



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1326 Vienna, 29 July 2021

EU on recent developments in Belarus

FINAL (516 words)

1. Madam Chair, a year has passed since the people of Belarus took to the streets to speak out against the fraudulent presidential elections of 9 August. We are moved by the courage of the Belarusian people who continue to demonstrate peacefully for democracy and for their human rights and fundamental freedoms despite the brutal repression by the Belarusian authorities. We stand in solidarity with them and fully support their democratic right to freely elect their President through new, inclusive, transparent and credible elections with international observation in particular by ODIHR.
2. Regrettably, the Belarusian authorities have not demonstrated any readiness to engage in real dialogue so far and have only responded with continued brutality. On 14 July, the Belarusian regime carried out a further wide-scale attack on independent voices in the country. The raids on private houses and offices targeted a long list of human rights, educational and political groups and organisations, charities and think-tanks, journalists and other media actors. Numerous human rights defenders and other activists have been arrested. The authorities have launched a process to liquidate dozens of NGOs, including key human rights groups.
3. The EU is particularly concerned about the arrest and detention of Viasna activists Ales Byalyatski, Valyantsin Stefanovich and Uladzimir Labkovich. We regret that “Viasna” is constantly targeted by politically motivated actions.
4. We echo the concern of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media Teresa Ribeiro over the continued harassment of media and journalists in retaliation for their work and the request by the Belarus Ministry of Justice to

the Supreme Court to close the Belarusian Association of Journalists (BAJ), as well as the freezing of the organization's bank accounts.

5. This new wave of repression is yet another proof that the Lukashenko regime is waging a systematic and orchestrated campaign with the ultimate aim to silence all dissident voices and suppress civic space in Belarus. By cracking down on its own society, the Lukashenko regime has further deepened the rift with the Belarusian people.
6. The EU calls on the authorities in Belarus to adhere to country's international commitments and obligations to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms. We demand the immediate and unconditional release of detained human rights defenders, journalists and media actors, as well as of other political prisoners whose numbers rise constantly, currently estimated at more than 580. The regime must halt the repression and perpetrators be held to account. The EU will continue to support international accountability initiatives, including under the UN HRC and the International Accountability Platform for Belarus.
7. The severe violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms come at a price. The EU is ready to consider further restrictive measures in line with its gradual approach. We will continue to stand with all human rights defenders, and independent voices and all the people oppressed in Belarus.
8. The EU condemns the continued attempts by Belarus authorities to use illegal migrants for political purposes. We call on Belarus to respect and implement its international commitments and obligations, including those undertaken within OSCE in the areas of border management and security.

The Candidate Countries REPUBLIC of NORTH MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO*, SERBIA* and ALBANIA*, as well as UKRAINE and GEORGIA align themselves with this statement.

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