

Support to democracy in Belarus

Presidential elections in Belarus in August 2020 were conducted in flagrant violation of all internationally recognised standards, democratic principles and European values. The European Union stands with millions of Belarusians who decided to oppose Aliaksandr Lukashenka's regime. The European Parliament is expected to vote on a draft recommendation on relations with Belarus, during the October II plenary session.

Background

Despite independent exit polls showing a victory for Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, Belarus's Central Election Commission [announced](#) that the 9 August presidential election had been won by Aliaksandr Lukashenka with 80.1 % of the votes. The openly falsified electoral results sparked widespread peaceful protests on which state militia [brutally cracked down](#). Opposition leaders – including members of Tsikhanouskaya's Coordination Council – were either forced into exile, or arrested. The [secret 'inauguration'](#) of Lukashenka's new presidential term, in the presence of hundreds of military officers, showed the regime's weakness and lack of contact with society. In light of the situation, the EU is currently reviewing its relations with [Belarus](#).

European Union position

The EU has expressed its solidarity with Belarusians. The [European Council of 19 August](#) concluded that the EU does not recognise the election results. It condemned violence against protesters and called for the immediate release of detained persons and for an inclusive national dialogue. It requested the Belarusian government protect civil society representatives from arbitrary arrest and violence. It stated that the progress in bilateral relations of recent years is at risk, and declared its readiness to impose sanctions on those responsible for violence, repression and the falsification of election results. The High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the Commission ([HR/VP](#)) declared on 24 September that the mandate claimed by Lukashenka lacks any democratic legitimacy. The [European Council of 1 October](#) authorised sanctions against 40 persons, not including Lukashenka, and encouraged the Commission to prepare a comprehensive economic support plan for democratic Belarus. The [Council conclusions of 12 October](#) reaffirmed the [HR/VP's statements](#). They expressed readiness to widen the scope of existing sanctions, which could also target Lukashenka. The EU will scale down bilateral cooperation with the Belarusian authorities, and increase its cooperation with the non-governmental sector. The conclusions declare that the EU is ready to substantially step up its engagement should the situation improve.

European Parliament position

On 21 September, Svetlana Tsikhanouskaya met the President of the European Parliament, [David Sassoli](#), as well as [the Committee on Foreign Affairs \(AFET\) and the Subcommittee on Human Rights \(DROI\)](#). Her interlocutors praised the Belarusian people's courage, and expressed their support. Parliament's 17 September [resolution](#) had condemned electoral fraud and violence against protesters. It recognised the Coordination Council as interim representation of the people demanding democratic change in Belarus, and supported rapid approval of EU sanctions, including on Lukashenka. On 21 September, AFET adopted a [report with a draft recommendation](#) on relations with Belarus. It supports the general EU line of action, recommends not to recognise Lukashenka as legitimate president of Belarus, and calls on him to step down peacefully. It requests that a comprehensive review of EU policy towards Belarus should focus in particular on EU support to civil society and the people of Belarus, while negotiations on the EU-Belarus Partnership Priorities should be suspended until free and fair presidential elections take place.

Recommendation ([Rule 118](#) of Rules of Procedure): [2020/2081\(INI\)](#); Committee responsible: AFET; Rapporteur: Petras Auštrevičius (Renew Europe, Lithuania).

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