



## *~FACTSHEET~*

Luxembourg, 15 October 2012

### **The European Union and Belarus**

The EU is committed to a policy of critical engagement with Belarus.

Since the violations of electoral standards in the December 2010 presidential elections and the subsequent violent crackdown on civil society, the political opposition and independent media, the EU has expressed its concern on many occasions and in different fora about the lack of respect for human rights, the rule of law and democratic principles in Belarus.

The EU's many serious concerns are spelt out in the Council conclusions of [\*31 January 2011\*](#), [\*20 June 2011\*](#), [\*23 March\*](#) and 15 October 2012, as well as in the numerous statements on Belarus by High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the Commission Catherine Ashton. In a joint statement with Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy Štefan Füle on 24 September 2012, she referred to the recent parliamentary elections as another missed opportunity to conduct elections in line with international standards.

The EU has consistently called for the immediate release and rehabilitation of all political prisoners. It has also repeatedly stressed that all harassment of members of the opposition, and of civil society must stop and the repressive policies must be rolled back.

The EU's restrictive measures are an important instrument to maintain political pressure on Belarus. The EU has repeatedly stressed that the EU policy of restrictive measures remains under constant review. In January 2011, the Council decided to target those responsible for violation of international electoral standards in the presidential elections or the crackdown on civil society and the democratic opposition. The criteria were expanded in January 2012 to also target those responsible for serious violations of human rights, the repression of civil society and opposition and persons or entities benefiting from or supporting the regime (see annex on restrictive measures against the Belarusian regime).

To make it clear that the EU's policies are not directed against Belarus as such, nor against its population, the EU has, in parallel, strengthened its engagement with civil society, the political opposition and the public at large.

In March 2012, Commissioner for Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy Štefan Füle launched the European Dialogue on Modernisation with Belarus society. The dialogue consists of an exchange of views and ideas between the EU and representatives of Belarusian civil society and political opposition. Discussions revolve around necessary reforms for the modernisation of Belarus and on the related potential development of relations with the EU, as well as possible EU support in this regard. The agenda is set by the representatives of Belarusian society, mindful of the needs of the Belarusian citizens.

In June 2010, the Commission invited Belarus to start negotiations for visa facilitation and a readmission agreement to the benefit of the population at large. However, so far, there has been no formal answer by the Belarusian authorities. Meanwhile, EU member states are using the existing flexibilities offered by the EU Visa Code to waive and reduce visa fees.

The EU has also significantly stepped up its support to civil society and independent media in Belarus. Regular meetings are held to coordinate the work of international implementers and donors.

The EU policy is not one of isolation. The EU remains committed to the policy of critical engagement, including through the Eastern partnership's multilateral track. We maintain technical dialogue and cooperation with Belarus in a number of areas of mutual concern. In summer 2011, the EU upgraded its delegation in Belarus and Ambassador Maira Mora was accredited to Belarus in September 2011.

The EU also made clear on many occasions that the broader development of bilateral relations between the EU and Belarus is conditional on progress by the authorities towards the principles of human rights, the rule of law and democracy.

## **Background**

A Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with Belarus was signed on 6 March 1995, but the ratification by EU member states remains suspended since 1997.

## ANNEX

### **Restrictive measures against the Belarusian regime**

The EU first imposed restrictive measures against the Belarusian regime in 2004 in response to the disappearance of four opposition activists in 1999 and 2000. Measures have also been imposed against those responsible for the fraudulent referendum and elections in Belarus on 17 October 2004; for the violations of international electoral standards in the presidential elections in Belarus on 19 March 2006, and on 19 December 2010; and those who are responsible for severe human rights violations and the repression of peaceful demonstrators in the aftermath of the referendum and these elections.

The most recent elections of 23 September 2012 have also been found to be inconsistent with international standards, notably in preliminary findings of the OSCE/ODIHR election observation mission to Belarus, and the EU considers that situation as regards democracy, human rights and rule of law has not improved and political prisoners have not been released or rehabilitated.

Therefore, on 15 October 2012, the Council maintained the measures for a further 12 months. A total of 243 persons are subject to a travel ban and an asset freeze in the EU. They are responsible for serious violations of human rights, for the repression of civil society and the democratic opposition or for undermining democracy and the rule of law in Belarus, or persons benefiting from or supporting the Lukashenka regime. A total of 32 business entities are also subject to the asset freeze.

An embargo on arms and material that can be used for internal repression was imposed in June 2011.

The restrictive measures are currently valid until 31 October 2013.

The legislation that is the basis for the EU sanctions can be seen [here](#).

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