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Statement by EU High Representative Catherine Ashton on the presidential elections in Belarus

Catherine Ashton, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the Commission, made today the following statement:

"I have taken good note of the preliminary findings of the OSCE/ODIHR -led International Election Observation Mission to the Belarusian presidential elections. They noted that Belarus still has a considerable way to go in meeting its OSCE commitments, although some specific improvements were made. Unfortunately, the trend set by the relative progress during the campaigning period was not followed by a transparent and fair polling process. It is especially regrettable that election night was marred by violence, which I strongly condemn. In particular, the beating and detention of several opposition leaders, including presidential candidates, is unacceptable.

I urge Belarus to engage fully in dialogue with the OSCE/ODIHR on reform of the electoral code and how to best implement OSCE/ODIHR recommendations in this respect with a view to future elections.

I recall our policy of critical engagement, through which the EU has offered a deepening relationship with Belarus. This is conditional on respect for the principles of democracy, the rule of law and human rights. The Union remains committed to strengthening its engagement with the Belarusian people and civil society."

P R E S S

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