Concept Note

The United Nations Security Council Arria-formula meeting on the situation in Belarus

The United Nations Security Council members Estonia, France, Ireland, Norway, the United Kingdom, the United States, with additional co-sponsors Albania, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Costa Rica, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Ukraine, will hold an informal high-level virtual meeting of the UN Security Council on the situation in Belarus, including the implications the continuing political crisis in the country has for international peace and security.

8 October 2021, 9.00 am - 1.00 pm (New York time, EDT)

OBJECTIVES

The meeting aims to highlight the deteriorating human rights situation in Belarus and the aggressive behaviour of Belarusian authorities against neighbouring countries. The meeting provides an opportunity to hear about these acts of transnational repression from first-hand sources.

BACKGROUND

Since the fraudulent presidential elections in Belarus on 9 August 2020, Alyaksandr Lukashenka’s regime has continued and intensified its repression against the Belarusian people. More than 35,000 people have been sentenced and detained, including recently leading opposition figures Maria Kolesnikova and Maksim Znak. Nearly 5,000 of those detained have submitted complaints of being tortured and ill-treated by Belarusian authorities. The authorities have started more than 4,600 politically motivated criminal cases and there are now over 650 political prisoners. Fearing for their lives and livelihoods, more than 13,000 people have fled the country. A massive crackdown on human rights
defenders, journalists and other media workers, as well as on political opponents and civil society organizations, is continuing with impunity. In August this year the authorities of Belarus decided to liquidate the Belarusian Association of Journalists. The ongoing campaign of political repression in Belarus is one of the largest in Europe in the last four decades. Participants in the peaceful pro-democracy movement, unprecedented in recent history of the country, have been punished by imprisonment, exile, intimidation, and abuse.

The forced diversion and landing of Ryanair flight 4978 jeopardised international civil aviation safety, including the trust that pilots must place in air traffic controllers’ instructions, and showed flagrant disregard for international norms. This step was met with wide international condemnation, as was the arrest of a journalist and his partner travelling on the plane.

Since May, Belarusian authorities have only intensified their acts of transnational repression. They have manipulated migration by taking advantage of vulnerable citizens from third countries to fuel illegal border crossings from Belarus to neighbouring states in order to apply pressure on those states for speaking out against the Lukashenka regime’s severe abuses and repression. This instrumentalization of human beings for political purposes with the objective of destabilizing neighbouring countries and diverting attention from the regime’s increasing human rights violations, demonstrates the threat the Lukashenka regime has become to regional stability.

Moreover, these events have been accompanied by a disinformation and propaganda campaign by Belarus authorities and state media to discredit European Union member states and provoke more tension in the neighbourhood.

This meeting builds upon earlier high-level UN Security Council Arria-formula meetings (4 September 2020 and 22 January 2021) on the human rights situation and media freedom in Belarus.

KEYNOTE SPEECH
Ms Ilze Brands Kehris, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, Head of the UN Human Rights Office in New York.

BRIEFERS
- Mr Artyom Shraibman, political analyst and scholar, founder of Sense Analytics
- Mr Jens Modvig, Head of the International Accountability Platform for Belarus, input from Ms Victoria Fedorova, International Committee for the Investigation of Torture in Belarus
- Ms Anna Maria Dyner, political analyst, the Polish Institute of Foreign Affairs

FORMAT
The debate will be chaired by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Estonia, H.E. Ms Eva-Maria Liimets.

The meeting will take place on 8 October 2021 via video conference at 9.00 am (NY time, EDT). Further technical details will follow.

There will be statements by briefers and UN Security Council members as well as by other UN member states. In order to allow as many interventions as possible, each one is limited to 3 minutes. The briefers are invited to speak for up to 7 minutes. The list of speakers closes on 6 October at noon. The Chair will prepare the Chair’s Summary reflecting the interventions of the briefers and speakers. To that end, please send your statements to the email address: eeunsc@mfa.ee.
The meeting will be streamed live and open to public via YouTube, Facebook and the homepages of the Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Permanent Mission of Estonia to the UN. The meeting will be held in English and no simultaneous interpretation is offered.

For any questions and for submitting the registration form, please use the following email address: eeunsc@mfa.ee.