

Statement

**by the Office for a Democratic Belarus (Brussels)
and the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies**

on events of December 19, 2010 in Minsk

The violent crackdown on the post-election protests in Minsk on 19 December, 2010 came as a symbolic 'closing' of the brief period of relative liberalisation, which Belarus enjoyed since 2008. Independent accounts provide information suggesting that violent break into a government building was staged by security forces and used by riot police to arrest and beat hundreds of people. President Lukashenka publicly declared his responsibility for treating protesters in a brutal manner and announced the end of 'senseless democracy,' showing his indifference to the 'European structures.'

Over 600 people are being kept in prisons of Minsk and other Belarusian cities, including five presidential candidates. Some of them remained locked in police trucks since the night of detention and were deprived of food and water for two days. 18¹ persons are facing criminal charges with possible punishment of up to 15 years in jail.

Post-election events bring Belarus back to the situation of 2005-2006, perhaps with less hope for dialogue and engagement. One needs to reflect on the long-term consequences of what has happened and put efforts into minimising Belarus' slide back in its darkest day of repression.

Therefore, we suggest that the European Union and its Member States, as well as other representatives of the international community immediately

- Declare all people arrested on December 19 for participating in mass protest political prisoners and call for their immediate release.
- Declare its readiness to resume political dialogue with the government of Belarus only upon release of all political prisoners and abstention from new repressive acts against individuals, parties, NGOs, and press.
- Demand an independent international investigation of the December 19 events.
- Declare solidarity and offer assistance to those who suffered from beating, arrests, and other repressive acts, and to their families.

We call on the government of Belarus to immediately release all those arrested in relation with the December 19 events, stop repressions against its own citizens and return to the path of liberal reform in the country.

22 December, 2010