



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**

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Subject : Council Conclusions on Belarus

Delegations will find attached the Conclusions on Belarus as adopted by the Council (Foreign Affairs) at its meeting on 31 January 2011.

COUNCIL CONCLUSIONS ON BELARUS**31 January 2011**

1. Recalling its previous conclusions on Belarus and in particular its Conclusions of October 2010 and the Statement by High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Catherine Ashton on 20 December, as well as other EU statements regarding the Presidential elections of 19 December 2010 and its violent aftermath, the Council deeply regrets that, according to OSCE/ODIHR, the Presidential elections demonstrated that Belarus still has a considerable way to go in meeting its OSCE commitments. In particular the electoral process deteriorated significantly during the vote count, undermining the steps taken to improve the conduct of the elections.

2. The Council particularly deplores that the election night was marred by violence by the Belarusian authorities. It strongly condemns the arrest of many presidential candidates, hundreds of activists, journalists and civil society representatives, as well as the ensuing detention and harassment of the opposition, independent media and civil society on political grounds.

3. The Council reiterates its demands for the immediate release of those detained on political grounds following the elections on 19 December, and their rehabilitation. The Council urges Belarus to respect the rights of detainees and their families, paying particular attention to detainees' children, and the right to legal representation. Furthermore, it underlines the need to ensure the access of family members to the detainees. The Council calls on the Belarusian authorities to end the persecution of democratic forces, independent media and representatives of civil society, and students, and to end any penalisation or discrimination against those exercising their right to freedom of expression and freedom of assembly, including the leaders of the opposition parties.

4. The EU regrets the decision of the Belarusian authorities not to renew the mandate of the OSCE Office in Minsk. The EU strongly believes that the mandate of the OSCE Office has not yet been fulfilled and calls for an urgent reversal of this decision by the Belarusian authorities.

5. In view of these recent events and developments, the Council has decided to impose travel restrictions and an asset freeze against persons responsible for the fraudulent Presidential elections of 19 December 2010 and the subsequent violent crackdown on democratic opposition, civil society and representatives of independent mass media. The Council has also decided to reinstate the travel restrictions imposed on certain persons in Belarus in relation to the elections in 2004 and 2006 and the crackdown on civil society and democratic opposition, which had been suspended since 13 October 2008 in order to encourage progress. These restrictive measures and the list of persons targeted will be kept open and under constant review. The Council underlines that the release and rehabilitation of all people detained on political grounds would be an essential element in this regard. This, along with progress towards further reforms of the Electoral Code, the freedom of expression and of the media, the freedom of assembly and association, would pave the way for the lifting of the restrictive measures.

6. The European Union remains strongly committed to strengthening its engagement with the Belarusian people and civil society. The EU is therefore working on measures to provide urgent support to those repressed and detained on political grounds and their families, as well as support to civil society. It will also review its assistance to Belarus which is aimed at addressing the needs of the population, in order to further strengthen support to civil society, targeting in particular NGOs and students, including through the International Donors' Conference in Warsaw on 2 February.

7. The Council recalls the importance it attaches to facilitating people-to-people contacts with Belarus to the benefit of the Belarusian population at large. It looks forward to the start of negotiations for visa facilitation and readmission agreements with Belarus, once the negotiating directives have been adopted. Pending the conclusion of such agreements, the EU will encourage the optimal use of the existing flexibilities offered by the Visa Code, in particular the possibilities for Member States to waive and reduce visa fees for certain categories of citizens.

8. The EU remains committed to its policy of critical engagement, including through dialogue and the Eastern Partnership, and recalls that the EU has consistently offered to deepen its relationship with Belarus. The Council reiterates that such a deepening is conditional on progress towards respect by the Belarusian authorities for the principles of democracy, the rule of law and human rights. The Union remains open to developing bilateral relations with Belarus, provided the Belarusian authorities prove their willingness to respect these principles. The Council will regularly re-examine the situation in Belarus and stands ready to consider further targeted measures in all areas of cooperation as appropriate.
