



## EUROPEAN UNION

### OSCE Permanent Council No. 1276 Vienna, 23 July 2020

#### **EU Statement on the latest developments in Belarus in the context of the upcoming presidential elections**

On 14 July, the Belarusian Central Electoral Commission announced that Siarhei Cherachen, Andrei Dzmitryev, Hanna Kanapatskaya, Aliaksandr Lukashenka and Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya were registered to stand in the Belarusian Presidential elections on 9 August. We have seen that other interested candidates have been unable to register. Viktor Babaryka was denied registration on the grounds that inconsistencies were allegedly found in his income and property declaration, and Valery Tsapkala was denied registration due to an alleged insufficient number of valid ballot access signatures and failure to disclose the ownership of Priorbank shares in the income and property declaration by his wife. Both candidates had reportedly collected more than 100,000 signatures, as prescribed by the national legislation.

The lack of transparency in the process of verification of the signatures supporting the presidential candidates, as already noted by ODIHR in 2010 and 2015, undermines confidence in the registration process. Moreover, the legal provisions for candidate registration pose disproportionate and unreasonable barriers to candidacy, contrary to OSCE commitments and other international standards.

The EU expects that previous ODIHR recommendations to include substantial procedural and legal safeguards that enhance inclusiveness, integrity and transparency during all stages of the electoral process, in particular to introduce clear and reasonable criteria and mechanisms for candidate registration and signature verification, be fully implemented.

We regret that the lack of a timely, as well as unconditional, invitation to observe the upcoming presidential election has precluded ODIHR from observing the ongoing election process. We reiterate our full support to ODIHR which, since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, has made every effort to deliver on its mandate for election observation.

As the election approaches and recalling earlier EU statements, the EU expects the Belarusian authorities allow a free and fair electoral campaign for all candidates, provide unhindered accreditation to domestic observers in the absence of ODIHR observation, and register independent and foreign journalists, allowing them to cover freely the electoral process in Belarus. Human rights and the rule of law must be respected and voters should be able to exercise their civil and political rights. Furthermore, the EU calls on Belarus to immediately release all those detained in the context of the upcoming presidential elections.

The EU is particularly concerned with the reported use of force, arbitrary detentions of and fines imposed against journalists, bloggers and media actors in Belarus, who are reporting on public protests. Such actions by Belarusian law enforcement bodies are unacceptable. As stated by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media and many OSCE participating States, journalists play a crucial role in covering events of public interest and Belarusian authorities have to ensure that they are able to perform their work.

We remain committed to strengthening our engagement with the Belarusian people and civil society. We support the independence and sovereignty of Belarus. Tangible steps taken by Belarus to respect universal fundamental freedoms, rule of law and human rights will remain key for the shaping of the EU's future policy towards Belarus.

The Candidate Countries REPUBLIC of NORTH MACEDONIA\*, MONTENEGRO\* and ALBANIA\*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, and the EFTA countries ICELAND, LIECHTENSTEIN and NORWAY, as well as CANADA align themselves with this statement.

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