



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



Council conclusions on Belarus

*2974th EXTERNAL RELATIONS Council meeting
Brussels, 17 November 2009*

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

- " 1. The Council notes that since October 2008, as a result of the release of internationally recognised political prisoners, new possibilities have opened up for dialogue and deepened cooperation between the EU and Belarus. The Council welcomes the increased high-level EU–Belarus political dialogue, the establishment of a Human Rights Dialogue, the intensified technical cooperation and the participation of Belarus in the Eastern Partnership, as ways of building mutual understanding and creating opportunities to address issues of concern.
2. The Council recalls its Conclusions of 13 October 2008, and the areas of concern identified therein, including the need for progress towards reforms of the Electoral Code to bring it into line with OSCE commitments and other international standards for democratic elections, the freedom of expression and of the media, and the freedom of assembly and political association. After a number of encouraging decisions taken earlier in these areas, the Council deeply regrets the recent lack of significant progress in addressing its concerns in the area of human rights and fundamental freedoms, including as regards the crackdown on peaceful political actions and the continued denial of registration of many political parties, non-governmental organisations and independent media. The Council furthermore regrets the recent death sentences in Belarus and urges Belarus to introduce a moratorium on the death penalty, as an interim step leading to the early abolition of the death penalty.

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3. Due to the absence of tangible progress in the areas identified in the Council Conclusions of 13 October 2008, the Council is not able to lift the restrictive measures in place against certain officials of Belarus. Therefore, it decides to extend until October 2010 the restrictive measures provided for by Common Position 2006/276 CFSP, as extended by Common Position 2009/314/CFSP. However, in order to encourage progress in the areas identified by the EU, the Council decides at the same time to extend the suspension of the application of the travel restrictions imposed on certain officials of Belarus, in accordance with the terms set out in Council Common Position 2009/314/CFSP, until October 2010.

At the end of that period, the Council will review the restrictive measures in the light of the situation in Belarus. The Council may decide to reapply or lift travel restrictions at any time, in light of actions by the Belarusian authorities in the sphere of democracy and human rights.

4. The Council recalls the Joint Declaration of the Prague Eastern Partnership Summit on 7 May 2009 and welcomes the constructive and active participation of Belarus in the Eastern Partnership. In this context, and recognising the importance of enhanced people-to-people contacts, the Council invites the Commission to prepare recommendations in view of obtaining negotiating directives on visa facilitation and readmission agreements with Belarus, taking into account the common approach on visa facilitation, the recent evaluation of the existing visa facilitation agreements, as well as the findings of a technical expert mission to Belarus, and with a view to the possible adoption of these negotiating directives once relevant conditions are met.
5. The European Union reaffirms its readiness to deepen its relations with Belarus in light of further developments in Belarus towards democracy, human rights and the rule of law and to assist the country in attaining these objectives. Subject to progress in Belarus in these areas, the Council stands ready to take steps towards upgrading contractual relations with Belarus. Meanwhile, the Council invites the Commission to make a proposal for a joint interim plan to set priorities for reforms, inspired by the Action Plans developed in the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy, to be implemented with Belarus.
6. In due time, the Council will review EU policy towards Belarus, in line with the above. In case of positive developments, the Council would respond accordingly.
7. In light of its engagement policy with Belarus, and in order to support the development of a democratic and pluralist environment, the European Union will further intensify its cooperation with the Belarusian civil society, including in the framework of the Eastern Partnership."
