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European Union

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OUTCOME OF PROCEEDINGS

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Delegations
Subject:	Council conclusions on Belarus

Delegations will find attached Council conclusions on Belarus as approved by the Council (Foreign Affairs) on 19 February 2024.

Council Conclusions on Belarus

1. The Council reaffirms its Conclusions on Belarus of 12 October 2020, which set out the EU's policy vis-à-vis Belarus.
2. The EU stands with the people of Belarus. The Council underlines its unwavering support for the Belarusian people's quest for a free, democratic, sovereign and independent Belarus as part of a peaceful and prosperous Europe.
3. The Council remains deeply concerned about the deteriorating human rights situation in Belarus and strongly condemns the continuing persecution and intimidation campaigns against all segments of Belarusian society, including human rights defenders, journalists, independent trade unionists, civil society representatives and persons belonging to national minorities by the Belarusian regime. It deplores that political prisoners remain incarcerated in appalling conditions, exposed to torture and ill-treatment, without access to essential health services, and that many of these prisoners have been kept for long periods of time without contact with their lawyers and relatives. The EU urges the immediate and unconditional release of all political prisoners, and their effective rehabilitation. It also urges the Belarusian authorities to abolish the death penalty and, as a first step, to introduce a moratorium.
4. The Council underlines that the unprecedented level of repression, including against civil society and independent media, and restrictions on political participation undermines the potential for fairness and legitimacy of the parliamentary and local elections scheduled to take place on 25 February 2024. The EU regrets that the Belarusian authorities decided not to invite an election observation mission by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) to observe the upcoming elections, contrary to its international commitments.
5. The Council continues to support the democratic right of the Belarusian people to elect their representatives through free and fair elections. The EU calls on the authorities of Belarus to engage in a genuine and inclusive dialogue with all elements of society with a view to holding free and fair elections, under the observation of the OSCE/ODIHR and in accordance with internationally recognised standards.
6. The Council reiterates its commitment to hold those responsible for human rights violations and abuses to account. Gross human rights violations continue to be committed to repress the Belarusian society and silence anyone perceived as opposing the regime. Some of these violations may, according to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, amount to crimes against humanity.
7. In this regard, the EU reaffirms the importance of continued scrutiny of the human rights situation in Belarus by the UN Human Rights Council and welcomes the work of the Special

Rapporteur on the situation of Human Rights in Belarus, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the International Accountability Platform for Belarus. The EU urges the Belarusian authorities to cooperate fully with international and regional human rights mechanisms. The application of universal jurisdiction is also an important tool to prevent and combat impunity and promote international accountability.

8. The Council condemns the decree of 4 September 2023, signed by Lukashenka, restricting passport and other consular services to Belarusians abroad and reiterates its commitment to continue supporting Belarusian citizens in the EU that fled repression, including through coordinated efforts amongst EU member states.
9. The Council strongly condemns the continued support provided by the Belarusian regime to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and calls on Belarus to refrain from such action and to abide by its international obligations. Belarus must stop being an accomplice in Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. The EU condemns the announcements by Russia of its intention to deploy nuclear weapons on the territory of Belarus and that an agreement has been reached between Russia and Belarus to this end. These announcements go against Belarus' international commitments under the Budapest Memorandum and contribute to already heightened tensions. The Council also condemns the complicity of the Belarusian regime in the unlawful deportation of Ukrainian children and reiterates its urgent call on Belarus to immediately ensure their safe return to Ukraine. The European Union remains committed to Belarus' sovereignty and independence.
10. The Council further strongly condemns hybrid attacks at the EU's external borders, including the instrumentalisation of migrants by the Belarusian regime, in complicity with Russia, for political purposes. The EU will continue to stand in solidarity with the affected Member States
11. The Council underlines that the safety and security of nuclear installations is a key priority for the EU. In this context, the EU express concerns for the numerous unresolved safety issues at the Belarusian Nuclear power plant and urges Belarus to adhere to the highest international environmental and nuclear safety standards, as well as to promptly implement the EU stress test recommendations.
12. The Council has imposed targeted sanctions in response to the repression, misconduct of the electoral process, inciting and organising illegal border crossings, human rights violations, and the authorities' involvement in Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. In line with the EU's gradual approach, the EU stands ready to take further restrictive and targeted measures as long as the Belarusian authorities continue these actions.
13. The Council expresses its deep concern about the Lukashenka regime's actions affecting the national identity of Belarus and reaffirms its commitment to supporting and promoting the Belarusian language and culture. The EU recalls the importance of people-to-people contacts, inter alia by supporting mobility, youth and cultural activities, in line with the principles included in the Council Conclusions of 2020. Ordinary Belarusian citizens continue to benefit from the EU – Belarus Visa Facilitation Agreement.

14. The Council values the Belarusian civil society as an important partner in the framework of the Eastern Partnership and recalls that the Eastern Partnership remains open for a future democratic Belarus.
15. The EU will continue to support Belarusian civil society and democratic forces. In this context, the Council welcomes the establishment of the EU Consultative Group with Belarusian civil society and democratic forces, and the coordination of assistance through the Senior Officials Meetings, and expresses support for their continuation. The EU also welcomes the cooperation of the Council of Europe with the Belarusian democratic forces and civil society through its Contact Group.
16. The EU supports and commends the efforts of the Belarusian democratic forces and civil society, and acknowledges their pro-European choice. A future democratic Belarus has a place in the European family. Once Belarus embarks on a democratic transition, the EU will provide support to stabilise its economy and reform its institutions. Our aim is to help build resilience and bring forward democratic reforms, to create new jobs and improve people's living standards, including through a Comprehensive Plan of Economic Support of up to EUR 3 billion to a democratic Belarus.
17. The EU remains strongly committed to maintaining Belarus high on the international agenda. The people of Belarus can be assured of the continued focus of the European Union on their well-being, their human rights and their entitlement to a prosperous future in a democratic Belarus.
