



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No.1460 Vienna, 8 February 2024

EU Statement on concerns related to human dimension commitments in Belarus

1. The European Union remains deeply concerned about the human rights violations committed by the regime in Belarus, in violation of its human dimension commitments - as documented by several international and regional human rights mechanisms. Some of the violations may, according to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, amount to crimes against humanity. The EU strongly condemns the regime's continuing persecution and intimidation campaigns against all segments of the Belarusian society, including human rights defenders, journalists, media actors, independent trade unionists, civil society representatives and persons belonging to national minorities. It deplores that political prisoners remain incarcerated in appalling conditions, exposed to torture and ill-treatment, without access to essential health services, and that many of these prisoners have been kept for long periods of time without contact with their lawyers and relatives. The EU reiterates its demand for the immediate and unconditional release of all political prisoners, and their effective rehabilitation. It also urges the Belarusian authorities to abolish the death penalty and, as a first step, to introduce a moratorium.
2. The latest reported wave of raids and arrests targeting relatives of political prisoners and former political prisoners in Belarus is deeply worrying. The raids and searches by the regime's security apparatus affected more than 100 people, many of whom have been arrested.
3. Maryia Kalesnikava, Maxim Znak, Mikalai Statkevich, Andzej Poczobut, Siarhei Tsikhanouski, Viktor Babaryka and some other political prisoners have been kept incommunicado for many months. Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, as well as Pavel Latushka, Volha Kavalkova, Maryla Maroz and Sierhei Dyleuski were convicted in

absentia to sentences ranging from twelve to eighteen years in prison on fake and politically motivated charges.

4. In addition, the Belarusian authorities have further tightened restrictions which pose a threat to freedom of religion or belief and religious activity in an amendment to the law 'On freedom of conscience and religious organisations' on 5 January 2024.
5. We underline that the unprecedented level of repression, including against civil society and independent media, and restrictions on political participation, undermines the potential for fairness and legitimacy of the parliamentary and local “elections” scheduled to take place on 25 February 2024. The EU deeply regrets that the Belarusian authorities decided not to invite an election observation mission by the OSCE/ODIHR, in complete disregard of its international commitments.
6. The EU reiterates its call on the authorities of Belarus to engage in a genuine and inclusive dialogue with all elements of society with a view to holding free and fair elections, under the observation of the OSCE/ODIHR and in accordance with internationally recognised standards.
7. The EU condemns in the strongest terms Belarus' involvement in Russia's unprovoked, unjustifiable and illegal war of aggression against Ukraine and that Belarus' complicity has allowed the unlawful deportation of Ukrainian children to Belarusian territory.
8. The EU has adopted sanctions in response to the internal repression and the support to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine by Lukashenka's regime. The latest package of sanctions addresses human rights violations and the constantly worsening internal repression, and sends a signal that the EU continues to be fully engaged in support to human rights and democracy. It also addresses the risk of sanctions circumvention. In line with the EU's gradual approach, the EU stands ready to take further restrictive and targeted measures as long as the Belarusian authorities continue these actions.
9. The EU supports and commends the efforts of the Belarusian democratic forces and civil society, and acknowledges their pro-European choice. A future democratic Belarus has a place in the European family. Once Belarus embarks on a democratic transition, the EU will provide support to stabilise its economy and reform its institutions. Our aim is to help build resilience and bring forward democratic reforms,

to create new jobs and improve people's living standards, including through a Comprehensive Plan of Economic Support of up to EUR 3 billion to a democratic Belarus.

10. We will continue to support the Belarusian people on their path to an independent, democratic and prosperous country that is part of a peaceful Europe.

The Candidate Countries NORTH MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO*, ALBANIA*, UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA and BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA*, the EFTA countries ICELAND and LIECHTENSTEIN, members of the European Economic Area, as well as ANDORRA and SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

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