

# Recent developments in Belarus: UK statement, 19 November

Mr Chair,

Two weeks ago, we listened as Professor Wolfgang Benedek delivered his report under the Moscow Mechanism into the human rights violations in Belarus. The UK, together with a majority of other OSCE participating States, expressed again our shock and regret at what has happened and continues to happen in Belarus. We called on the Belarusian authorities to immediately change their approach, cease violence against peaceful protestors and engage in a national dialogue with all sectors of society.

It is now over 100 days since the fraudulent Presidential elections of 9 August, which were the context for the political crisis and turmoil that has unfolded in Belarus. The Belarusian authorities have not ceased their campaign of repression. Almost 30,000 peaceful demonstrators and journalists have either been arrested or detained. Over 900 people face charges in politically motivated criminal cases. The authorities deploy weaponry against their citizens, throw stun grenades into crowds causing injuries, and forcibly enter the homes of those they accuse of harbouring protestors.

Students have been expelled from their universities and academics removed from their positions for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of speech. One week ago, on the day of our last Permanent Council meeting, a 31 year old Belarusian and opposition supporter, Mr Raman Bandarenka, died from his injuries in hospital in Minsk, after being savagely beaten – allegedly by plain clothed representatives of the Belarusian authorities.

The case of Mr Bandarenka is a further shocking example of the repression that is being carried out by the Belarusian authorities on its own people. A full and transparent investigation must be carried out into Mr Bandarenka's death, and those responsible brought to justice. All such violence must stop. Our thoughts and prayers are, of course, with Mr Bandarenka's family and friends at this difficult time.

Mr Chair,

Since the illegitimate Presidential elections, the Belarusian authorities have committed massive and systematic human rights violations with impunity. In his independent report, Professor Benedek informed this Permanent Council of the evidence of the Belarusian authorities acting with excessive violence, and their involvement in torture and other ill-treatment. He also noted the general impunity under which the Belarusian security forces have been operating.

Yet since the election, not a single criminal case has been brought against the Belarusian security forces. This is despite the clear evidence of excessive violence documented by Belarusian human rights defenders,

journalists and media workers, and broadcast around the world. Those members of the Belarusian media have themselves been subject to serious attack. Their dedication and bravery and the importance of the work they do was recognised earlier this week when [the Belarusian Association of Journalists was awarded the first Canada/UK Media Freedom Award](#) at the Global Conference for Media Freedom 2020.

The Belarusian government's attempts to hide their actions have not only seen journalists, media actors and civil society attacked. They also expelled two UK diplomats from our Embassy in Minsk for legitimately observing protests – a wholly unjustified action, and another example of the Lukashenko regime's attempts to prevent others shining a light on what is happening in Belarus.

Mr Chair,

The tragic death of Mr Bandarenka highlights the importance of immediate action by the Belarusian authorities. We call – yet again – on the Belarusian government to end their campaign of violence against protestors, release all those unjustly imprisoned and detained, and hold perpetrators of the violence to account. We request the authorities fully investigate all accounts of abuses and violations.

We urge the Belarusian authorities to implement the recommendations in Professor Benedek's recent report and seek a peaceful and democratic solution to the current ongoing crisis. In that regard, we remind the Belarusian authorities of the offer made by the Chair in Office to facilitate a national dialogue with the representatives of the opposition and civil society.

Thank you.