



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1290 Vienna, 19 November 2020

EU Statement on human rights violations in Belarus

Mr. Chair, in recent months the European Union has made a number of statements on Belarus in which we have repeatedly expressed our grave concern about the total disrespect for the OSCE commitments by the Belarusian authorities and highlighted the dramatically deteriorating situation in the area of human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law in the country. Time and again, the EU has called on the Belarusian authorities to change the course of their actions, and to adhere to the OSCE commitments and international obligations. Unfortunately, so far the calls were not heard.

The political persecution of representatives of the democratic opposition including the Coordination Council, civil society, and independent media, the use of force by the law enforcement, the violence by unidentified persons acting in coordination with the law enforcement bodies, as well as the mass detention of peaceful protesters remain daily realities in Belarus since the fraudulent presidential election of 9 August. According to Belarusian human rights organisations, in the wake of the unprecedented wave of repressions, over twenty-five thousand persons have been arbitrarily detained for making use of their right to freedom of peaceful assembly, most of them sentenced to administrative arrest and sanctioned with disproportionate fines. Regrettably, this number continues to grow, as every week we are receiving new evidence of these unacceptable practices.

Regarding the reported cases of torture and other ill-treatment despite numerous complaints submitted to the relevant authorities, not a single criminal case has been opened against those responsible. On the contrary, a number of complainants have recently been notified that no such investigations will be opened. This decision

sends another dangerous signal of impunity to the security forces involved and is a carte blanche for them to continue their criminal behavior in the future. Additionally, official calls for tougher punishments for protesters, increasing pressure and intimidation of lawyers as well as threats to fair trial rights add substantially to the prevailing climate of impunity for human rights abuses.

The tragic death of 31-year old Raman Bandarenka caused, according to reports, by the brutality of plain-clothes policemen, reminds us again that impunity breeds further violence. This terrible event resulted from outrageous and shameful actions by the Belarusian authorities, which have not only directly and violently carried out repression of their own population, but also created an environment whereby such lawless, violent acts can take place. This violates the fundamental rights and freedoms of the Belarusian people.

The EU expresses its deepest condolences to Mr Bandarenka's family and stands in solidarity with all the Belarusians who have suffered and continue to suffer at the hands of the Belarusian authorities in the aftermath of the falsified presidential elections.

The EU continues to strongly condemn violence employed by the Belarusian authorities against peaceful protesters, persons engaged in the pro-democracy movement, independent media, representatives of civil society, religious leaders or ordinary Belarusian citizens which was confirmed by the rapporteur under the Moscow Mechanism. We urge Belarus to implement the recommendations made by the rapporteur of the Moscow Mechanism in this regard. We expect the authorities to end the violence and persecution, to release immediately and unconditionally all arbitrarily detained persons, including political prisoners, and to investigate fully and transparently all human rights violations and abuses, including the tragic death of Raman Bandarenka and hold those responsible to account. The EU has already imposed sanctions on 55 individuals responsible for violent repression and intimidation, including Aleksandr Lukashenko and stands ready to impose additional sanctions. We reject the arbitrary decision of 17 November 2020 adopted by the Belarusian authorities in response to the EU sanctions. In view of these developments, the EU has also decided to review its relations with Belarus and increase its support to the Belarusian people and civil society.

The expulsion of the two British diplomats is another unfortunate and unacceptable step by the Belarusian authorities. The reasoning given by the Belarusian authorities is unjustified. Such actions will only isolate Belarus further.

The EU urges Belarus to deepen its co-operation with the OSCE and to make full use of the Moscow Mechanism report's recommendations and the expertise offered by the ODIHR to help strengthen human rights and democratic institutions in Belarus. At the same time we again urge the Belarusian authorities to work with international organizations including the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Belarus and the UN Human Rights Commissioner on Human Rights, and to finally accept the offer made by the current and incoming OSCE Chairs, with the aim of facilitating a genuine dialogue process in Belarus.

The Candidate Countries REPUBLIC of NORTH MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO*, SERBIA* and ALBANIA*, and 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.