



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1307 Vienna, 25 March 2021

EU on recent developments in Belarus

On 25 March, the Freedom Day is celebrated across Belarus, commemorating the anniversary of the proclamation of the Belarusian People's Republic in 1918. It bears a special importance this year, as the peaceful fight for an independent, free and democratic Belarus continues despite widespread repressions.

The continued peaceful demonstrations illustrate the urgency and the necessity of launching a genuine and inclusive national dialogue leading to new credible and transparent presidential elections with international observation, including by ODIHR. Last Thursday, the Belarusian opposition leader, Ms S. Tsikhanouskaya, initiated a nationwide online vote on negotiations between representatives of the authorities and the opposition. Since then, over 700,000 Belarusians have supported the call for the peaceful resolution of the crisis. We repeat our call on Belarus to implement the Moscow Mechanism report recommendations and listen to the Belarusian people's call for organizing free and fair presidential elections based on international standards and fully respecting relevant OSCE commitments. Regrettably, the scale of state-run repression is unprecedented. Each month, hundreds of people are sentenced to prison terms on spurious charges, and the number of political prisoners in Belarus nears 300. We condemn the inhumane prison conditions and wide-spread ill-treatment of these detainees. This week, the leader of the United Civic Party, Mr M. Kazlou, and the Chairman of the Social Democratic Party, Mr I. Barysau, were arbitrarily detained, the latter after requesting permission to organize a rally on the Freedom Day. Such developments utterly contradict the core international commitments endorsed by Belarus, including in the OSCE. All arbitrarily detained persons, including political prisoners, human rights defenders, journalists and media actors, must be released

immediately and unconditionally. All perpetrators of human rights violations must be held to account and the climate of impunity must stop.

In this context, we fully share the unequivocal assessment of the Council of Europe's Venice Commission that certain criminal law provisions enshrined in the Belarussian Criminal Code violate the basic principles of the rule of law: Among these are the criminalisation of non-violent demonstrators; use of vague notions; the criminal responsibility of organisers of a demonstration on account of acts imputable to its participants; as well as the severity and unclarity of the sentences.

In this respect, we welcome the establishment of the International Accountability Platform for Belarus as an important contribution to ensuring accountability. The Platform was launched as a follow-up on the recommendations of the OSCE's Moscow Mechanism report, and will support the ongoing efforts to collect and preserve documentation and evidence of serious human rights violations committed in the run up to the presidential election on 9 August 2020 and its aftermath. This initiative will complement the establishment of a UN mandated investigation, - in accordance with the resolution recently adopted by the Human Rights Council - under the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and supported by relevant experts, aimed at contributing to accountability for perpetrators and justice for victims. We reaffirm the Human Rights Council's encouragement of all efforts, including by Belarussian and international civil society groups, to document human rights violations and abuses in Belarus.

The EU reiterates its firm belief that only democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, the rule of law and free and fair elections respecting the democratic will of the people can guarantee a stable, sovereign, and prosperous future of Belarus. The EU will continue to support the Belarussian people in their legitimate request for democracy and respect of fundamental freedoms. We urge Belarussian authorities to take on the offer, as presented by the former and current Chairperson-in-Office, to facilitate a genuine and inclusive national dialogue.

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

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