



TEXTS ADOPTED

P9_TA(2020)0280

Recommendation to the Council, the Commission and the VPC/HR on relations with Belarus

European Parliament recommendation of 21 October 2020 to the Council, the Commission and the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy on relations with Belarus (2020/2081(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to Articles 2, 3 and 8 and Title V, notably Articles 21, 22, 36 and 37, of the Treaty on European Union (TEU), and to Part Five of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU),
- having regard to the Council conclusions on Belarus of 15 February 2016,
- having regard to the launch of the Eastern Partnership in Prague on 7 May 2009 as a common endeavour of the EU and its six Eastern European Partners, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine,
- having regard to the Joint Declarations of the Eastern Partnership Summits of 2009 in Prague, 2011 in Warsaw, 2013 in Vilnius, 2015 in Riga and 2017 in Brussels, and to the Eastern Partnership leaders' videoconference held in 2020,
- having regard to the agreement between the European Union and the Republic of Belarus on the readmission of persons residing without authorisation, which entered into force on 1 July 2020¹,
- having regard to the agreement between the European Union and the Republic of Belarus on the facilitation of the issuance of visas², which entered into force on 1 July 2020,
- having regard to the 6th round of the bilateral Human Rights Dialogue between the EU and Belarus held on 18 June 2019 in Brussels,

¹ OJ L 181, 9.6.2020, p. 3.

² OJ L 180, 9.6.2020, p. 3.

- having regard to the Joint Statement by High Representative/Vice-President Josep Borrell and Neighbourhood and Enlargement Commissioner Olivér Várhelyi of 10 August 2020, as well as the declaration by the High Representative on behalf of the European Union on the presidential elections in Belarus of 11 August 2020,
- having regard to the statement by the EEAS Spokesperson on recent developments in Belarus of 19 June 2020 and to the statements by High Representative/Vice-President Josep Borrell related to the elections in Belarus of 14 July 2020, 7 August 2020, and 17 August 2020,
- having regard to the statements by the EEAS Spokesperson on the application of the death penalty in Belarus, notably of 30 July 2019, 28 October 2019, 20 December 2019, 11 January 2020, and 7 March 2020,
- having regard to its recommendation to the Council, the Commission and the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy on the Eastern Partnership, in the run-up to the June 2020 Summit,
- having regard to the UN Human Rights Council's Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus of 10 July 2020,
- having regard to the UN statements on the situation in Belarus, in particular those of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights of 12 August 2020, the UN Special Rapporteurs on human rights of 13 August 2020, and the Spokesperson for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights of 21 August 2020,
- having regard to the statement of the President of the European Parliament calling for a stop to the violence in Belarus of 13 August 2020,
- having regard to the joint statement on Belarus of political leaders from the EPP, S&D, Renew Europe, Greens/EFA and ECR groups in the European Parliament of 17 August 2020,
- having regard to the main outcomes of the extraordinary meeting of the Foreign Affairs Council on 14 August 2020, to the conclusions of the European Council of 19 August 2020 on the situation in Belarus following the presidential elections of 9 August 2020, and to the conclusions of the European Council of 1 October 2020 and the Foreign Affairs Council of 12 October 2020 on imposing restrictive measures against individuals identified as responsible for repression and intimidation against peaceful demonstrators, opposition members and journalists in the wake of the 2020 presidential election in Belarus, as well as for electoral misconduct,
- having regard to the open letter on Diplomatic Watch activities during the 2020 presidential elections in Belarus (Minsk, 13 August 2020),
- having regard to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,
- having regard to the EU Global Strategy and the revised European Neighbourhood Policy,

- having regard to its resolutions on Belarus, in particular those of 24 November 2016 on the situation in Belarus¹, of 6 April 2017 on the situation in Belarus², of 19 April 2018 on Belarus³, of 4 October 2018 on the deterioration of media freedom in Belarus, notably the case of Charter 97⁴, and of 17 September 2020 on the situation in Belarus⁵,
 - having regard to Rule 118 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Foreign Affairs (A9-0167/2020),
- A. whereas the actions of the Lukashenka regime are criminal and are against European values, the principles of democracy, and the will of the Belarusian people; whereas despite the fundamental restrictions on basic freedoms and human rights that remain in Belarus, the EU's policy of critical engagement with Belarus has produced some results in the form of signed agreements and increased cooperation in areas such as environment and connectivity, cross-border cooperation and border management, but insufficient results in the regime's adherence to the fundamental values of the Eastern Partnership; whereas the unlawful actions of the Belarusian regime jeopardise these results and EU-Belarus relations must be subject to a thorough review in view of the regime's lack of adherence to its own commitments under international law and its agreements with the EU; whereas future relations between the EU and Belarus will be defined in the Partnership Priorities to be agreed by the EU and new legitimate, democratically elected authorities in Belarus, and should be based on the common values on which the EU is built, namely democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms;
- B. whereas the people of Belarus share a common European heritage and culture in a country directly neighbouring on three EU Member States; whereas the situation in Belarus may have a direct impact on the EU;
- C. whereas none of the parliamentary or presidential elections held in Belarus from 1994 to date have been free and fair, but despite these harsh undemocratic conditions the people of Belarus clearly voted for a change, after more than two decades of oppression; whereas the recent presidential elections were neither free nor fair and even more than the previous ones were marred by disregard for the fundamental freedoms of assembly, association and expression, and took place after a limited space for election campaigning and within an extremely restrictive environment characterised by repression that did not provide for a meaningful or competitive political contest overall;
- D. whereas the Belarusian authorities did not comply with minimum international standards for a credible, transparent, free and fair presidential election process;
- E. whereas the presidential election campaign was marred by widespread bureaucratic interference favouring the incumbent, intimidation and repression towards other candidates and their families and supporters, denial of registration of candidates who

¹ OJ C 224, 27.6.2018, p. 135.

² OJ C 298, 23.8.2018, p. 60.

³ OJ C 390, 18.11.2019, p. 100.

⁴ OJ C 11, 13.1.2020, p. 18.

⁵ Texts adopted, P9_TA(2020)0231.

had collected a sufficient number of signatures, multiple arrests, and attempts to silence independent journalists and bloggers and to close down dissident websites;

- F. whereas a restrictive and arbitrary registration process prevented most of the candidates from participating, the arrests of the main presidential contender Viktor Babaryka and of Siarhei Tsikhanouski, the husband of another key candidate, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, and denial of registration by the Central Election Commission (CEC) to a key opposition candidate, Valery Tsapkala, over an insufficient number of valid ballot access signatures with no possibility to appeal for reassessment of the rejection; whereas this underlines the disproportionate and unreasonable nature of the barriers to candidacy, contrary to OSCE commitments and other international standards; whereas such exclusions of candidates limited the possibility for the Belarusian people to choose their candidates;
- G. whereas according to 'Human Rights Defenders for Free Elections', further measures disadvantaged opposition candidates, such as restricting locations where election activities can lawfully take place, detaining members of candidates' campaign teams, and blocking nearly all opposition nominees to the Precinct Election Commissions (PECs), resulting in 1.1 % of the total number of nominees elected being from opposition parties and 96.7 % from pro-government parties;
- H. whereas the government of Belarus failed to issue a timely invitation to OSCE/ODIHR for the observation of the 9 August 2020 presidential elections, leading to the absence of independent international observers during those elections;
- I. whereas due to restrictions imposed by the CEC amid the coronavirus pandemic, the local election observers were prevented from fully executing their duties during all phases of voting, namely early voting, voting on election day, and home voting; whereas early voting was used by the Belarusian regime to inflate the voter turnout several times over, while numerous cases of forced voting of certain categories of voters were documented, for example, of military personnel, public servants, employees of state-owned enterprises and citizens living in public housing; whereas on election day the local election observers were prevented from monitoring the count, and the numbers of voters and the election results announced by the PECs and the CEC significantly differed from their observations;
- J. whereas independent platforms established by civil society organisations of Belarus (such as [Golos-Belarus2020.org](https://golos-belarus2020.org/)) conducted independent exit polls and analysed protocols of more than 200 PECs which released genuine results that clearly point to the fact that Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya received an absolute majority of votes (between 71,1 % and 97,6 %);
- K. whereas the CEC announced Aliaksandr Lukashenka as the winner of the election, allegedly receiving 80,10 % of the vote while his main opponent Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya received 10,12 %; whereas irregularities during the polling days were reported constantly, people were often denied their right to vote, and protocols from PECs were falsified;
- L. whereas the European Union and its Member States did not recognise the results of the presidential elections due to substantial doubt about their fairness, condemned the

disproportionate and unacceptable use of force against peaceful protestors, and supported the right of the people of Belarus to determine their future;

- M. whereas Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, the President-elect according to the Belarusian people, was intimidated and forced into leaving Belarus two days after the presidential elections; whereas other civic and political activists and workers' leaders also left Belarus due to threats to their or their family members' safety;
- N. whereas the Belarusian regime refuses to enter into a national dialogue with the people and does not recognise the Coordination Council (CC), which was initiated by Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya with the sole purpose of facilitating a peaceful and orderly transition of power through dialogue, and seeks to intimidate and disperse it by targeting its members and launching a criminal case against them; whereas only one Presidium member of the Coordination Council, Svetlana Alexievich, remains not detained or forcibly expelled from the country by the Belarusian authorities;
- O. whereas Belarus has seen unprecedented nationwide peaceful protests calling for free and fair new elections, following the presidential elections of 9 August 2020 and the announcement of a falsified result claiming victory for the incumbent president; whereas the protests led to a violent crackdown with thousands of Belarusians detained, hundreds hospitalised, at least six confirmed dead and dozens still missing;
- P. whereas the European Parliament expresses its support for the Belarusian people's demands for free and fair elections and the ability to freely make decisions about their country's future;
- Q. whereas the European Parliament welcomes and encourages the sustained peaceful organisation of nationwide protests, and commends the role and strong leadership of Belarusian women;
- R. having regard to the testimonies of Belarusian protesters concerning the inhumane conditions and treatment they were subjected to during their unlawful detention, including reports of endless beatings, acts of rape, degrading treatment, and inhumane detention conditions in overcrowded cells with no access to drinking water, food, sanitary facilities or medical assistance; whereas Belarusian opposition leader and political prisoner Pavel Sieviaryniec cut his wrists in a protest against torture and inhumane detention conditions; whereas after their release many people were hospitalised and some taken into intensive care, with injuries such as broken limbs, cracked skulls, and damaged eyesight and hearing, some of which, together with the psychological traumas incurred, will have lifelong effects, including infertility;
- S. whereas reprisals against regime opponents, election observers, journalists, bloggers, civil society activists, and human rights defenders, including through physical violence, abductions by unknown people without identification markers, administrative fines, threats of losing custody of a child, criminal proceedings, as well as physical and psychological torture, have become common practice in Belarus in the last months;
- T. whereas the Belarusian people are in urgent need of assistance and support from the international community;

- U. whereas the situation in Belarus requires an urgent international investigation into the human rights violations against peaceful protesters and the excessive use of force by the Belarusian regime;
- V. whereas the environment for the work of human rights defenders, representatives of the opposition, civil society and media has continuously deteriorated, with systematic subjection to intimidation and harassment and restrictions of fundamental freedoms; whereas human rights organisations along with other civil society organisations are systematically denied registration, and membership of non-registered groups and receiving foreign funds are criminalised; whereas human rights lawyers are debarred from defending detained civil and political activists, who cannot rely on receiving a fair trial;
- W. whereas the widespread impunity of law enforcement officers contributes to even more human rights violations and retaliations against human rights defenders and innocent people;
- X. whereas the Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus of July 2020 notes no major improvements in the legal and regulatory protection of human rights in Belarus and, in addition to the problems highlighted above, draws attention to the continuing application of the death penalty, the prevalent discrimination against vulnerable groups, including women, persons with disabilities, ethnic and religious minorities and LGBTQI persons, the continuing practice of forced labour, torture and other forms of cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment of detained persons, and discrimination against speakers of the Belarusian language;
- Y. whereas according to Belarusian human rights organisations there are around 100 persons detained for political reasons in Belarus; whereas among the imprisoned Belarusian opposition members are Mikola Statkevich, a democratic contender in the 2010 presidential elections, who was a prisoner of conscience from 2011 until 2017, another former prisoner of conscience Anatol Liabedzka, Presidium Members of the Coordination Council of Belarus Maria Kalesnikava, Liliya Ulasava and Maksim Znak, presidential contender Viktor Babaryka, and video blogger Siarhei Tsikhanouski;
- Z. whereas the European Parliament expresses its deepest condolences over the deaths of Alyaksandr Taraykouski, Alyaksandr Vikhor, Artsyom Parukou, Henadz Shutau and Kanstantsin Shyshmakou, to their families and to the whole Belarusian nation;
- AA. whereas on 14 August 2020 the Belarusian regime denied entry into the country to two Members of the European Parliament, Robert Biedroń, chair of the Delegation for relations with Belarus, and Petras Auštrevičius, Parliament's standing rapporteur on Belarus, who were to visit the country on the invitation of Belarusian civil society;
- AB. whereas since 2014 18 000 Belarusian minors have been sentenced to disproportionately long terms of imprisonment of between 8 and 15 years, for non-violent drug-related offences under Article 328 of the Criminal Code; whereas during detention and imprisonment Belarusian minors face numerous violations of their rights, including physical violence and torture, and are exposed to working conditions that are dangerous for health;

- AC. whereas in 2016 the EU lifted most sanctions against Belarus, with the exception of an arms embargo and sanctions against four individuals, but this was done not because Belarus fulfilled all conditions, but rather in the hope that it would continue in the direction of improving the environment for political and civic participation and respecting human rights and fundamental freedoms; whereas no progress has been achieved in the areas of democratic governance and human rights, with increasing administrative, financial and physical repression against the democratic opposition, civil society organisations, journalists and bloggers, and even ordinary people;
- AD. whereas the European Council agreed in 2020 to impose sanctions against a substantial number of individuals responsible for violence, repression and the falsification of election results in Belarus, prohibiting them from entering the EU and freezing their financial assets in the EU;
- AE. whereas it is unacceptable if a Member State does not condemn unambiguously the election falsification, violence and repression and counts Lukashenka's Belarus as a partner state, since the situation in Belarus requires adopting a firm and principled position and agreeing on common EU action;
- AF. whereas the Belarusian authorities denied that COVID-19 had spread in the country, thereby wasting precious time that could have been used to prepare and protect the country's population and in particular medical staff, did not cancel mass events - notably the military parade on 9 May 2020 with thousands of participants and the annual community work day attended by a quarter of the Belarusian population - and instead engaged in the intimidation of journalists, bloggers, the democratic opposition, civil society organisations and ordinary people who shared crucial information about the pandemic and necessary precautionary measures, resulting in one of Europe's highest per capita COVID-19 infection rates and Belarus being a health threat to the region; whereas the government and president of Belarus failed to provide facts about and react in a timely way to the pandemic, instead actively spreading false information that jeopardised the health of their citizens;
- AG. whereas the EU stood in solidarity with the people of Belarus from the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, and allocated EUR 60 million to the country for mitigation of the immediate and direct effects of the outbreak, followed by, in reaction to the post-election situation in Belarus, an additional EUR 53 million to support the Belarusian people; whereas Belarus is exploring the possibility of seeking macrofinancial assistance from the EU;
- AH. whereas the COVID-19 pandemic has displayed the resilience, strong resolve and unprecedented self-organisation of Belarusian society, particularly in light of the authorities' lethargic response to and even denials of the pandemic and its impact;
- AI. whereas there are no independent Belarusian news agencies registered in the country, and press freedom in Belarus has significantly deteriorated since 2015, as confirmed annually by the World Press Freedom Index, and the situation has become even worse since the presidential elections in August 2020; whereas the few independent journalists, bloggers, photographers or media outlets that are able to operate in the country and denounce human rights violations are subject to systematic harassment and punitive measures, such as arrests or initiation of criminal investigations, including on charges of illegal production and distribution of information, extremism, discrediting

and insulting the president or hooliganism, and the number of prosecutions for statements on the internet has increased; whereas in 2000 and in 2016, two human rights journalists were killed following their active reporting on human rights violations and criticism of the repressive policies of the authoritarian government of Belarus;

- AJ. whereas after the presidential elections the Belarusian regime further tightened its grip on media freedom and people's right to access and share information, by blocking internet access, disrupting the printing of newspapers, as well as arresting local journalists and foreign correspondents who observed or covered demonstrations, as well as those who have criticised the state's environmental policy or commented on the COVID-19 pandemic in Belarus and exposing them to torture and inhumane treatment; whereas journalists were specifically targeted and several were injured while covering the Belarusian regime's authorised crackdown on peaceful protesters; whereas the state-owned TV stations do not cover ongoing protests or the atrocities committed by the Lukashenka regime and are being used for spreading disinformation, attacking and discrediting Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, political activists and peaceful protesters; whereas after the resignation of journalists at the state-owned TV stations, they were replaced by propaganda experts from Russia;
- AK. whereas independent journalists cooperating with and working for foreign media are prosecuted under Article 22.9 of the Code of Administrative Offenses, which makes it illegal to receive financial rewards from media that are not duly registered and accredited in Belarus; whereas the Belsat TV channel, which is officially registered in Poland, is not registered in Belarus and its activities are under constant pressure and attack, including brutal detentions of its journalists and fines imposed on its contributors, totalling USD 101 791 as of 18 June 2020;
- AL. whereas Belarus has been subject to unprecedented pressure from Russia to deepen their integration in the context of the Union State, to the detriment of the sovereignty of Belarus, resulting inter alia in an ongoing standoff over oil and gas imports from Russia;
- AM. whereas Lukashenka's 26 years in power have been marked by policies of undermining the sovereignty and independence of the country and the weakening of Belarusian identity, heritage and culture;
- AN. whereas from a security point of view, Belarus is closely linked to and dependent on Russia and is engaging in actions posing a threat to the EU Member States such as the non-transparent Zapad 2017 joint military exercises, the planned Zapad 2021 joint military exercise, and the construction of unsafe nuclear installations;
- AO. whereas after the eruption of massive protests Aliaksandr Lukashenka reached out to Russia for assistance to ensure the survival of the Belarusian regime, and seeks to salvage his image and public support by creating false narratives about external threats to Belarus from foreign Western actors and using them to justify the intensification of activities and movement of Belarusian military forces in the Grodno region on the border with Poland and Lithuania, which poses a direct threat to the EU and its Member States;
- AP. whereas Belarus, in partnership with the Russian corporation ROSATOM, is building the Astravyets Nuclear Power Plant (NPP) at an unjustified location just 20 kilometres away from the EU's external border and 45 kilometres away from the Lithuanian

capital; whereas the construction of the Astravyets NPP has been followed by lack of respect for international standards for nuclear safety, serious safety violations and major incidents, including continuous construction work at the site despite the COVID-19 outbreak; whereas the first reactor of the Astravyets NPP was planned to launch before the presidential elections in August 2020 and before full implementation of the recommendations of the stress tests carried out by the EU nuclear safety authorities;

- AQ. whereas the difficult economic situation, which is to worsen due to nationwide strikes and the refusal of the Belarusian regime to enter into a national dialogue with the Belarusian people, indicates that the economic model of Belarus has reached its limits and the country could be entering a period of transition in which the EU can play a key balancing role;
- AR. whereas there has been a notable increase in engagement with Belarusian civil society, including through EU-supported activities and intensifying people-to-people contact;
1. Recommends that the Council, the Commission and the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy:

Post-election situation in Belarus

- (a) strongly support the decision of the EU and its Member States not to recognise the fraudulent election results as announced by the Belarusian Central Election Commission (CEC), due to substantial doubt over the fairness of the elections, not to recognise Aliaksandr Lukashenka as legitimate president of the country once his current term of office expires no later than 5 November 2020; denounce the act of Aliaksandr Lukashenka to proclaim himself the President of Belarus via an illegitimate inauguration ceremony held in secrecy on 23 September 2020; call on him to respect the will of the people of Belarus and peacefully step down; call on all Member States to condemn the election fraud, suppression of opposition and civil society, restrictions on human rights, freedom of expression and media freedom, and breaching of core democratic values and the rule of law;
- (b) insist that these developments will have an adverse impact on EU-Belarus relations;
- (c) unequivocally support the people of Belarus in their legitimate demands for new free and fair elections, which must be held as soon as possible under the supervision of the OSCE and independent international observers; emphasise the need for a peaceful and democratic solution to the current crisis, underpinned by independent and free media and a strong civil society;
- (d) insist on full compliance of election processes in Belarus with international standards, the recommendations of the OSCE and the opinions of the Venice Commission, and call for the electoral legislation of the Republic of Belarus to be amended to include substantial procedural and legal safeguards that enhance inclusiveness, integrity and transparency during all stages of the electoral process, and in particular to introduce clear and reasonable criteria and mechanisms for candidate registration and signature verification, ensure inclusion of

representatives of all actors of the electoral process in electoral commissions, and grant equal access to media for all participants;

- (e) call for free and fair elections to take place before a transparent and inclusive constitutional reform process, subject to a public consultation of all relevant stakeholders of Belarusian society, as a crucial opportunity to introduce genuine changes, including with regard to basic civil rights and freedoms, which would address the weaknesses of the current political system, ensure a transparent and pluralistic electoral process, and enable the Belarusian people to be represented in a democratically elected parliament and to participate actively in political life and processes;
- (f) call on the authorities to increase transparency, remove the arbitrary barriers under which no new political party has been registered in Belarus since 2000, and enable the registration of political parties, religious and civil society organisations and independent trade unions, and to put an end to the restrictions applied to established organisations and the persecution of the regime's political opponents;
- (g) note that Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, who according to the independent sociological surveys received more than half of the votes in the 2020 presidential election, is in the eyes of the Belarusian people their President-elect;
- (h) recognise the Coordination Council (CC) initiated by Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya as the legitimate representative of the people demanding democratic change and freedom in Belarus and insist that the Belarusian regime enters into a dialogue with it; deplore the persecution of the members of the CC and demand that all legal actions undertaken by the authorities against them are dropped and all those detained and arrested are freed;
- (i) support the efforts of the CC for a peaceful and democratic transition of power as a result of an inclusive national dialogue between the Belarusian government and the opposition/civil society/CC, including representatives of churches as respected and neutral mediators; provide any assistance necessary to reinforce the organisation and functioning of the CC;
- (j) encourage and support the establishment of an independent centre for a democratic Belarus, in Brussels, among other capitals, for the purpose of disseminating information and activities relating to democratic processes in Belarus;
- (k) insist that Aliaksandr Lukashenka accepts the offer of the OSCE's current and incoming chairpersons-in-office to facilitate national dialogue in order to resolve the political crisis and the tense situation in the country, and ensure that the EU provides concrete assistance to the OSCE for its proposal to take on a mediation role;
- (l) demand an immediate halt to the violence, cruel repression, torture and crackdown against peaceful protesters; denounce statements such as that issued on 12 October 2020 by the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Belarus threatening to use special equipment and lethal weapons against peaceful protesters; call for a full EU/international investigation of the crimes against the people of Belarus

committed by the law enforcement authorities of the Lukashenka regime and for the authorities to provide all victims of human rights violations and abuses with access to justice and ensure their right to an effective remedy;

- (m) review and update Annex III to Council Regulation (EC) No 765/2006 of 18 May 2006¹ concerning restrictive measures in respect of Belarus, which contains the list of equipment that might be used for internal repression in Belarus, including adding surveillance drones to that list;
- (n) condemn the tactic of the Belarusian regime to disperse the CC by intimidating its members and expelling them, as well as opposition politicians and activists, from Belarus so as to distance them from the internal political processes;
- (o) call on Belarus to immediately and unconditionally release and drop all charges against all political prisoners and all members of civil society, journalists and anyone else arbitrarily detained before, during and after the electoral campaign; demand the full restoration of and respect for human rights and freedoms, including freedom of the press, freedom of assembly and other political and civil freedoms in Belarus;
- (p) commend the actions taken by workers in numerous factories and institutions throughout the country who joined the protests in various ways, including going on strike, and provide the necessary support for those of them who were punished by the regime for exercising their democratic rights;
- (q) address the problems faced by the independent trade unions, including denied registration, politically motivated prosecution of their leaders, and forced membership of newly contracted employees in the state-controlled trade unions;
- (r) remain vigilant regarding arrests, disappearances and harassment of candidates, protesters, activists and independent journalists, and follow up such cases with the Belarusian authorities;
- (s) continue to closely follow the cases of arrests and disappearances in Belarus, bring the attention of the Belarusian authorities to these cases and request their proper and immediate action; launch a targeted EU assistance programme to help the victims of political repression and police violence, in particular with access to legal counsel, material and medical help, and rehabilitation;
- (t) insist on an independent and effective investigation into the protests-related deaths of Alyaksandr Taraykouski, Alyaksandr Vikhor, Artsyom Parukou, Henadz Shutau and Kanstantsin Shyshmakou and the murders of political opposition figures Yuriy Zakharenko, Anatoliy Krasovski and Victor Honchar that took place in 1999, as well as into the fate and whereabouts of journalist Dmitriy Zavadski in 2000;
- (u) call on Belarus to introduce into its Criminal Code a specific definition of torture in line with international human rights standards and ensure that it is punished

¹ OJ L 134, 20.5.2006, p. 1.

with sanctions, as well as legislative changes to criminalise enforced disappearance;

- (v) call on the authorities to improve access, availability and quality as regards healthcare in places of detention, in particular given the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the working conditions of medical staff, given reports of police preventing help for injured protesters and arresting medical workers;
- (w) implement the sanctions agreed by the EU foreign affairs ministers and the European Council, as soon as possible and in meaningful coordination with international partners;
- (x) widen the sanctions by enlarging the group of persons to include Aliaksandr Lukashenka and a substantial number of high and middle ranking officials, as well as members of the CEC who are liable for or have contributed to the falsification of the results of the presidential elections in Belarus and are responsible for or have contributed to violations of civil and human rights; this list should be applied by the EU as a whole and constantly updated and extended according to the level of crimes committed by the Lukashenka regime;
- (y) impose visa bans and financial sanctions, including freezing of assets, against regime representatives, sanctioned individuals and their family members;
- (z) swiftly operationalise and implement an EU human rights sanctions mechanism allowing sanctions to be applied that are similar to those of the US Magnitsky Act, against individuals and companies involved in grave human rights violations and responsible for other crimes, and apply them against Belarusian officials, including investigators and judges conducting criminal cases against political prisoners, and other individuals and companies involved in the violent suppression of peaceful signature collection rallies and protests in Belarus by means including torture and ill-treatment of detainees and political prisoners;
- (aa) consider sectoral sanctions for Belarus which could increase pressure on the regime but should not entail a long-term negative impact on the population;
- (ab) commit to the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Belarus; strongly reject any covert or overt external interference from any third state, including the Russian Federation, in particular in Belarusian state media and the security forces; emphasise that the Belarusian protests are pro-democratic and not geopolitical in nature; reiterate that the European Union would be open to further development of relations with the country both bilaterally and within the Eastern Partnership framework only if Belarus meets all previously agreed conditions related to democracy, the rule of law, free and fair elections, international law and human rights and fundamental freedoms;
- (ac) urge the Russian Federation not to engage in any actions that would threaten the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Belarus; express concern over its use of negotiations for continuous supply of oil and gas to Belarus as a political pressure method; publicly name and condemn the hybrid interference executed by the Russian Federation in ways such as delegating so-called media experts to the Belarusian state media and advisors to the military and law enforcement agencies,

and deter the continuation of such actions; warn against any attempts to militarise the situation and provoke tensions with the neighbouring countries;

- (ad) denounce the fact that Belarus charged Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya for allegedly making public calls to harm the country's security and to seize power, and denounce the Russian Federation's decision to put her on the interstate list of wanted persons;
- (ae) highlight that the military exercise of Belarusian armed forces held at the end of August 2020 on the border with Lithuania and Poland, which was followed by a hostile and misleading information campaign, has unnecessarily increased tension and mistrust;
- (af) acknowledge that while the critical engagement policy followed before the fraudulent presidential elections of 9 August 2020 has brought about some developments in bilateral relations, progress in the key areas of democracy, the rule of law, and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms - including freedom of speech and expression and media freedom, as well as labour rights - and civil society, was reversed during and after those elections, the socio-economic situation is characterised by low household incomes and high unemployment rates, and the economy is stagnant and is heavily affected by state-owned enterprises and corruption; as the EU engages in a more tailored approach to the Eastern Partnership and a full review of EU-Belarus relations, consider applying the 'less for less' principle in the case of further deterioration of the human rights situation, which should not affect engagement and support for civil society, human rights defenders, independent media and the people of Belarus, since on the contrary political, financial, technological and information support needs to be further boosted pursuing the 'more for more' principle and greater involvement of civil society in initiatives and projects in Belarus supported by the EU, other international organisations and individual countries needs to be encouraged;
- (ag) prepare a comprehensive review of its policy towards Belarus, with a particular focus on the EU's support to civil society and the people of Belarus, taking into account different scenarios of developments in the country, and suspend negotiations on the EU-Belarus Partnership Priorities until free and fair presidential elections take place in Belarus; insist that the EU needs to be united and persistent in its response to the situation in Belarus following the presidential elections;
- (ah) welcome the statement of the Foreign Affairs Council of 12 October 2020 expressing the EU's readiness to support a peaceful democratic transition and to use a variety of instruments in line with the Eastern Partnership, including launching a comprehensive economic support plan;
- (ai) support the initiative to set up a high-level mission for Belarus composed of former heads of state or government, whose task should be to help put a stop to the violence, assist in freeing political prisoners and detainees, and explore all avenues at a domestic and international level to create a conducive environment for an inclusive political dialogue in Belarus;

- (aj) denounce the actions taken by the Belarusian authorities against the Lithuanian and Polish embassies in Minsk, namely their demands that the Lithuanian and Polish ambassadors be recalled and their embassies' diplomatic staff reduced; ensure a coordinated and united response from the EU Member States; welcome, in this context, the gestures of solidarity expressed by those Member States that decided to recall their ambassadors for consultations;
- (ak) offer the alternative of strengthened and much closer cooperation with Belarus that also includes a substantially increased financial and technical commitment from the EU should democratic changes, including new elections, become reality;
- (al) develop a comprehensive programme for Belarus after the new presidential elections are held and organise a donors' conference for democratic Belarus, which would bring together international financial institutions, G7 countries, EU Member States and institutions, and others willing to pledge a multi-billion euro financial package to support the future reform efforts and restructuring of the economy;
- (am) immediately cease any disbursements of EU financial assistance to the illegitimate Belarusian authorities and avoid providing any funding to the government and state-controlled projects, including the twinning and cross-border cooperation projects, and channelling assistance or funding earmarked for civil society through these entities; set up clear conditions to guarantee that EU financial support to Belarus will not end up in the hands of the regime's representatives or serve to legitimise its actions, unless the regime ceases all repression, opens up to dialogue with citizens and allows new free and fair elections;
- (an) ensure that the additional support of EUR 53 million meets the needs of the Belarusian people, thus, in addition to the COVID-19-related relief, covering medical treatment of Belarusian people who have been injured and traumatised as a result of the brutal crackdown on protesters, and for the most serious cases facilitating and supporting treatment and recovery in EU Member States; express their support for the civil society organisations and activists, including those operating in exile, for enabling organisations and lawyers providing legal services to the victims of the Belarusian regime, for documentation and investigation of the human rights violations, and for the Belarusian workers on strike and the independent trade unions, the independent media and investigative journalism;
- (ao) develop a strategy for distribution of the EU funds in cooperation with civil society and democratic representatives of the Belarusian people, the EU and international civil society organisations and institutions with experience of working with Belarus;
- (ap) insist that support programmes implemented through the EIB, EBRD, World Bank, UN and other international organisations must also be conditioned on improving the situation of human rights and democracy, and on meeting the international standards for nuclear safety; note and address the situation that, currently, the programmes implemented in cooperation between these international organisations and state structures in Belarus usually do not include independent stakeholders in their governing bodies, which leads not only to such programmes having only dubious achievements, but also contributes to the

displacement of civil society organisations from the structure of cooperation with the EU by the state-owned public organisations (government-organised non-governmental organisations or GONGOs);

- (aq) welcome the numerous acts of solidarity with the people of Belarus, including fundraising and charitable and humanitarian assistance; in this regard, condemn the stopping of the humanitarian aid transport organised by ‘NSZZ Solidarnosc’;
- (ar) support the work of European political foundations in strengthening the development and role of the citizenry in shaping public affairs and empowering future political leaders in Belarus;
- (as) remind the Belarusian authorities that the EU has reacted fast and responded to the urgent needs of the country during the COVID-19 pandemic, mobilising over EUR 60 million to help tackle immediate needs, such as support to the health sector and vulnerable communities, as well as short-term needs, in support of social and economic recovery;
- (at) insist that any future EU macrofinancial support for mitigating the economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic is conditional on strict political and economic criteria, notably those linked to democracy and human rights, particularly ending political repression and releasing all political prisoners; note the nuclear safety concerns voiced by some EU Member States and the threats posed by Belarus-Russia military cooperation, and insist that adequate measures are taken to combat the virus and protect the population;
- (au) insist that such support must be closely monitored in order to prevent any misuse of EU funds such as the financing of experimental medicines or vaccines;
- (av) highlight the need to address the Belarusian regime's endeavours to spread disinformation, portraying EU support as support for the regime; express concern at the spread of fake news and disinformation in Belarus during the COVID-19 pandemic, and encourage both the Belarusian authorities and the EU to develop specific programmes that combat disinformation and propaganda;
- (aw) call on the Belarusian authorities to publicly recognise the threat posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, strengthening the healthcare system, providing citizens with relevant life-saving information and statistics about the pandemic in a transparent and inclusive manner, implement the recommendations of the WHO expert mission to Belarus of April 2020, improve the working conditions of medical staff, and improve access to and the, availability and quality of healthcare, including in places of detention;
- (ax) maintain the issue of nuclear safety as a major concern for the EU owing to the potentially disastrous consequences of an accident for the whole region; treat the issue of the Astravyets Nuclear Power Plant (NPP) with urgency as it is approaching the start of its operations, the first delivery of nuclear fuel having been received from Russia and already loaded to the first reactor, while further technical preparations are under way to start electricity generation in November 2020;

- (ay) demand the deferral of the planned commissioning of the Astravets NPP until international nuclear safety standards have been met, obligatory public hearings are held, and the political situation in Belarus has stabilised, given a number of unresolved nuclear safety problems identified during stress tests, the absence of a final conclusion on the plant's safety, insufficient storage capacity for spent nuclear fuel and for energy reserves, and the currently unstable situation in Belarus complicating response measures in the event of an accident, of which there is an increased risk during the start-up of the reactor;
- (az) express their concern that Belarus will not fully implement the recommendations of the stress tests carried out by the EU nuclear safety authorities before the launch of the first reactor of the Astravets NPP, noting moreover that the NPP is being built without ensuring a secondary control reserve that is necessary for its safe functioning;
- (ba) insist on full respect for international nuclear and environmental safety standards, transparent, inclusive and constructive cooperation with international authorities, and the provision of access and monitoring capabilities for independent environmental organisations in Belarus as regards the Astravets NPP, and link their implementation to the disbursement of EU financial support; support efforts to ensure European solidarity on the issue of banning imports of energy from the Astravets NPP into the EU market;

Human rights and media freedom

- (bb) applaud the Belarusian people for their courage and determination and strongly support their desire for democratic change, social justice and freedom, basing their country's future on the principles of democracy, the rule of law and human rights, so as to ensure the freedom, independence, sovereignty and prosperity of the Republic of Belarus;
- (bc) insist on the need to amend the national legislation of the Republic of Belarus in order to ensure basic civil rights and freedoms, such as freedom of assembly, association, expression and opinion, as well as media freedom, and compliance with international agreements and the OSCE guidelines on the freedom of peaceful assembly; call on Belarus to cooperate fully with the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the country, including visits to Belarus, as well as with the UN Committee against Torture and the UN Human Rights Committee, in order to carry out long-overdue reforms to protect human rights, strengthen democracy and address the issue of torture and other cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment of detained persons in Belarus;
- (bd) condemn the ongoing application of the death penalty in Belarus and continue to work with the Belarusian authorities towards a moratorium as a first step towards its permanent abolition and, pending abolition, work towards an effective right of appeal against death sentences; encourage the intensification of public debate regarding the abolition of capital punishment, paving the way for a possible future referendum on the issue;
- (be) condemn the ongoing intimidation and persecution of human rights defenders, opposition figures, including presidential hopefuls, their supporters and family

members, peaceful protesters, civil society activists, election observers, environmental rights defenders, religious leaders, athletes, students and researchers, and independent journalists and bloggers, in particular the tactics of disappearance and heavy fines applied by the authorities; call on Belarus to cease this repression and to guarantee these people's ability to carry out their activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions; deplore the silencing and intimidation of doctors, medical personnel and others who openly spoke and warned about the spread of COVID-19 in Belarus;

- (bf) note the attempts to interrupt and limit the work activities and silence the reporting of the Human Rights Centre 'Viasna' members, notably Aliaksandr Burakou, Ales Burakou, Raman Kisliak, Uladzimir Vialichkin, Alena Masliukova, Andrei Miadzvedzeu and Siarhej Lacinski, and call for an end to the detention, prosecution and intimidation of these people and their family members;
- (bg) acknowledge the chilling effect of repression on civil society and the important role of human rights defenders in ensuring independent monitoring, particularly during elections;
- (bh) condemn the efforts of the Belarusian regime to deny entry to the country for Belarusians critical towards it, such as the head of the Catholic Church of Belarus, Archbishop Tadeusz Kondrusiewicz, as well as independent journalists, human rights workers and representatives of the international community, including Members of the European Parliament;
- (bi) develop a clear procedure and capacities among the EU Member States to fast-track consideration and issuance of Schengen visas and create a humanitarian corridor for Belarusian citizens in cases where they are in urgent need of medical assistance or seek refuge for political reasons;
- (bj) condemn the continued discrimination and stigmatisation directed against people with disabilities, people with HIV, minorities, LGBTIQ people, and families of detainees across Belarus, and call for the establishment of an independent national human rights body and a new Human Rights Action Plan, and the adoption of comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation;
- (bk) recall that Belarus has ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, in accordance with which national legislation must guarantee all persons equal and effective protection against discrimination on any grounds: race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other beliefs, national or social origin, property status, and birth or other circumstances; express concern that awareness and knowledge about the Covenant among government officials, judges, prosecutors, and lawyers remain limited; call on the Belarusian authorities to improve the education system and spread information in the media in order to foster a tolerant attitude towards vulnerable groups;
- (bl) call for action to effectively counter the continued stereotyping and discrimination affecting women by improving their working environment, allowing women access to all sectors of employment, reducing the gender pay gap, and promoting the political engagement of women, among other measures; mainstream gender equality in the EU's relations with Belarus;

- (bm) raise the issue of discrimination against Belarusian language speakers in Belarus and support initiatives aimed at promoting a wider use of the Belarusian language in education, public and cultural life and the media;
- (bn) deplore the prevalence of forced labour, which disproportionately targets vulnerable categories of people, including employees of state-owned enterprises and administrations, students, people held in so-called labour treatment centres, prisoners and army conscripts; call on Belarus to revoke all legislation that allows forced labour and not to force Belarusian people to take part in the annual community work day;
- (bo) address the issue of disproportionate punishment within the legal system of Belarus, notably Article 328 of the Criminal Code, under which minors are punished for non-violent drug-related offences with disproportionately long terms of imprisonment;
- (bp) encourage the continuation of the EU-Belarus Human Rights Dialogue, but insist that its true usefulness comes not just from institutional contacts but from measurable progress, which is not taking place according to the participating Belarusian civil society organisations;
- (bq) monitor the situation of media freedom in Belarus and support and create a safe working environment for independent media outlets, bloggers and journalists, including those who work on a freelance basis with unregistered foreign media, as well as media based in Poland, such as Belsat TV, European Radio for Belarus and Radio Racja, as these are an important source of information both for and about Belarus, and provide a much-needed channel for alternative views;
- (br) strongly condemn the suppression of the internet and media, road blockades, and intimidation of and massive withdrawals of accreditations for journalists in order to stop the flow of information about the situation in the country, as well as the denial of access to Belarus for international media and members of parliament or government of the democratic community;
- (bs) denounce the decision of the Belarusian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to cancel all accreditations of journalists who work for foreign media organisations and have been covering the ongoing protests in the country, citing an update of accreditation procedures;
- (bt) commend the actions of the journalists and employees of public media outlets who despite repression and threats against them remained true to the journalist's ethos and continued to support the democratic opposition and were subsequently fired; recognise the work of independent media, including Charter 97, Belsat TV, Radio Svoboda and others; use the European Endowment for Democracy and other instruments to support these outlets and journalists that are subject to repression by the regime;
- (bu) vigilantly counter propagandist narratives and disinformation spread by the Belarusian state media accusing the EU and its Member States of interference in the ongoing processes in Belarus and posing supposed security threats for the territorial integrity of the country, as well as any hybrid threats made by third-

party actors; call for the removal of the alleged ‘journalists’ sent from Russia to replace the employees who resigned from the Belarusian state-owned TV stations;

Economic and sectoral cooperation

- (bv) remind Belarus that the EU is its second-biggest trade partner and that intensification of economic relations could bring a much-needed balance to Belarusian external trade, which remains very dependent on Russia and the Eurasian Economic Union;
- (bw) emphasise the importance of continuing the process of Belarus’s accession to the World Trade Organisation (WTO), as it will encourage the modernisation and diversification of the economy, contribute to the creation of a more stable business environment in the country, and ease rules-based trade with the EU;
- (bx) note that China's president was the first to congratulate Lukashenka after the elections; express concern over increasing Chinese investments in strategic infrastructure, and warn about the dependency effect this might create for Belarus;
- (by) note that the Belarusian economy is stagnating and that more than one fifth of the population live in absolute poverty, with the numbers tending to increase due to the COVID-19 crisis; note that the minimum wage in Belarus is 375 Belarusian rubles per month or EUR 137, and that the country is facing a demographic crisis, with the working age population shrinking and massive labour migration from Belarus;
- (bz) note the damaging effects for the Belarusian economy of the refusal of the regime to enter into a dialogue with the people, and notably the ongoing nationwide strikes at state-owned enterprises and the strikes by teachers and social and cultural workers; also notes the damaging effects on the IT sector, which might not recover to its previous level;
- (ca) express their regret at the unwillingness of the Belarusian authorities to follow the recommendations of international financial institutions such as the World Bank and IMF, or to implement reforms reducing the vast number of state-owned enterprises, reforming the business sector, encouraging entrepreneurship, supporting SMEs, reducing the public debt, outsourcing the realistic costs of living to the population and improving conditions on the labour market;
- (cb) express their concern over state regulations that are damaging for the private sector, particularly the requirement to pay a minimum wage not lower than the average wage of the ten most successful state-owned enterprises;
- (cc) express their concern over the prevalent large-scale systemic corruption in Belarusian public institutions and state-owned companies, encourage and support anti-corruption investigations and information campaigns, voice concerns over harassment and persecution of journalists reporting on corruption cases, and insist on a safe environment for investigative journalists and whistleblowers;
- (cd) insist that a comprehensive investigation is conducted into the financial flows of the family of Aliaksandr Lukashenka and his associates, including the activities of

Belarusian state enterprises in offshore zones, as well as corruption schemes of Belarusian enterprises;

- (ce) welcome and encourage the energy diversification of Belarus and the reduction of its dependence on Russia through imports of oil and gas from new suppliers, including via the territory of the EU; also encourage improving environmental sustainability and the development of alternative energy sources;
- (cf) emphasise the importance that the EU attaches to the fight against climate change, notably through the implementation of the European Green Deal and the 2015 Paris Agreement, and encourage Belarus to enhance its cooperation with the EU on environmental matters with a view to green transformation, energy efficiency, sustainability and climate neutrality, and to use the opportunities offered by the Eastern Europe Energy Efficiency and Environment Partnership, while insisting that the harassment of environmental activists must be stopped; invite Belarus to increase efforts to fight climate change and implement climate change mainstreaming in all areas of policymaking;
- (cg) highlight initiatives in the framework of the Northern Dimension Environmental Partnership (NDEP), which are aimed at tackling the most pressing environmental problems in the area;

People-to-people contacts

- (ch) maintain that the EU is interested in the broadest possible people-to-people contacts as the best way of bringing the EU and Belarus closer together, as well as promoting mutual understanding and exchange of best practice; promote exchange programmes with a proven track record, such as the Mobility Scheme for Targeted People-to-People Contacts (MOST), and reiterate that the visa facilitation agreement is a tangible expression of this policy;
- (ci) welcome the progress in implementing the Mobility Partnership and visa facilitation and readmission agreements as part of a safe and well-managed mobility environment between the EU and Belarus;
- (cj) acknowledge and make use of the fact that growing mobility between the EU and Belarus increases citizens' exposure to European values and support for democratic transformation;
- (ck) explore possibilities for visa-free travel to Belarusian citizens so that people-to-people contact is not held hostage to undemocratic principles of the Belarusian authorities;
- (cl) support cross-border cooperation and movement between Belarus and the neighbouring EU Member States, particularly encouraging the Belarusian authorities to implement the local border traffic regime with Lithuania, which would benefit those living within a 50-kilometre radius on both sides of the border;
- (cm) acknowledge the role of the Belarusian diaspora in democratic awakening in Belarus and engage its members in the EU Member States as important actors in a national dialogue in Belarus;

- (cn) support cooperation in the sphere of culture through programmes such as Creative Europe, and in particular projects aimed at fostering creativity, involving civil society organisations and initiatives at local level; promote and mobilise European solidarity with Belarusian society through cultural expressions;
 - (co) intensify efforts to ensure that young people in Belarus can benefit from better-quality education through progress in the implementation of the Bologna Process and increased academic mobility and opportunities to study in the EU via the Erasmus+ programme, which can contribute, in a real and long-term way, to a change of mentality in Belarus and to the natural transfer of European values to the country and its democratisation;
 - (cp) support Belarusian youth who due to their participation in the nationwide protests will be deprived of education in Belarus, and provide them with scholarships to study at the EU Member States' educational institutions;
 - (cq) maintain the financial support of the EU for the European Humanities University (EHU), a Belarusian university in exile in Vilnius;
 - (cr) provide scholarships for academics who lost their teaching and research positions over participation in the protests;
 - (cs) provide urgent humanitarian assistance, including Schengen visas and scholarships, to athletes and their family members who have been deprived of income for their political position and have had to endure acts of physical and psychological repression by the Lukashenka regime;
 - (ct) support educational programmes for the professional reorientation of the Belarusian civil servants who were fired or voluntarily left the civil service;
 - (cu) support digitalisation of education in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak in Belarus;
 - (cv) acknowledge that many voices of ongoing democratic revolution in Belarus are graduates of the EU Member States' universities or participants in different EU-supported programmes aimed at raising their professional qualifications and enabling professional activities;
 - (cw) encourage the science community of Belarus to increase cooperation with its European counterparts and make full use of Horizon Europe;
 - (cx) strengthen democracy support programmes and strategic communication, and support greater outreach to local communities beyond the traditional 'pro-European' cohorts;
2. Instructs its President to forward this recommendation to the Council, the Commission and the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.