

EUROPEAN EXTERNAL ACTION SERVICE



The Director

Directorate
'Russia, Eastern Partnership, Central Asia,
Regional Cooperation and OSCE'

Brussels, 10.07.2013
eeas.sg.1(2013)2047180

Subject: Reply to the petition of 'Free Belarus Now' on human rights violations in Belarus

Dear Petitioners,

Thank you for the petition directed to President Barroso, High Representative Catherine Ashton and Commissioner Štefan Füle concerning the situation in Belarus. I would like to reply to you on behalf the President, the High Representative and the Commissioner.

The European Union follows closely the situation in Belarus and fully shares the concerns expressed in your petition as regards the human rights situation in Belarus.

The EU has at numerous occasions expressed its grave concern regarding the lack of respect for human rights, the rule of law and democratic principles. In repeated Conclusions adopted by the Foreign Affairs Councils the EU has in particular strongly condemned the death penalty sentences and executions and reiterated its call for the immediate and unconditional release and rehabilitation of all political prisoners. In May 2013, when the latest death sentence was pronounced in Belarus, the EU once again expressed its strong opposition to capital punishment and urged Belarus to join the global moratorium on the death penalty as a first step towards its universal opposition.

Regarding the Belarusian parliamentary elections of September 2012, we have stated that this was yet another missed opportunity to conduct elections in line with international standards.

The EU has also recalled to Belarusian authorities that the development of bilateral relations under the Eastern Partnership remains conditional on progress towards respect by Belarus for the principles of democracy, the rule of law and human rights.

During last two years, the EU has strengthened its engagement with civil society and the public at large. EU support to Civil Society has increased six-fold since the start of 2011, reaching €13.6 and €12.7 million respectively in 2011 and 2012. These figures include grants for civil society organisations, scholarships, languages courses and support to the European Humanities University.

The EU has also strengthened its dialogue with civil society. In March 2012 a European Dialogue

on Modernisation with Belarusian society has been launched. The Dialogue on Modernisation consists of an exchange of views and ideas between representatives of the Belarusian society as well as the EU and its Member States. Discussions revolve around possible reforms for the modernisation of Belarus, such as for example in the justice and the economic sectors. The EU continues to encourage the authorities of Belarus to engage in the discussions of this Dialogue in view of charting a course of reform and modernisation for the benefit of the Belarusian people.

The immediate and unconditional release and rehabilitation of all political prisoners is a political priority for the EU. This is evidenced by the reference to the political prisoners, including the conditions under which they are imprisoned and their state of health, in all relevant actions, statements and diplomatic messages of the EU. The EU Delegation in Minsk keeps engaging the Belarusian authorities on the issue of political prisoners and has repeatedly submitted requests to visit them in prison. Political prisoners, and in general victims of repression, have been and continue to be supported by the EU.

The EU continuously urges Belarusian authorities to join a global moratorium on the death penalty as a first step towards its universal abolition, and not to carry out the executions.

In order to maintain political pressure, EU restrictive measures against a number of persons and entities remain in place.

Conscious of the risks critics of the regime face when expressing democratic opinions, I would like to express my deepest respect for your commitment towards the fight for democracy and human rights in Belarus.

Please rest assured that the EU will use every opportunity to raise with Belarusian authorities all human rights related issues.

Gunnar Wiegand