

Recent developments in Belarus: UK statement, 16 September 2021

Madam Chair,

On 17 September 2020, almost a year ago to the day, the United Kingdom, with 16 other OSCE participating States, [invoked the Moscow Mechanism](#) to establish a mission of experts to look into and report on the serious concerns around electoral fraud and human rights violations following the 9 August 2020 Presidential election in Belarus. The subsequent, independent [report by Professor Wolfgang Benedek](#) concluded that the election results were fraudulent and that systematic violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms had been committed by the Lukashenko regime.

Since that time, the Belarusian authorities have made no attempt to address any of the recommendations in Professor Benedek's report. Instead, the Belarusian authorities have responded with misinformation, distorting the facts and providing unconvincing justifications as they seek to defend the indefensible. Sadly, the situation in the country continues to deteriorate.

The sentencing of Maria Kolesnikova and Maxim Znak to 11 and 10 years respectively on 6 September following a closed trial highlighted yet again the lengths the regime will go to as they attempt to silence their critics. Locking up your opponents, and silencing independent voices will not solve this crisis. The solution lies in meaningful and constructive dialogue with all parts of Belarusian society. We continue to call for the release of all political detainees and journalists and those imprisoned for voicing opposition to the Lukashenko regime.

Moreover, the crackdown on non-state media and civil society continues unabated. The decision by the Belarusian courts on 27 August to liquidate the Belarusian Association of Journalists was unjustified. The BAJ have been working to protect the rights of media actors in Belarus for over 25 years. This decision further erodes the right to freedom of expression and media freedom in Belarus. Human rights organisations report that BAJ are just one of over 200 NGOs who have been targeted by the regime. This is a terrible but sadly not surprising statistic.

We also remain concerned about the Lukashenko regime's continued facilitating of trafficking migrants across the border. The unconscionable use of migrants to put pressure on Lithuania, Latvia, Poland and other European partners is another example of the Belarusian Government's flagrant abuse of international norms. We continue to stand with and support Lithuania, Latvia, Poland and the EU, and again urge the Belarusian authorities to cease this activity.

Madam Chair,

In conclusion, we once again urge decision-makers in Belarus to reconsider

their course of action, to proactively address the recommendations made in Professor Benedek's Moscow Mechanism report, and to engage with the offer of the current and previous OSCE Chairs-in-Office to facilitate a genuine national dialogue.