



**COUNCIL OF  
THE EUROPEAN UNION**

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**NOTE**

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from :	General Secretariat of the Council
to :	Delegations
Subject :	Report on the debate on the elections in Belarus - Council and Commission statements, held in Strasbourg on 5 April 2006

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In his speech, State Secretary Mr WINKLER welcomed the Belarus opposition leader, Mr Milinkevich, and said that the latter deserved all possible political and financial support. He regretted that there had been serious failings with regard to the Belarusian elections, and stressed that the Council had given serious warnings to President Lukashenko before the elections about not respecting the people's right to demonstrate and exercise freedom of speech. He said that the Council and the EU must make it clear that the situation could not be tolerated, and take measures against those who were responsible. He told the members that the Council was preparing a decision on a visa ban and that it was examining possibilities of further measures. He underlined that these measures should not aim at the population in general, but target the people responsible for the wrongdoings with regard to the elections. As for concrete forms of support to the Belarus population, he said that a number of states had already decided to give grants to young people to give them the opportunity to study abroad. He stressed that Member States should support civil society in Belarus. He called upon the Belarus government to release detainees who had only made use of their right to demonstrate peacefully and expressed their opinion, and concluded by saying that he would not rest until spring had arrived in Belarus.

Ms FERRERO-WALDNER expressed her admiration for the degree to which the pluralistic forces in Belarus were able to come together and hoped that the Commission would be able to continue its support to the democratic forces. According to OSCE reports the election did not meet OSCE's standards, and the Commission considered the elections fundamentally flawed. Like Mr WINKLER, she stressed the need for targeted sanctions, and underlined the importance of continued support to civil society. She considered it highly important that the population have access to media to be able to make their own decisions. She stressed the need to look at what to do with those students who had been expelled from university, and said that programmes would be found for the future. She underlined the need to speak out clearly on the situation in meetings with Russia.

There was a strong consensus during the debate following the interventions of Mr WINKLER and Ms FERRERO-WALDNER. The members, speaking either on behalf of their groups or individually, stressed the need for a visa policy which increased the possibility for the Belarusians to travel, while at the same time establishing a visa ban for officials and politicians responsible for wrongdoings in the context of the elections. Some also suggested a freezing of their assets. They agreed with Mr WINKLER and Ms FERRERO-WALDNER that the people in general must not be isolated and that the sanctions must be targeted. They stressed the importance of supporting the opposition and emphasised that that had to be done by taking action, not just by making declarations. It was underlined that the topic must be on the agenda of meetings with Russia. Mr EURLINGS (PPE-DE, NL) wanted the trade in arms with Belarus to be cut off, and suggested that the topic should be discussed with other allies. Mr SZYMANSKI (UEN/NGL, PL) warned about the image of democracy coming from Russia and said that if democracy came from Russia, Belarus would not become a real democracy. Mr MASIEL (NI, PL) said that when Belarus would one day become a democracy, the country would be a candidate for the EU. Some members emphasised the role of media, and the need for more supporting measures to be taken in that area. The situation of the students who had been expelled from university on account of their participation in the demonstration was raised. Some members suggested that the Member States of the EU should provide alternative education for these students. Several members stressed that they considered the elections invalid and that President Lukashenko could not be considered to be legally in office.

In his concluding remarks, Mr WINKLER noted the strong signal from the European Parliament and stressed the importance of the EU institutions to speak with one voice. He assured that the Council and the Commission would continue doing so. He emphasised that the situation in Belarus would be part of the talks with Russia. With reference to the calls for a simplified visa procedure or the lifting of the visa obligation for Belarusians in general, he said that such a measure would involve certain administrative measures and that the Council was working on the issue of inviting the right people, while responsible officials and politicians would be targeted by a visa ban. He stressed the importance of protecting the people and showing solidarity with them. He assured the members that the Council would work for a democratisation of Belarus with concrete measures, and that while membership for Belarus in the Council of Europe was not yet possible, it should be one day.

Ms FERRERO-WALDNER said that a key message was that the EU would like to be able to include Belarus in the Neighbourhood Policy. She stressed that NGOs registered outside Belarus were granted financial support, which was unusual, since under the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights normally only NGOs within the country concerned were granted support. She told the members that the very important media project would continue. On the question of visa facilitation, she said that the general approach on visa facilitation that was adopted by the Council in December last year stated that visa facilitation should not be offered to third countries proactively. Despite this general principle, the Commission were looking for possibilities to facilitate people-to-people contacts between the European Union and Belarus through measures such as waiving visa fees on an ad hoc basis. On the question of students, she said that the Commission wanted to facilitate access of Belarusian students to its universities and considered that the EU could facilitate access for them to its universities, provided that all the Member States and the Commission cooperated on that issue. With regard to Russia, she said that Belarus was clearly a subject of political dialogue and she underlined that Russia needed to be convinced that leaders other than President Lukashenko would not threaten the special relationship between Russia and Belarus.

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