

EU extends and (again) suspends sanctions against Belarus

On 25 October, the EU Council accepted conclusions on situation in Belarus extending the existing ban on entry to EU countries on 41 representatives of the Belarusian government until 31 October 2011. At the same time, the Council once again suspended the application of sanctions against 36 of the officials, including President Alyaksandr Lukashenka. The EU has made its further relations with Belarus conditional on the development of democracy in this country, as well as whether the presidential elections scheduled for 19 December will be held in accordance with international standards. The new document is confirmation that that EU intends to continue its current policy towards Minsk, while at the same time waiting upon the development of the political situation in that country.

The EU first imposed a ban on entry on four Belarusian officials in 2004. Two years later, the list was extended to 41 persons, although in October 2008 the EU introduced a moratorium on sanctions on 36 of those persons, including Lukashenka. That decision was dictated by Brussels' hopes for a new opening in relations with Belarus. The sanctions still cover the representatives of the power institutions, those responsible for the disappearance of Belarusian opposition activists in the period 1999-2000, as well as the head of the Central Electoral Commission, Lidia Yarmoshina. In the latest document, the EU Council expressed its disquiet at the lack of democracy in Belarus and government's failure to respect human rights, and also made further co-operation with Minsk, as well as further financial aid, conditional on progress in democratisation.

The EU Council document means that once again, the approach of avoiding putting pressure on the Belarusian government has prevailed. This time, it is caused by waiting for the outcome of the presidential elections in Belarus. <WojK>