

Resolution the situation in Belarus after the parliamentary elections of 23 September 2012

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The Council discussed the situation in Belarus in the wake of the parliamentary elections of 23 September and adopted the following conclusions:

- The Council noted the importance that it attaches to Belarus and to its citizens, and remained **gravely concerned about the lack of respect for human rights, democracy and rule of law in that country**. The elections, which took place against an overall background of repression, represented another missed opportunity for Belarus to hold elections in line with OSCE and international standards. The Council calls on the Belarusian authorities to address the recommendations made by the OSCE/ODIHR, to cooperate fully to that end with the OSCE /ODIHR, and to permit the return of an OSCE Office to Belarus.
- It reiterates its calls for the **immediate release and rehabilitation of all remaining political prisoners**, and remains deeply concerned about decisions concerning additional prison sentences and continued reports of mistreatment of political prisoners. The Council again calls upon the Belarusian authorities to stop the harassment of civil society, the political opposition and the independent media, and to comply with the Human Rights Council Resolution 20/13, and to cooperate fully with the new UN Special Rapporteur on Belarus. As not all political prisoners have been released and no released prisoner has been rehabilitated, and against the background of the lack of improvement as regards the respect for human rights, the rule of law and democratic principles, the Council **decided to prolong the existing restrictive measures until 31 October 2013**.
- The Council reiterates its **firm commitment to strengthening the EU's engagement with the Belarusian people and civil society** and expresses its continued full support for the “European Dialogue on Modernisation” which has stimulated a substantial debate among representatives of Belarusian society with a view to proposing concrete ideas on the reform needs and encourages the authorities of Belarus to engage in the discussions.

It reiterates the EU's readiness to **launch negotiations for visa facilitation and readmission agreements** which would enhance people-to-people contacts to the benefit of the Belarusian population at large, and regrets the absence of response from the Belarusian authorities to Commission's invitation in June 2011 to start negotiations.