



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



Council conclusions on Belarus

*3101st FOREIGN AFFAIRS Council meeting
Luxembourg, 20 June 2011*

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

- "1. Recalling its Conclusions of 31 January 2011, the statements by High Representative Ashton on the situation in Belarus of 18 February, 12 April and 14 and 26 May as well as the Declaration by the High Representative on behalf of the EU of 18 March 2011, the EU expresses its deep concern at the deteriorating human rights, democracy and rule of law situation in Belarus.
2. The EU strongly condemns the detention, trials and sentencing on political grounds of representatives of civil society, the independent media and the political opposition, including former presidential candidates, Nyaklyayew, Rymashewski, Sannikaw, Statkevich and Uss in the aftermath of 19 December 2010 Presidential elections. The EU reiterates its calls for the immediate release and rehabilitation of all political prisoners. It underscores its deep concern at reports of torture and other forms of ill-treatment in Belarusian prisons, and urges the authorities to respect international commitments endorsed by Belarus, notably the absolute prohibition of torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment.
3. The EU deplors the continuing deterioration of media freedom in Belarus, including the lawsuits filed by the Ministry of Information to close two of Belarus' largest independent newspapers, *Nasha Niva* and *Narodnaya Volya*, the trial of the journalist Poczobut, and the cancelled licence of radiostation *Autoradio*. It calls on Belarus to end the ongoing politically motivated persecution and harassment of democratic forces, independent media, civil society and those defending them.
4. The Council urges Belarus to respect internationally recognised diplomatic immunities and privileges of EU diplomatic representations and their personnel in Minsk and to stop the ongoing harassment and intimidation.

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5. The EU remains determined to address the human rights situation in Belarus, including in international fora such as the UN Human Rights Council and the OSCE. The Council welcomes the successful adoption of the resolution on the situation on human rights in Belarus at the 17th session of the UN Human Rights Council and calls on Belarus to implement it fully. The EU reiterates its regret at the lack of cooperation by Belarus in the framework of the OSCE Moscow Mechanism and notes with concern the findings of the OSCE Rapporteur's Report on Belarus regarding Belarus' fulfillment of its OSCE commitments in the human dimension.
6. In view of recent developments, the Council has decided to designate additional persons to travel restrictions and assets freeze. The Council has furthermore decided to impose an embargo on Belarus on arms and on materials that might be used for internal repression. It has also decided to freeze the assets of three companies linked to the regime.
7. The Council agrees that the extension of European Investment Bank operations to Belarus should only proceed if and when the EU is able to give a sufficiently positive assessment of the human rights and rule of law situation. The Council welcomes the outcome of the recent European Bank for Reconstruction and Development Country Strategy Update, which implies a recalibrating of EBRD assistance away from the Belarusian central authorities in favour of non-state and local actors implementing projects in areas which benefit the population at large. The Council expresses its hope for conditions to be re-established in Belarus that would allow the country to enjoy the full benefits of EIB and EBRD support.
8. The EU reiterates its strong commitment to strengthening its engagement with the Belarusian people and civil society. It welcomes that the EU assistance strategy towards Belarus has been revised in order to further strengthen support to civil society and that the EU's special assistance package is reaching full implementation speed, providing notably support to repressed individuals, NGOs, media and students. Donor coordination will continue, with the aim of increasing the effectiveness of aid to Belarusian civil society in the years ahead.
9. Recalling the importance it attaches to people to people contacts to the benefit of Belarusian population at large, the Council takes positive note of the ongoing work to fully use the existing flexibilities offered by the Visa Code, in particular the possibility for Member States to waive and reduce visa fees for certain categories of citizens. In the same spirit, the Council also welcomes the Commission's formal invitation to Belarus to start negotiations on visa facilitation and readmission agreements, on the basis of negotiation directives adopted by the Council on 28 February, and calls on the Belarusian authorities to engage constructively.
10. The EU will continue to closely monitor the situation in Belarus. The EU reiterates its commitment to the policy of critical engagement, including through dialogue and the Eastern Partnership, and recalls that the development of bilateral relations is conditional on progress towards respect by Belarus for the principles of democracy, the rule of law and human rights. At the same time, and in the light of further developments, the EU stands ready to consider further targeted measures in all areas of cooperation, as appropriate."