers as well as devise mechanisms which would strengthen the respect for human rights and the position of the independent media.

The EU appeals to the Belarusian authorities to implement this commitment by the end of May 1997.

The EU in close cooperation with the OSCE and the Council of Europe is prepared to assist the Belarusian authorities in the process of democratization.

The EU supports the OSCE's efforts to establish independent mechanisms for monitoring the functioning of the existing legal framework for the protection of human rights and an independent role for the mass media and possible improvements to this legal framework.

The EU supports the establishment of a OSCE mission in Belarus which it believes could play a vital role in promoting democratic reforms and respect for human rights.

The European Union has taken note of the appointment of Mr Kosto by the Presidency as its Special Representative to the Republic of Belarus and has noted that Mr Kosto has been tasked with:

- assisting both the Belarusian authorities and all the deputies of the elected 13th Supreme Soviet in setting up a formal consultation mechanism to discuss proposals for amending the 1994 Constitution with a view to establishing a proper balance in the system of the separation of powers;
- monitoring and facilitating the consultations in coordination with the OSCE and the Council of Europe;
- reporting to the GAC on the progress made in those consultations.

To these ends Mr Kosto will be assisted by a team of experts and will periodically visit Belarus. Mr Kosto's mandate will be reviewed as required by the political developments in Belarus and by the scope of future OSCE involvement.

Mr Kosto and the team of experts would expect to have unrestricted access to any person or organization in Belarus they may wish to see.
