



## EUROPEAN UNION

### OSCE Permanent Council No. 1349 Vienna, 16 December 2021

## EU Statement on the sentencing of Siarhei Tsikhanouski and five other prominent political prisoners in Belarus

1. On 14 December in Homiel, six prominent political prisoners received unfounded and harsh sentences ranging between 14 and 18 years on dubious charges of "preparation of mass disorder" and "incitement to hatred" in a trial behind closed doors. Siarhei Tsikhanouski, a blogger and pro-democracy activist, who was unfairly imprisoned and prevented from standing in the 2020 Presidential election campaign, was sentenced to 18 years of prison. Mr Tsikhanouski was imprisoned on May 29, 2020 together with members of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya's nomination group Artsiom Sakau, and social media manager Dmitry Popov. On 14 December, both of them were sentenced to 16 years in prison. Ihar Losik and Uladzimir Tsyhanovich, bloggers who ran popular telegram and Youtube channels, sharing information on the presidential election campaign, both received sentences of 15 years in prison. Prominent Belarusian politician and veteran of the opposition to Lukashenko, Mikola Statkevich, was sentenced to 14 years.
2. These sentences are yet more examples of unfounded charges against Belarusian citizens who have exercised their right of expression and called for free and fair elections. These sentences are part of the ongoing brutal and systematic repression of all independent voices in Belarus.
3. The EU strongly condemns these continued, flagrant violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms by the Minsk regime. The EU reiterates its demand for

the immediate and unconditional release of all political prisoners. There are now more than 920 political prisoners in Belarus, many subjected to torture and ill treatment, a number that continues to rise. Belarus must adhere to its international commitments and obligations within the OSCE and the UN. In view of the continuing deterioration of the human rights violations and the repression in Belarus, the EU remains committed to consider further sanctions in line with the gradual approach adopted by the Council on 12 October 2020.

The Candidate Countries REPUBLIC of NORTH MACEDONIA\*, MONTENEGRO\*, SERBIA\* and ALBANIA\*, the EFTA countries ICELAND, LIECHTENSTEIN and NORWAY, members of the European Economic Area, as well as UKRAINE and CANADA align themselves with this statement.

\* Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.