

PRESS RELEASE

Brussels, 23 March 2001

7361/01 (Presse 119)

P 64/01

**Declaration of the Presidency on behalf of the European Union
on the presidential decree on foreign aid and the by-elections in Belarus.**

The EU is deeply concerned about the Presidential Decree that was issued on 12 March and seeks to impose far-reaching restrictions on the foreign aid to Belarus in the field of democratisation, human rights and humanitarian aid. This decree signals a departure from the professed willingness to engage in a dialogue with the international community and could result in furthering a self-imposed isolation. The EU therefore urges the Belarusian authorities to withdraw the decree.

The EU has followed the legislative by-elections in Belarus and the electoral campaign that preceded them with utmost attention. It has taken note of the assessment of the EU representatives in Minsk and the OSCE Advisory and Monitoring Group. In talks with the Belarusian Foreign Ministry in February the EU stressed the importance of progress within the well-known joint criteria of the OSCE, the EU and the Council of Europe. The EU regrets that little progress in the democratisation process could be noted before the by-elections, and that sufficient progress has not taken place within the criteria.

Internet: <http://ue.eu.int/Newsroom>
E-mail: press.office@consilium.eu.int

7361/01 (Presse 119 - G)

1
EN

Should the Belarusian authorities show willingness to develop a genuine process of democratisation, the EU will be ready to offer its support. The EU will closely follow the process before the presidential elections this year, and urges the government of Belarus to create political conditions for free and fair presidential elections. This would imply real progress within the criteria mentioned above. The EU once again stresses the importance of democratic elections for the future relations between Belarus and Europe. This would be a necessary first step towards normalised relations with the EU.

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.
