Brussels, 10 August 2012
A 366/12

Statement by the Spokesperson of High Representative Catherine Ashton following the meeting of the Political and Security Committee on Belarus

The spokesperson of Catherine Ashton, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice President of the Commission, issued the following statement today:

Following the statement made by High Representative Catherine Ashton on 3 August, the Political and Security Committee (PSC) met today to discuss the situation in Belarus with regard to measures taken by the authorities in Minsk forcing the Ambassador of Sweden to leave the country and terminating the diplomatic status of remaining staff in the Swedish Embassy.

The Member States expressed full support for the statement issued on 3 August by High Representative Catherine Ashton in which she expressed grave concern over the decision by Belarus.

They noted that the EU is set to review its restrictive measures against Belarus before 31 October 2012, and agreed that in assessing the broader context of the EU-Belarus relationship and internal developments in Belarus - including continuous repression against civil society, the fate of political prisoners and the conduct of the forthcoming parliamentary elections -, the evolution of the situation stemming from the current diplomatic crisis caused by Belarus will also be taken into account.

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The Member States also expressed dismay that none of the remaining political prisoners have been released as part of the recent prisoner amnesty. They remain deeply concerned about the conditions in which the political prisoners are being held and call once more for their immediate release and full rehabilitation.

They noted that these actions taken by Belarus have impacted on the conditions for the political dialogue between the EU and Belarus and agreed that the restriction of political contacts with Belarus will be subject to due consideration. They agreed that the Ambassadors of Belarus should be summoned to the Foreign Ministries of EU Member States and to the European External Action Service (EEAS), in order to receive the position of the EU in this regard.

The Member States underlined the European Union's commitment to European values, in particular democracy, human rights and the rule of law, and to the EU's dialogue on modernisation with Belarus. They expressed the EU's ambition to continue and expand its engagement and support to civil society and democratic actors in Belarus, and invited the Commission and the EEAS to report to the PSC on concrete measures in this regard as soon as possible.

For more information, please see: Factsheet on the European Union and Belarus