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Belarus

EU foreign ministers fail to agree on effective economic sanctions against Lukashenko regime

EU foreign ministers today agreed to expand travel restrictions and asset freezes against members of the Lukashenko regime in Belarus in response to the continuation of the poor human rights situation in the country. The Greens believe the measures will not be effective and have called for wider economic sanctions to be imposed. Commenting on the outcome, Green foreign policy spokesperson **Werner Schulz** said:

"The new extended measures against the Lukashenko regime, agreed by EU foreign ministers today, are unlikely to change anything. The existing travel bans and asset freezes against members of the Lukashenko regime have failed to achieve the desired results. Simply extending these measures to more individuals will not lead to any improvement in the human rights situation in Belarus, particularly as the travel restrictions ignore key personnel in the interior ministry and Lukashenko's own sons.

"If the EU is serious about tackling the repression in Belarus, foreign ministers need to impose comprehensive but targeted economic sanctions against companies and businesspeople that directly support the Lukashenko regime. Simply imposing sanctions against one or two companies falls short of what is necessary. The EU is by far the largest customer of Belorussian steel, potash and oil products, with trade even increasing in recent years. The EU should follow the US lead and recognise that only effective economic sanctions will force a dictator to rethink his policy.

"Sanctions should be linked to clear conditions: the release of all political prisoners and their complete rehabilitation. The EU should not agree to any fudges: Lukashenko's announcements of political change to date are totally hollow. More and more human rights activists have been given harsh sentences on trumped-up evidence, like Ales Bialiatski (whose organisation Viasna will be closed down). Penalties against already-convicted dissidents have been more extreme."

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