



EUROPEAN UNION

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EU Statement on developments in Belarus

The European Union has been following the latest developments in Belarus very closely and with increasing concern. We call on the Belarusian authorities to find a way out of the crisis by bringing about an end to violence and engaging in a genuine and inclusive national dialogue. Only a peaceful and democratic process, underpinned by independent and free media and a strong civil society, can provide sustainable solutions.

In this regard, we fully support the proposal of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, Prime Minister and Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs of Albania, Edi Rama, and the incoming OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden, Ann Linde, to pay a visit to Belarus and to meet with the government and representatives of the opposition. The OSCE can offer different tools in supporting the implementation of the OSCE commitments and in facilitating the national dialogue. The European Union is ready to provide assistance to further this effort. We urge the Belarusian authorities to engage quickly, constructively and meaningfully.

The European Union had followed the developments leading to the presidential elections closely and had raised its concerns repeatedly, including within the OSCE, in particular in connection with the detention of prospective candidates and the irregularities related to candidate registration, including the lack of transparency in the process of verification of the signatures.

We also raised our concerns about the limited independent monitoring by local observers, intimidation and detention of journalists and other media actors, human rights defenders and political activists.

The Presidential elections were neither free nor fair, therefore we do not recognise the results as presented by the Belarus Central Election Commission. We regret that, despite repeated calls, the lack of a timely, as well as unconditional, invitation to observe the presidential election had precluded ODIHR from observing the election process. The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and PACE were not able to

observe either. Credible domestic independent observers reported that the electoral process did not meet the international standards expected of an OSCE participating State.

Only the day after the elections, following reports of serious administrative misconduct, ODIHR expressed its concerns about the excessive use of force by police across Belarus in the face of peaceful protests and called for a prompt and effective investigation of any police brutality. In the following days, the situation in Belarus deteriorated. Thousands of people have been detained and held in overcrowded detention centres, and the crackdown on freedoms of peaceful assembly, media and expression has intensified.

We condemn the violence displayed by the state authorities against peaceful protesters, which caused several fatalities and many injuries. We are alarmed by the arbitrary arrests and allegations of serious human rights violations in temporary arrests and detention centres. In this context, we emphasize that the prohibition of torture and other ill-treatment is absolute.

We are also concerned about the criminal case opened against the Coordination Council, as well as the intimidation and detention of its members. The Coordination Council, which consists of representatives of different parts of the society, could be instrumental in paving the way for a genuine and inclusive national dialogue.

We remind Belarus of the urgent need to respect its international obligations and OSCE commitments. All countries across the OSCE region have committed to hold genuinely democratic elections to uphold human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the right to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, to ensure the safety of human rights defenders and journalists, foreign or domestic, and their ability to work without police interference.

In this respect, we call on the Belarusian authorities: to release immediately and unconditionally all unlawfully detained persons in relation to these elections, including those detained on political grounds, and to abstain from further detentions; to stop the criminal case against the members of the Coordination Council; to refrain from violence and immediately cease all human rights violations; and to conduct a thorough, transparent and impartial investigation into all alleged human rights violations, in order to hold those responsible to account. Any perpetrators of human rights violations must be brought to justice and victims provided with appropriate redress.

The European Union will continue to support a democratic, independent and sovereign, as well as prosperous and stable Belarus. We will also support the people of Belarus in exercising their right to free, fair and democratic elections.

We will continue to follow the situation closely and stand ready to contribute to efforts to peacefully end the crisis.

The Candidate Countries REPUBLIC of NORTH MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO*, SERBIA* and ALBANIA*, the EFTA country LIECHTENSTEIN, member 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.