

Joint statement on the presidential elections in Belarus

We, as friends of the Belarusian people and supporters of the sovereignty and independence of Belarus, welcome the progress achieved in our relations over the past few years. We have seen many positive developments between our countries and Belarus: the signing of the Visa Facilitation and Readmission Agreements with the EU and the doubling of its financial support; the decision to resume relations with the United States at ambassadorial level, the visit of the Secretary of State to Minsk, and the first shipment of U.S. oil; the increasing political dialogue with the EU and with its Member States bilaterally (e.g. visits at Presidential or PM level to EU Member States) or in the framework of the Eastern Partnership; the Commercial Dialogue with the UK; and the opening up of EIB and EBRD for loans. We reaffirm our commitment to continue this positive engagement with Belarus on the basis of shared values.

As Belarus begins the process of selecting its president, we urge the Belarusian authorities to take the measures necessary to hold a safe, peaceful, free and fair election and to ensure fundamental freedoms.

We expect Belarus to invite officially OSCE/ODIHR observers in due time and urge the Belarusian authorities to demonstrate in deeds its willingness to make progress in the implementation of the recommendations of the previous OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Reports.

Noting in particular that the process of registration of candidates should be fair and transparent, we emphasize that no politically motivated restrictive measures should prevent potential candidates fulfilling the registration procedure.

Given that the elections are taking place in the context of the COVID-19 crisis, we strongly recommend the Belarusian authorities adopt the World Health Organization's recommendations of physical distancing to minimize the COVID-19 threat in a way which allows all candidates an equal chance to campaign and inform voters about what they stand for.

We also recall that a genuinely pluralistic composition of election commissions is key to promoting confidence in the election administration.

Media freedom and the right of peaceful assembly are essential to legitimate elections. Journalists must be able to report freely and unhindered. Citizens must be allowed to peacefully express their opinions. This is why we are also concerned regarding the recent detentions of peaceful protesters and imprisonments of journalists.

We recall that tangible steps taken by Belarus to respect universal fundamental freedoms, rule of law and human rights will remain key for the shaping of our future policy towards Belarus. A safe, peaceful, free and fair

election, untainted by malign external influence and respecting fundamental freedoms, will foster democratic development in Belarus, reinforce its sovereignty and independence, and pave the way for greater cooperation with our countries and economic prosperity for the Belarusian people.