

Response by Belarus to the Vienna Mechanism: joint statement

Madam Chairperson,

I am delivering this statement on behalf of the following 35 participating States that invoked the Vienna (Human Dimension) Mechanism on 4 November: Albania, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Montenegro, The Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, Ukraine, and the United States.

In our letter of 4 November 2021 to the Delegation of Belarus, and our statement to the Permanent Council on the same day, we stressed our concerns about the serious human rights violations and abuses taking place in Belarus. We highlighted specific areas of concern around (i) freedom of peaceful assembly; (ii) media freedom; (iii) continued arbitrary or unjust arrests or detentions; (iv) the targeting of opposition figures; (v) torture; and (vi) migration. In accordance with the provisions of the Vienna Mechanism, we posed a number of questions to the Belarusian authorities.

The Delegation of Belarus has now replied by letter, with Annex, dated 12 November 2021.

Whilst we welcome that the Delegation of Belarus responded within the ten days mandated under the Vienna Mechanism, we regret that the content of their letter does not indicate a material change in the approach of the Belarusian authorities.

We will, of course, study the full contents of the letter in detail. However, we take this early opportunity to reject firmly some of the comments made in that letter, such as the suggestion that our concerns are groundless, and that the raising of those concerns through OSCE mechanisms undermines trust.

The Vienna Mechanism was invoked to express our concerns about the implementation of human dimension commitments in Belarus. But it also offered another opportunity for Belarus to reassess its current direction, and to consider the opportunities for serious and meaningful engagement through the unique set of tools and instruments that are available through the OSCE.

In that regard, we remind the Delegation of Belarus of the offers of the current Chairpersonship-in-Office, together with the previous and subsequent Chairs, to facilitate a true national dialogue between the Belarusian authorities and representatives of the opposition and civil society. We underscore our call for the Belarusian authorities to implement the 2020 Moscow Mechanism report's recommendations. We also call on Belarus to make full, proper and meaningful use of the OSCE's institutions, bodies and mechanisms to help resolve the ongoing crisis.

Madam Chair,

In their previous statements to the Permanent Council, and now in their reply to our Vienna Mechanism letter, the Delegation of Belarus has repeatedly claimed that the Belarusian authorities are open to dialogue. So far, those words have not been reflected in their actions and behaviours.

We yet again call on the Belarusian authorities to reconsider their current approach to this crisis. And we reconfirm our commitment to continue to work together to help resolve the current crisis for the sake of the Belarusian people.

We request that this statement be attached to the Journal of the Day.