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To: Delegations

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Subject: Council Conclusions on Belarus

Delegations will find attached Council conclusions on Belarus as adopted by the Council (Foreign Affairs) on 12 October 2020.

Council Conclusions on Belarus

1. Recalling its previous conclusions on Belarus as well as the recent Declarations by the High Representative on behalf of the EU, the Council deeply regrets that the persistent call of the Belarusian people for the respect of their fundamental freedoms and human rights has not been heeded by the Belarusian authorities.
2. The Council declared the 9 August Presidential elections as neither free nor fair. Credible reports of domestic observers show that the electoral process did not meet Belarus' own legislation and its international commitments. A. Lukashenko lacks any democratic legitimacy. The Belarusian people clearly demand new elections. Against this background, the EU supports legitimate calls for new, free and fair presidential elections in line with international standards and under the OSCE/ODIHR's observation.
3. The Council reiterates its full support for Belarus' sovereignty and independence. The Council underlines the democratic right of the Belarusian people to elect their President through new free and fair elections, without external interference. Only upholding human rights, democracy, the rule of law and conducting free and fair elections in respect of the democratic will of the people of Belarus will guarantee the long-term stability and sovereignty of Belarus.
4. The EU calls on the Belarusian authorities to seek a peaceful and democratic solution to the crisis through an inclusive national dialogue with broader society, in particular the Coordination Council. The EU continues to support the proposal of the current and upcoming OSCE Chairmanships-in-Office to facilitate this dialogue. The EU will promote such an approach with all international actors and regrets that Belarus, as an OSCE participating State, is not responsive to this offer.

5. The Council strongly condemns violence employed by the Belarusian authorities against peaceful protesters, including youth and women, and the numerous cases of torture and sexual violence. It calls on the authorities to release immediately and unconditionally all arbitrarily detained persons, including political prisoners and media workers. The Council strongly urges the Belarusian authorities to investigate fully all human rights violations and abuses, and to end the persecution of the persons engaged in the pro-democracy movement, independent media and representatives of civil society, including the members of the Coordination Council, as well as to ensure conditions allowing the citizens of Belarus to exercise their rights of freedom of opinion, expression and assembly.
6. The EU is determined to address the human rights situation in Belarus and mobilise the international community in support of the Belarusian people, including in the UN Human Rights Council, the OSCE and the Council of Europe. The Council welcomes the adoption of the Resolution on the situation on human rights in Belarus at the 45th session of the UN Human Rights Council and calls on Belarus to implement and allow full access of the UN Special Rapporteur to Belarus and cooperate with other UN Special Rapporteurs. The EU regrets the lack of cooperation by Belarus in the framework of the OSCE Moscow Mechanism mandated to investigate human rights violations and abuses in Belarus.
7. The Council imposed sanctions, consisting of travel ban and asset freeze, against persons responsible for the fraudulent nature of the presidential elections and the violent crackdown on peaceful protests. The list of persons targeted will be under constant review. In line with the EU's gradual approach, the EU stands ready to take further restrictive measures, including against entities and high-ranking officials, including A. Lukashenko.

8. In view of developments, the Council decided to review the EU's relations with Belarus. The EU will:
- a) Scale down bilateral cooperation with Belarusian authorities at central level and increase EU's support to the Belarusian people and civil society; Exclude from this cooperation institutions responsible for violations and abuses of human rights.
 - b) Recalibrate bilateral financial EU assistance to Belarus in order to ensure it benefits the population at large notably by directing it to the maximum possible extent away from central authorities and towards non-state, local and regional actors, including through cross-border cooperation programmes.
 - c) Continue engagement with Belarus on issues of interest to the EU and the Belarusian society.
 - d) Within the **Eastern Partnership** multilateral framework, and with the exception of institutions responsible for violations and abuses of human rights, maintain cooperation with Belarus at non-political level, and intensify cooperation with key non-state Belarusian stakeholders.

In view of the above decision, the European Investment Bank (EIB) will review its operations in Belarus. The EU Member States will coordinate their positions accordingly also within the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) Board of Directors.

9. The EU stands with the Belarusian people and has immediately made available additional financial resources for victims of violence, civil society organisations and independent media. The EU is working on measures to provide further urgent and medium-term support to Belarusian civil society, including youth, persons in vulnerable situations and independent media, as well as to the private and health sectors.

10. The Council underlines the importance of people-to-people contacts. The conclusion of the visa facilitation agreement was an important step in this regard. Belarusians will continue to be offered possibilities to participate in European exchange programmes such as Erasmus +, Horizon Europe or under Eastern Partnership initiatives. The EU will continue supporting the Belarusian University in exile: European Humanities University in Vilnius and will offer additional scholarships and mobility schemes.
11. The Council underlines that the safety and security of nuclear installations is a key priority for the EU and remains of great importance for the EU relations with Belarus. Referring to European Council Conclusions of 12 December 2019 and of 2 October 2020, the Council urges Belarus to comply with the highest international environmental and safety standards and implement the EU stress tests recommendations without delay. In this regard, it underlines the importance of the cooperation between Belarus and European Nuclear Safety Regulators Group (ENSREG) in the stress test process, including a formal review and monitoring of the urgent implementation of the Belarus' National Action Plan by ENSREG.
12. The Council highlights that the EU is ready to substantially step up its political engagement, sectoral cooperation and financial assistance to Belarus, provided its authorities respect principles of democracy, the rule of law and human rights and:
 - a) Stop all repression and abuses of the human rights of persons engaged in the pro-democracy movement, independent media and representatives of the civil society;
 - b) Release, rehabilitate and financially compensate political prisoners;
 - c) Provide safe conditions for return of those in political and forced exile;
 - d) Promote a serious, credible and inclusive political process resulting in free and fair elections under the OSCE/ODIHR's observation;
 - e) Provide guarantees for the respect for human rights, including the freedoms of opinion and expression, information, assembly and association, as well as the freedom of media.

13. The Council reaffirms that the EU would be ready to support a peaceful democratic transition in Belarus. Should such a transition take place, and upon the request by the Belarusian government, the EU will use a variety of instruments in line with the Eastern Partnership policy. The following would i.a. be considered:

- a) Entering into negotiations on a EU-Belarus framework agreement;
- b) Strengthening of sectoral cooperation and increasing participation in EU programmes and cooperation with EU agencies.
- c) Launch of a comprehensive plan of economic support for democratic Belarus including:
 - Substantial financial and technical assistance for institutional reforms and economic development within the multiannual financial framework;
 - Resumption of talks on further reforms needed to enable EU's macro-financial assistance;
 - Substantial scaling up of EIB and EBRD operations;

The EU would also further support Belarus in its accession to the World Trade Organization.

The Council recalls that under the Eastern Partnership, in due course and if conditions allow, strengthened cooperation and further progress in the area of visa policy, such as the opening of a visa liberalisation dialogue, is possible under the precondition of sustained and effective implementation of the visa facilitation and readmission agreements as well as a well-managed and secure mobility.

14. The Council remains impressed by the perseverance of the Belarusian people and their commitment to a democratic future of their country. The people of Belarus deserve better and their demand for new free and fair elections should be answered positively. Only an inclusive national dialogue with broader society, in particular the Coordination Council, can lead to a peaceful and sustainable solution of the crisis. The EU expects that all partners of Belarus support this dialogue. The EU supports this objective and stands with the people of Belarus.
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