



## **EUROPEAN UNION**

### **OSCE Permanent Council No. 1305 Vienna, 11 March 2021**

#### **EU Statement on the recent developments in Belarus**

Madame Chair, on the occasion of the International Women's Day the EU pays special tribute to women and girls in Belarus. Despite widespread brutal repression, they have been one of the driving force of the pro-democracy movement.

One of the most prominent figures of the Belarusian opposition, Maryia Kalesnikava, has been detained for the past six months. In February, the Belarusian authorities brought new charges, accusing her of "conspiracy to seize state power in an unconstitutional way", and "establishing and leading an extremist group". Other prominent figures, including the opposition leader Svetlana Tikhonovskaya and a member of the Coordination Council Volha Kavalkova, were forced out of the country. Recently, the Belarusian authorities have again intensified an intimidation campaign against Ms. Tsikhanouskaya, demanding her extradition. Marfa Rabkova, volunteer coordinator at the Human Rights Centre "Viasna", charged on 12 February with incitement of social hatred and participation in a criminal organization, now faces up to twelve years in prison. Liudmila Kazak, Maryia Kalesnikava's lawyer, was recently deprived of her status as a lawyer for "administrative offences". Katsiaryna Barysevich, a TUT.BY journalist, was sentenced on 2 March to six months' imprisonment for disclosing the cause of Raman Bandarenka's death. Daria Chultsova and Katsiaryna Andreyeva, a Belsat TV journalist and camera operator, were both sentenced on 18 February to two years imprisonment for reporting on peaceful protests in Minsk.

We urge the Belarusian authorities to stop the systematic oppression and persecution of peaceful and democratic movements and cease all violence, including the use of

torture and other ill-treatment. The authorities must release and rehabilitate all political prisoners and those arbitrarily detained, including human rights defenders, journalists and other media actors, immediately and unconditionally, and stop acts of repressions against them.

We repeat our call on Belarus to follow up on the recommendations from the Moscow Mechanism report, including on organizing free and fair presidential elections based on international standards. We renew our call on Belarusian authorities to thoroughly and transparently investigate all human rights violations, including sexual and gender-based violence, and to hold those responsible to account. Against this background, the establishment of an independent international body to investigate human rights violations in Belarus, as recommended by the Moscow Mechanism report, retains its high importance. The EU will continue to actively support efforts established in collecting, consolidating and preserving the evidence of serious human rights violations and repression in Belarus. Those responsible must not enjoy impunity and should be brought to justice.

The EU is also deeply concerned about the amendments to the Administrative Code, which came into force on 1 March 2021. It increased liability for violating the order by holding unauthorized mass events and extended the duration of administrative detention for repeated violations of these regulations. This represents an additional tightening of the restrictions on civil society in Belarus and yet another step backwards in Belarus' respect for human rights and the rule of law.

The EU will continue to support the Belarusian people in their legitimate request for democracy and respect of fundamental freedoms. In this regard, we again urge Belarusian 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\*, 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.