

Belarus: Remarks by the High Representative / Vice-President Jos



Opening remarks

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Thank you Mr President, Honourable Members,

You have invited me to address the [European Parliament] plenary on three very important foreign affairs issues. All of them together is going to be a lot of work and not enough time to deal with them as much as needed. But let us try to summarise what has been, indeed, a summer of crisis.

Let us start with Belarus. The situation is clear for us. We consider the elections on the 9th of August fraudulent. We do not recognise Lukashenko as the legitimate President of Belarus.

I appreciate the support that this Parliament has demonstrated for the rights of the Belarusian people, as well as for the actions taken until now by the European Union.

But the brutal crackdown continues. More than 7,500 peaceful protesters have been detained. 500 cases of torture have been recorded and documented. All Presidium members of the Coordination Council have been arrested or forced into exile, with the exception of Nobel Prize Laureate Ms [Sviatlana] Alexievich.

We have reacted covering four pillars of action.

First, adopting sanctions. We are in the process of adopting sanctions for a substantial number of those responsible for violence, repression and falsification of election results. They are, right now, under examination of the Council working parties with a view to adoption as soon as possible. "As soon as possible" – what does it mean? They should be adopted before the European Council if we want to keep the European credibility. We are trying

to apply a gradual approach, and if the situation further deteriorates, additional sanctions will be envisaged.

Secondly, we call on the Belarusian authorities to find a way out of the crisis by ending violence and unlawful detentions, and by establishing an inclusive national dialogue. We continue to stress that we are ready to support any credible initiative in this direction. For example, the offer of the OSCE Chair in Office to visit Minsk could help to resolve the crisis. We stress the fact that, from our point of view, the re-run of elections under OSCE's supervision would be the best solution, but so far it has been impossible for us to reach out to the Belarusian authorities on this issue at any level.

The single-minded determination of Lukashenko to stay in power – with the, apparently, increasing support of Moscow – makes all this difficult. You know that there was a meeting between Lukashenko and Putin on Monday (15 September), yesterday. It seems from this meeting that the support of Russia to Belarus – to Lukashenko – continues.

Thirdly, we are committed to strengthening the engagement with the Belarusian people and civil society. President von der Leyen announced €53 million allocated to Belarus. Funds have been made immediately available to the victims of violence, and we try to provide support to independent media.

Finally, we are conducting a review of European Union-Belarus relations. We are identifying areas where contacts should be suspended or scaled back; areas where our interest is to engage and even intensify contacts in support of the Belarusian people and civil society; and, finally, areas where we can assist further if there is a move towards a new, democratic Belarus.

I want to stress these three areas: where we can suspend or scale back, where we can engage, and where we can assist further.

This is, telegraphically, what I can say about the Belarusian situation.

Link to the video: <https://audiovisual.ec.europa.eu/en/video/I-194060>

Closing remarks

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Thank you Mr President, thank you honourable members for all your contributions to this debate. I do not have a lot of time to summarise.

We are using all the tools that we have at our disposal to contribute to the end of the violent repression that has been developing in Belarus after the [elections, which we do not consider to have legitimately elected \[Alexander\] Lukashenko \[as President\]](#).

We [support](#) a peaceful and democratic solution to the crisis through political engagement, restrictive measures, and increased support to civil society and independent media. This is what we can do and that is what we are doing. Do not ask for things that are out of the competences of the European

institutions. Sometimes you ask for decisions that belong to [the competence of] Member States, for which I am sorry but I cannot feel responsible. I try to work within the framework of the treaties for the European and the capacities we have. And believe me it is not always easy.

We are still discussing sanctions on Belarus and my main purpose is to try to see them approved with an agreement in the technical working groups of the Council, in order to have it approved before the European Council. But we will continue engaging on the situation with Belarus with all the tools at our disposal.

Link to the video: <https://audiovisual.ec.europa.eu/en/video/I-195015>