



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1285 Vienna, 15 October 2020

EU Statement on recent developments in Belarus

Mr. Chair, the European Union remains concerned over the ongoing deterioration of the human rights situation in Belarus. Since the fraudulent presidential elections on 9 August the repressions continue unabated. This week another red line has been crossed, as the Belarusian authorities entitled the law enforcement to use lethal weapons against peaceful protesters. Moreover, the wide-spread use of coercive measures, including water cannons, stun grenades, rubber bullets and tear gas in response to the peaceful protest on 11 October has brought violence to a new level. We strongly condemn these violent and disproportionate reactions by the Belarusian authorities, including the politically motivated harassments, arbitrary detentions and trial of representatives of the pro-democracy movement, civil society and independent media.

Such developments represent a substantial degradation of the human rights situation in Belarus and utterly contradict the core international commitments endorsed by Belarus, in particular with regard to freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, the right to fair trial and the absolute prohibition of torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. They also stand in sharp contrast to the statements from the Belarusian delegation these past few weeks.

The EU reiterates its call on the Belarusian authorities to end at once the ongoing crackdown on the pro-democracy movement, civil society and independent media, to release all political prisoners and to put an end to politically motivated trials, including against the members of the Coordination Council. In this context, we pay

tribute to human rights defenders, in particular the Human Rights Center, “Viasna”. In the current wave of repression they remain a precious source of reliable information on human rights abuses in Belarus. Regrettably, they often know it first-hand from their own experience. In this regard, we urge the Belarusian authorities to immediately release all human rights defenders, including Ms Marfa Rabkova, coordinator of the Volunteer Service of “Viasna”, and to drop all charges against them.

In view of the ongoing developments in Belarus, the EU has decided to impose travel restrictions and assets freeze against 40 individuals responsible for the fraudulent presidential elections of 9 August and subsequent violent crackdown on opposition, civil society and representatives of independent mass media. These restrictive measures and the list of persons targeted will be kept open and under constant review. We are ready to take further restrictive measures against entities and high-ranking officials, including Aleksandr Lukashenko.

The EU decided to review its relations with Belarus, as defined in the EU Council Conclusions on Belarus of 12 October. The EU also stands ready to substantially step up its political engagement, sectoral cooperation, and financial assistance to Belarus provided that its authorities respect the principles of democracy, the rule of law and human rights. Stopping of repression and abuses, promoting a serious, credible and inclusive political process resulting in free and fair elections under the OSCE/ODIHR's observation, and providing guarantees for respect for human rights are fundamental in this respect.

We renew our call on the Belarusian authorities to engage in an inclusive national dialogue with broader society, in particular the Coordination Council, and stand ready to support a peaceful democratic transition with a variety of instruments, including a comprehensive plan of economic support for a democratic Belarus. In this regard, we note that a dialogue in detention cannot be considered a true democratic and civilized way to hold a dialogue with the society. We fully support the offer made by current and incoming OSCE Chairs to facilitate a national dialogue in Belarus by a joint visit and encourage Belarusian authorities to accept this proposal.

Finally, as stated by the EU High Representative, J. Borrell, the Belarusian authorities' demand that Poland and Lithuania withdraw their ambassadors and significantly reduce their diplomatic representations in Minsk is unfounded and regrettable, and will only further isolate the authorities in Minsk. Attempts by the Belarusian authorities to target certain EU Member States will not succeed in weakening EU unity, which was clearly reaffirmed by the European Council on 1 October when all EU Member States called on the Belarusian authorities to end violence and repression, release all detainees and political prisoners, respect media freedom and civil society, and start an inclusive national dialogue.

The Candidate Countries REPUBLIC of NORTH MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO*, SERBIA* and ALBANIA*, and the EFTA country ICELAND, member of the European Economic Area, and UKRAINE align themselves with this statement.

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