



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1408 Vienna, 26 January 2023

EU Statement on the political prisoners in Belarus

1. Mr. Chair, the EU condemns the ongoing violent repression of civil society, democratic activists, journalists and media actors, as well as of persons belonging to national minorities in Belarus. Currently, over 1,440 Belarusians remain unlawfully detained or imprisoned on politically motivated charges, facing torture and other ill-treatment in inhumane conditions, deprived of their rights to a fair trial and to an independent court.
2. The Belarusian authorities reject any attempt to peacefully resolve the internal political crisis through dialogue and to start a democratisation process. Those striving for a free and democratic Belarus and demanding new free and fair elections are labelled as “extremists” and, according to the amendment to the Criminal Code, they might even face capital punishment. Arbitrary legislation deprives citizens of fundamental rights; a new law makes it possible to deprive Belarusians living abroad of their citizenship.
3. Since the beginning of this month, a series of trials that do not live up to international standards against prominent opposition figures, human rights defenders, as well as journalists, have started:
 - on 5 January against Ales Bialiatski, Valiantsin Stefanivich and Uladzimir Labkovich, whose engagement in defending freedom and human rights was recognised by the Nobel Peace Prize Committee;
 - on 9 January against Maryna Zolatava and Ludmila Chekina, journalists of the biggest independent media outlet in Belarus (Tut.by);

- on 16 January against Andrzej Poczobut, journalist and member of the board of the independent Union of Poles in Belarus;
 - on 17 January (*in absentia*) against leaders of the democratic opposition Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, Pavel Latushka and three other members of the Coordination Council.
 - on 18 January against Darya Losik, the wife of the blogger and political prisoner Ihar Losik, sentenced to 15 years in prison in a politically motivated trial behind closed doors. She was charged with “assisting extremism” over providing a comment to the Belsat TV channel. On 19 January, she was sentenced to two years in a colony.
4. They are facing fabricated charges of treason, extremism, conspiracy and incitement to hatred and are risking many years of prison just for trying to exercise their democratic rights.
 5. The EU condemns this brutal repression and the politically motivated trials. We will continue to support all those striving for a free, democratic and independent Belarus.
 6. The EU reiterates its call on Minsk to immediately and unconditionally release and rehabilitate all those unlawfully detained, to stop violating the human rights and fundamental freedoms of the Belarusian people, and to engage in a genuine and inclusive dialogue with the democratic forces and civil society to find a way out of the current crisis and to enable a peaceful political transition. We also reiterate our call on the Belarusian authorities to refrain from any further involvement in or facilitation of Russia’s illegal war of aggression against Ukraine.

The Candidate Countries NORTH MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO*, ALBANIA*, UKRAINE and the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, and the EFTA countries ICELAND and LIECHTENSTEIN, members of the European Economic Area, align themselves with this statement.

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