

Press Release

Council of Europe Press Division

Ref: 179a06

Tel: +33 (0)3 88 41 25 60

Fax: +33 (0)3 88 41 39 11

pressunit@coe.int

internet: www.coe.int/press



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Repression of Demonstrators in Belarus

Statement by the Chairman-in-Office of the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers

Strasbourg, 28.03.2006 - Mihai-Razvan Ungureanu, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Romania, Chairman-in-Office of the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers, today made the following statement:

"I am deeply concerned over the last developments in Belarus following the presidential elections held on 19 March, which were marred by a series of major irregularities. I consider unacceptable the attitude of the Belarusian authorities which, on 25 March, chose to respond to the legitimate actions of the people of Belarus through threats, the use of force, and arrests. This is a regretful confirmation of the aggressive suppression of freedom of expression and association and of the forceful intimidation of the political opposition that the authorities of Belarus operated in the run-up to the presidential elections.

I urge the Belarusian authorities to release immediately the political activists and peaceful demonstrators detained before and after the elections, to refrain from the further use of force and arrests, and to allow the people of Belarus to exercise their right of assembly and freedom of expression, in accordance with the international commitments undertaken already by Belarus.

As Chair of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, I consider that the only way to ensure the rightful place of Belarus in Europe is for the authorities in Minsk to let the people of Belarus have access to the benefits of democracy, to stop systematically operated repression and to show a genuine will to respect the fundamental freedoms and rights of citizens.

The ongoing efforts in favour of democracy by civil society and the democratic opposition are to be welcomed and the Romanian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers will continue to support their legitimate aspirations."

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