

Statement on the One Year Anniversary of the Fraudulent Presidential Election in Belarus

Thank you madam Chair.

The UK would like to add its voice in marking the one year anniversary of the deeply flawed and fraudulent presidential election in Belarus. The UK has on a number of occasions in this Permanent Council condemned the appalling crackdown on human rights which has taken place in Belarus over this time. No sector of society has been safe; Professor Benedek's Moscow Mechanism report, commissioned in the immediate aftermath of the election, and the further work conducted by the UN have shown the full range of brutality on display.

Recent incidents such as the forced diversion of Ryanair Flight 4978, the sentencing of Victor Babariko and the closed trials of Sergei Tikhanovski and other high profile opposition figures, as well as the ever growing number of political prisoners show how the situation continues to deteriorate. Not satisfied with its attacks on political opposition, free media and peaceful protesters, the Lukashenko regime is now attacking the wider civil space. On 23 July in coordinated action, authorities across Belarus dissolved at least 46 NGOs. These included organisations focused on environmental protection and disability rights.

The Belarusian authorities have had ample time to cease their attacks on the freedoms of the citizens of their country, to release those detained on spurious political charges, and to undertake the fresh elections needed to enable the Belarusian people to choose their own leaders, and their own future, democratically.

As we have seen no such action from the Belarusian authorities, the UK has this week acted alongside international partners to introduce further sanctions on Belarus. Our package of sanctions – focused on economic and aviation sectors – are in direct response to the continued actions of the authorities to undermine democracy and violate the human rights of the Belarusian people.

In addition, we also want to raise our concerns regarding the regime's instrumentalisation of migrants and refugees for political purposes. We are aware of a sizeable increase in the number of migrants moving through Belarus' borders and into its neighbours. Particularly Lithuania, which has seen over 2,600 people entering this way in the past month alone and most recently Poland where in the last week over 400 people have tried to enter. Latvia too has seen approximately 350 people attempting to enter from Belarus within the last month. This 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 stand with and support Lithuania, Latvia, Poland and the EU, and urge the

Belarusian authorities to cease this activity.

In conclusion, madam chair, we again urge decision-makers in Belarus to reconsider their current course of action, and to seek to proactively address the recommendations made in the Moscow Mechanism report.

Thank you very much.