

Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner condemns new Law on Mass Media in Belarus

Benita Ferrero-Waldner, European Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighbourhood Policy, condemns the passing on 27 June of the new Law on Mass Media in Belarus: "I deplore the adoption by Belarus parliament of a new Media Law that will further restrict the freedom of the press in Belarus. I regret that this law fails to take up the recommendations of Miklos Haraszti, the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, who had cooperated with the Belarusian administration. This is a missed opportunity for the Belarusian authorities to improve the media conditions in Belarus and thus take a step towards democratisation. Freedom of the press is an essential element of democracy and I urge the Belarusian authorities to remedy this situation ahead of the parliamentary elections of 28 September. I reiterate the EU's offer to Belarus for further engagement provided that Belarus takes convincing steps towards democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law, including the release of all political prisoners, the freedom of the media and the democratic conduct of parliamentary elections. Such positive steps would allow for the EU to positively respond. Background: on 28 June, the Belarusian Parliament passed a new Law on the Mass Media. The Law puts further restrictions on Belarusian media, including Internet based media, according to the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, the Belarusian Association of Journalists and Reporters without Borders.