

**Ahead of the European Council Summit on Belarus on 19 August, we, the undersigned organisations, call on the EU Member States and institutions to support human rights, justice and accountability at this critical juncture for Belarus.**

Over the 26 years of the Lukashenko regime, the people of Belarus have experienced immense violations of fundamental freedoms and ongoing repressions against the dissenting voices in the society. The most recent crackdown began in May 2020 as a response to a series of protests targeting and imprisoning opposition presidential candidates. Prior to the presidential election scheduled for 9 August, hundreds of protesters, human rights defenders, journalists and bloggers were detained, fined or imprisoned for their participation in “unauthorised” protests. Thousands of Belarusians expressed their support for the last-minute candidate Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, the wife of the imprisoned pro-democracy activist Siarhei Tsikhanouski, joining rallies across the country.

The situation escalated on 9 August when mass gatherings started against the allegedly fraudulent election result, and law enforcement forces responded with immense violence and brutality against the protesters. Since then, more than 7,000 protesters have been detained, many of whom have been beaten and tortured. At least two protesters have reportedly died at the hands of security personnel, one in detention. [According to independent sources](#), more than 80 people are missing. Dozens of journalists, including foreign correspondents, have been intimidated, detained or deported while many others have been denied access to the country. Despite this repression, the people of Belarus have continued to oppose the official election result, with peaceful protests becoming widespread. Strikes in state-owned enterprises and institutions are also growing across the country.

Last week several EU states started the process of imposing targeted sanctions against Belarus officials responsible for grave abuses and rigged elections. We welcome this development and call on Governments of the EU to strengthen their commitment to human rights and democracy in Belarus.

**We call on EU Member States and EU institutions to:**

- Support democratic processes in the country, in particular to the Belarusian-led transition coordination council;
- Condemn the widespread abuses and human rights violations in Belarus and support processes for ensuring accountability for these violations, including through the immediate establishment of a UN Human Rights Council Commission of Inquiry and the OSCE Moscow Mechanism into abuses in the context of the 9 August election;
- Call for the release and rehabilitation of all those detained for exercise of their right to freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and other human rights, including opposition members, human rights defenders, journalists, and political prisoners who have been detained before or during the election campaign, and provide access to prisoners for their families and lawyers;
- Call for free and fair elections in Belarus in accordance with international standards and with the presence of international observers;
- Effectively apply targeted sanctions, travel bans and asset freezes to those individuals responsible for fraud in the 9 August election and the repression which followed;
- Offer protection for those individuals facing persecution through the provision of free Schengen visas and/ or temporary humanitarian visas;

- Provide flexible and speedy funding to Belarusian civil society, including through the Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR).

## ARTICLE 19

ePaństwo Foundation

Elbarlament

Netherlands Helsinki Committee (NHC)

People in Need

Danish Institute for Parties and Democracy (DIPD)

The European Association for Local Democracy (ALDA)

Club de Madrid

Demo Finland

The Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD)