



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1335 Vienna, 16 September 2021

EU Statement on “Recent developments in Belarus”

FINAL (668 words)

1. The European Union remains deeply concerned over the continued repressions in Belarus. On 6 September, two political prisoners and Members of the Executive Board of the Coordination Council of Democratic Belarus, Ms Marya Kaliesnikava and Mr Maksim Znak, were sentenced to 11 and 10 years in prison respectively. In August 2020, Ms Kaliesnikava, together with Ms Tsikhanouskaya and Ms Tsepkalo, became a symbol of the movement for democratic Belarus. In a trial behind closed doors, together with a prominent lawyer, Mr Znak, she was then tried on unfounded charges of “conspiring to seize state power in an unconstitutional way”, “calling for actions aimed at damaging the national security of Belarus through the use of media and the Internet” and “establishing and leading an extremist group”.
2. The EU deplores the continuous blatant disrespect by the Minsk regime of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of the people of Belarus. Civil society and NGOs in the country have experienced unprecedented pressure over the past weeks, including multiple arrests and sweeping bans. The EU reiterates its demands for the immediate and unconditional release of all political prisoners in Belarus, now numbering more than 660.
3. We also deplore the decision by the Investigative Committee of Belarus, as announced on 26 August, not to open criminal investigations into some 680 complaints of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, including sexual and gender-based violence. This decision must be reversed. No one responsible for these crimes should enjoy impunity. The EU reiterates its support to

the work of the International Accountability Platform for Belarus as an independent and impartial platform for the collection, verification and preservation of documentation and evidence of serious human rights violations perpetrated in Belarus during and after the fraudulent August 2020 presidential elections.

4. The EU strongly condemns the continued wide-scale attack on independent media, journalists and other media actors in Belarus. On 27 August, the Minsk regime ordered the closure of the Belarusian Association of Journalists, the largest independent journalist organization in the country. This politically motivated closure constitutes yet another blatant manifestation of the Belarus authorities' continued contempt for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including freedom of the media and freedom of expression. It is also part of an organized system of repression of all independent voices to prevent or disrupt access to or dissemination of accurate and impartial information on the situation in the country.
5. Irregular migration must not be used as a political bargaining chip. The observed 50-fold increase of irregular crossings from Belarus into the EU is not a reflection of the inability of the Belarus administration to comply with their obligations in combatting illegal migration and human trafficking. There are no objective reasons for such a sharp increase in illegal crossings on the route in question. We condemn the instrumentalization of migrants for political purposes and urge the authorities in Belarus to stop this practice. We stand in solidarity with Latvia, Lithuania and Poland and call on Belarus to respect and implement its international commitments, including those undertaken within OSCE.
6. One year since its invocation on 17 September, it is high time for Belarus to implement the Moscow Mechanism report's recommendations. The EU will continue to call for accountability for the brutal repression, and to urge Belarusian authorities to take up the offer of the former and current Chairperson-in-Office, to facilitate a genuine and inclusive national dialogue.
7. Since the Council Conclusions of October 2020, the authorities in Belarus have been fully aware of the EU's gradual approach to the use of sanctions and of what has to be done for the EU to lift its sanctions and normalise relations. The EU remains ready to substantially step up its political engagement, sectoral cooperation and financial assistance to Belarus, provided that its authorities stop repression, promote a

serious, credible and inclusive political process resulting in free and fair elections under the OSCE/ODIHR's observation, and provide guarantees for the rule of law and for respect for human rights.

The Candidate Countries REPUBLIC of NORTH MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO*, SERBIA* and ALBANIA*, and the EFTA countries ICELAND, LIECHTENSTEIN and NORWAY, members of the European Economic Area, 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.