



## **EUROPEAN UNION**

### **OSCE Permanent Council No. 1303 Vienna, 18 February 2021**

#### **EU Statement on the recent developments in Belarus in response to the Current Issue raised by US**

The European Union strongly condemns the ongoing crackdown on journalists, bloggers, media actors and human rights defenders, as well as other civil society and trade union activists in Belarus. This Tuesday, more than 40 human rights defenders, journalists and media actors, mostly affiliated with the Belarusian Association of Journalists and the Human Rights Center “Viasna”, were either detained or targeted in police raids.

We consider these unacceptable actions as yet another attempt to intimidate, Human Rights Defenders, journalists and media actors and to hinder them from reporting on the human rights violations in Belarus. This new wave of persecutions of the Belarusian civil society fits into a broader picture of state-run repressions in Belarus, which have escalated dramatically since the rigged presidential election in August 2020. Such repressive acts utterly contradict the OSCE commitments and international human rights standards.

The EU supports ODIHR Director Mr. Matteo Mecacci’s call on the authorities in Belarus to respect the rights of human rights defenders in line with its OSCE commitments, and RFoM Teresa Ribeiro’s urgent call on the authorities to reverse this negative trend and bring their policies and practices in compliance with their OSCE commitments regarding media freedom and journalists’ safety. In 2018, Belarus supported the important Ministerial Council decision on the safety of journalists and joined other participating States in acknowledging that governments have a key role in enabling a safe working environment for journalists.

We also recall our joint commitment from Astana, where we all reiterated that human rights and fundamental freedoms are inalienable, and that their protection and promotion is our first responsibility.

We urge the Belarusian authorities to end the ongoing crackdown on the pro-democracy movement, civil society and independent media, and reiterate our urgent call to immediately release and rehabilitate all political prisoners, peaceful protesters, as well as arbitrarily detained journalists and media actors.

We repeat our call on Belarus to follow-up on the recommendations from the Moscow Mechanism report, as presented in November 2020.

We urge Belarusian authorities to take on the offer, as presented by the former and current Chairperson-in-Office on 28 August, to facilitate a genuine and inclusive dialogue. As stated by Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama, “We owe it to the men, women and children of Belarus, to have their voices heard, so that they, through dialogue not violence, can determine their own future”.

The EU reiterates its firm belief that only democracy, respect for human rights, the rule of law and free and fair elections respecting the democratic will of the people of Belarus can guarantee a stable, sovereign, and prosperous future of Belarus.

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

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