

PRESS RELEASE

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Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union
on the release of Mr. Mikhail N. Chigir,
the former Prime Minister of Belarus

The European Union takes note with satisfaction of the release of former Prime Minister, Mr. Chigir from detention on 30 November 1999, which had been requested from the Belarusian authorities for many months.

Mr. Chigir was detained on 2 April 1999, on charges of corruption, but there were serious indications that the arrest was politically motivated. The EU expects that legal proceedings in due course involving Mr. Chigir will be transparent and fair and conducted according to internationally accepted principles of justice.

The release of Mr. Chigir is an encouraging sign. The EU reaffirms its support for the efforts made by the OSCE towards a political dialogue with the opposition in order to prepare free and democratic elections observed by the international community in 2000. In this respect, the EU is satisfied with the commitments undertaken by Belarus in the Istanbul summit declaration.

After this first step, as a means of allowing the rapid opening of the expected negotiations, the EU expresses the hope that the agreement already reached, providing for opposition access to the state media before the start of the negotiations, will be put into operation.

Finally, the EU expresses the hope that the political dialogue process initiated by the OSCE will allow Belarus to engage itself resolutely in developing a pluralist society, guided by the rule of law and respect for human rights. The EU is ready to assist Belarus in this process.

The Central and Eastern European countries Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, the Slovak Republic and Slovenia, the associated countries Cyprus and Malta, and the EFTA countries Iceland and Liechtenstein, members of the European Economic Area align themselves with this declaration.
