



United States Mission to the OSCE

One Year Anniversary of the Fraudulent Presidential Election in Belarus

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires, a.i Courtney Austrian
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
August 12, 2021

Three days ago, we marked the one-year anniversary of the August 9 fraudulent presidential election in Belarus and the subsequent violent crackdown by the Lukashenka regime. Today, our thoughts remain with Belarusians who continue to peacefully demand respect for their human rights and fundamental freedoms.

One year ago, the people of Belarus turned out in record numbers to give voice to their democratic aspirations and desire for change. Instead of honoring their votes, the regime fraudulently declared victory and embarked on a campaign of violence and repression. Since that time, Lukashenka sought to cement his hold on power at the expense of the Belarusian people. The regime holds over 600 political prisoners unjustly detained. In the attempt to silence vital independent voices, the authorities raided, shuttered, and imposed politically-motivated charges on media outlets and NGOs.

Belarusian authorities are increasingly intimidating and harassing Belarusians abroad. This transnational repression reflects blatant disregard of international norms, as displayed by the brazen forced diversion of RyanAir flight 4978 for the apparent purpose of arresting an independent Belarusian journalist. It is also clear in the dangerous attempt to intimidate the EU—in particular, our Ally Lithuania—by orchestrating irregular migrant outflows on Belarus' border. Most recently, we witnessed the attempted forced repatriation of Belarusian Olympian Krystsina Tsimanouskaya, who has been offered a humanitarian visa by Poland. These acts of transnational repression cannot be tolerated and must stop.

The Lukashenka regime will continue to face consequences for its unconscionable actions. The world will continue to say *enough is enough* through diplomatic and economic tools such as sanctions. On the August 9 anniversary, the White House issued a new Executive Order to enhance our ability to impose costs on the Lukashenka regime and its support network. On the same day, the United States announced sanctions on forty-four individuals and entities involved in the continuing violent crackdown on civil society, are involved in human rights abuses; are connected to the May 23 RyanAir incident; or are profiting from or sustaining the Belarusian regime at the expense of the Belarusian people. These sanctions demonstrate our determination to hold the Lukashenka regime to account for its human rights abuses, corruption, and attacks on democracy.

Democratic countries are stronger when they stand together. Alongside these U.S. actions, we welcome the steps taken by the United Kingdom and Canada against the Lukashenka regime on August 9 and those announced by the European Union on June 24. The United States further commends the ongoing close coordination with Lithuania and Poland—demonstrating steadfast international resolve in supporting the Belarusian people’s democratic aspirations.

The United States once again calls on the Belarusian authorities to end the crackdown on members of civil society, the opposition, the media, athletes, students, legal professionals, and other citizens and immediately release all political prisoners. We also renew our call for the Lukashenka regime to accept the OSCE’s offer to facilitate a national dialogue leading to free and fair elections under international observation. We stand with the people of Belarus in support of their human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

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