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FACT SHEET

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 and 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 and Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy Štefan Füle.

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.

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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 Belarusian society. The dialogue consists of an exchange of views between the EU and representatives of Belarusian society about necessary reforms for the modernisation of Belarus.

In January 2014, the EU and Belarus launched negotiations on visa facilitation and a readmission agreement, which are to the benefit of the population at large.

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. The EU also maintains sectoral dialogues with Belarus in a number of areas of mutual concern.

The EU welcomes all the recent positive steps taken by the Belarusian authorities, including the release of Belarusian human rights defender Ales Bialiatski. The EU continues to encourage this Belarus' policy of small positive steps and reciprocates where possible within its policy of critical engagement.

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 as well as in the parliamentary elections on 23 September 2012; and for those who are responsible for severe human rights violations and the repression of peaceful demonstrators in the aftermath of the referendum and these elections.

On 30 October 2014 following an annual review the EU [extended restrictive measures against Belarus until 31 October 2015](#). This is because not all political prisoners have been released and rehabilitated, and the respect for human rights, the rule of law and democratic principles has not improved in Belarus.

The sanctions comprise an arms embargo, an embargo on equipment for internal repression as well as asset freezes and travel bans against persons responsible for serious human rights violations, the repression of civil society or for undermining democracy in Belarus, or persons benefitting from or supporting the Lukashenka regime or associated persons or entities..

The review updates the list of persons and entities targeted as the Council considered there were no longer grounds for keeping 24 previously listed persons and seven entities under restrictions. The total of persons subject to sanctions is now 201 while 18 entities remain under the asset freeze.

This decision does not reflect any change in the EU's policy towards Belarus, as set out in the [Council conclusions of 15 October 2012](#): the EU maintains its policy of critical engagement, intended to promote the respect for human rights, the rule of law and democratic principles in Belarus.

Factsheet on EU restrictive measures:

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/135804.pdf