



EUROPEAN UNION

28th Meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council 2-3 December 2021

EU Statement on the situation in Belarus

1. Madam Chairperson, 2021 has been yet again a year of further degradation of the human rights situation in Belarus. The Lukashenko regime has continued an orchestrated repression and intimidation campaign against civil society, human rights defenders, lawyers, academics, journalists and other media actors, persons belonging to national minorities, trade unions, as well as the systematic destruction of non-governmental organisations and independent media, with the ultimate aim of silencing all remaining independent voices and suppressing civic space in Belarus. Arbitrary detentions, unjust persecutions, including denial of the right to a fair trial, and hundreds of documented cases of torture continue to take place in an environment of impunity. The EU deplores the decision by the Investigative Committee of Belarus, announced on 26 August, not to open criminal investigations into some 680 complaints of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, including sexual and gender-based violence. This decision must be reversed. No one responsible for these crimes should enjoy impunity.
2. Recently, we marked the first anniversary of the presentation of the OSCE Moscow Mechanism report, prepared by Professor Wolfgang Benedek. Let me highlight the following recommendations from the report:

The Belarusian authorities should:

- Organize new genuine presidential elections based on international standards, inviting OSCE/ODIHR observation as well as other international and domestic observers;

- Immediately cease all violence, in particular torture and ill-treatment against peaceful protestors and opponents;
- Immediately and unconditionally release all prisoners held for political reasons;
- Ensure that the standards of fair trial are respected;
- Ensure the freedom of peaceful assembly in line with international standards;
- Ensure the safety of all journalists and provide an enabling environment for the work of journalists and the media;
- Refrain from interference with the access to the Internet, and terminate censorship and blocking of webpages;
- Ensure that an independent and impartial body promptly investigates all allegations of torture, ill-treatment, sexual violence, disappearance and killing by security forces.

Regretfully, the report's recommendations remain unaddressed.

3. The EU also condemns in the strongest terms the instrumentalization of migrants and refugees for political purposes, as well as the numerous provocations against the border guards and the deliberate attacks against the border infrastructure of EU Member States. The authorities of Belarus must stop these practices immediately. We remain firm and resolute to impose further restrictive measures against those responsible.
4. The EU stands in solidarity with Latvia, Lithuania and Poland, which are most affected by this hybrid attack, and will continue assisting those most directly impacted. On 15 November, the EU amended its sanctions regime in view of the situation at the EU's border with Belarus, as a direct response to the orchestrated instrumentalization of human beings for political purposes. The EU's listing criteria on which specific designations can be based were broadened, and the EU will now be able to target individuals and entities involved in and contributing to activities by the Lukashenko regime that facilitate the illegal crossing of EU's external borders. Lukashenko's regime is solely responsible for the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Belarus. Third country nationals brought to the Belarusian border areas must be provided with the

opportunity to return to Minsk and to their home countries. International humanitarian organizations must also be granted unhindered access to them.

5. The EU expresses deep concern about the health condition of all those detained and calls on Belarus to provide them with medical care. The EU and its Member States remain united in further supporting the people of Belarus, including by providing emergency assistance for the victims of oppression and for independent media and humanitarian assistance to the civilian population, including in favour of persons belonging to vulnerable groups.
6. In November this year, 35 OSCE participating States invoked the OSCE Vienna Mechanism. The replies provided by Belarus have been unsatisfactory and not credible, indicating that there is no real change in its position.
7. The OSCE's comprehensive concept of security recognizes that respect for human rights within States is essential to lasting peace, prosperity and cooperation among States. It is high time for Belarus to adhere fully to the commitments and obligations it has freely made.
8. The Belarusian people demand respect for their human rights and fundamental freedoms, the right to elect representatives in a fair and free election and to hold those that violate these rights to account. All core issues for the OSCE. The Belarusian people chose a peaceful way to fight for their rights through democratic elections, and through peaceful demonstrations. Regrettably, the regime responded with unprecedented repression that continues unabated.
9. We urge the Belarusian authorities to engage in a genuine dialogue with its people, taking up on the offer of the previous and current OSCE Chair. We stand ready to support an inclusive national dialogue in order to resolve the crisis in a sustainable way, safeguarding Belarus' sovereignty and independence, as well as its safe, democratic and prosperous future.

Madam Chairperson, please attach this statement to the journal of today's meeting.

The Candidate Countries the 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.