



EUROPEAN UNION

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EU on recent developments in Belarus

Madam/Mr. Chair, the sentencing of Viktar Babaryka to 14 years in prison for exercising his political right and standing as a candidate in the presidential elections in August 2020 is impermissible. This is one of at least 125 unfair and arbitrary recent verdicts by Belarusian courts in politically motivated trials, often held behind closed doors and without due process of law.

As recently confirmed by the UN Special Rapporteur on Belarus Anaïs Marin, the Belarusian regime clearly violates international human rights it has committed to uphold. Over 555 political prisoners, hundreds of documented instances of torture and ill-treatment, as well as continued mass repression against all segments of society unprecedented in scale and severity are a sad reality.

The EU demands the immediate and unconditional release of Mr Babaryka as well as of all political prisoners, detained journalists and media actors, lawyers and people who are behind bars for exercising their fundamental rights. The regime must halt repression and injustice and hold perpetrators to account.

The EU is gravely concerned about the drastic limitation of the EU diplomatic presence in Belarus. On 6 July, the Belarusian authorities ordered the Head of Mission at the Embassy of Lithuania in Minsk and the Consul General in Hrodna to leave the country by 11 July. On 28 June, the Belarusian authorities asked the Head of the EU Delegation in Minsk to return to Brussels for consultations. These actions are detrimental to Belarus and its population, further isolating the Belarusian authorities. Keeping diplomatic channels of communication open in time of difficulties is crucial. We call on the Belarusian authorities to allow the full

presence of the EU's and its Member States' diplomatic missions to allow diplomacy to work.

On 8 and 9 July, the Belarus authorities raided the offices of independent media outlets, including Nasha Niva, Brestskaya Gazeta and Intex Press, and homes of their editors and journalists. Nasha Niva and at least two other media sites – Dev.by and Euroradio, have been blocked. Three employees of Nasha Niva, including editor-in-chief Yahor Martsinovich, remain in custody. The EU urges the Belarusian authorities to reverse the current repressive policies and to end the ongoing crackdown on the independent media, journalists and other media actors.

The EU shares the assessment of the RFoM, Teresa Ribeiro, that the recent legal regulations adopted by the Belarusian authorities, including "On amending legislation in the sphere of mass media", "On amending the Law of the Republic of Belarus "On Mass Events in the Republic of Belarus" and "On Amending the Codes Related to Criminal Liability Issues" are detrimental to the already dire state of freedom of expression and freedom of the media in the country. We support her call on the national authorities to repeal these excessively restrictive provisions and undertake a comprehensive reform of the national legislation to bring it in line with applicable international standards and the OSCE commitments. We urge the Belarusian authorities to cooperate with the RFoM and implement the Office's recommendations.

We are concerned over substantial increase of cases of attempted violation of EU's external border. The EU condemns attempts to instrumentalize illegal migration for political purposes. We stand in solidarity with Lithuania and demand the Minsk authorities to stop facilitating illegal migration to the EU. We call on Belarus to respect and implement its international commitments and obligations, including those undertaken within the OSCE.

The EU will continue its efforts to push for accountability for the brutal repression by the Belarusian authorities. The EU also continues to call for a comprehensive and genuine political dialogue with representatives of the democratic opposition and civil society, facilitated by the OSCE, leading to new free and fair elections.

Since last October, the EU has progressively imposed restrictive measures in response to the continued intimidation and violent repression of peaceful

protesters, opposition members, journalists and media actors. On 21 and 24 June, in coordination with our international partners, the EU imposed restrictive measures against 78 Belarusian individuals and 8 entities, as well as the new targeted economic sanctions to respond inter alia to the forced landing of a Ryanair flight in Minsk on 23 May 2021 and the related detention of journalist Raman Pratasevich and Sofia Sapega. In line with its gradual approach, the EU stands ready to consider further measures.

The Candidate Countries REPUBLIC of NORTH MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO*, SERBIA* and ALBANIA*, and the EFTA countries ICELAND and NORWAY, members of the European Economic Area, as well as GEORGIA align themselves with this statement.

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