



**Foreign, Commonwealth
& Development Office**

Rt Hon Dominic Raab MP
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Tom Tugendhat MP
House of Commons
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25 September 2020

Dear Tom,

Thank you for your letter of 4 September regarding the Government's response to the fraudulent Presidential elections in Belarus and the human rights violations which have followed.

The elections fell well below international standards. Opposition candidates and their supporters were imprisoned ahead of the vote. Extensive witness reports recorded widespread falsification of results. Independent accredited observers were barred from polling stations and the Belarusian Government refused to cooperate in the deployment of international observers through the OSCE's Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR).

Since the elections, we have witnessed an appalling and sustained campaign of violence by the Belarusian authorities against peaceful protestors and the deliberate targeting of journalists and independent media, including repeated shutdowns of the internet. We have seen many credible reports of cruel and degrading treatment inside detention centres. The Belarusian authorities have signalled no intent at peaceful dialogue. Instead they have abducted, detained and expelled members of the opposition Coordination Council, many of them women, including the now familiar figures of Svetlana Tikhanovskaya and Maria Kolesnikova.

Your letter asked about the UK's multilateral and bilateral response to this crisis. Let me be clear, the UK does not accept the results of this fraudulent election and condemns the violence by the Belarusian authorities. The Government has set to work with our key international partners to promote a peaceful resolution, hold those responsible for violations to account and to support the democratic aspirations of the Belarusian people. We took an immediate step to suspend bilateral defence cooperation.

I discussed the situation in depth with the Foreign Ministers of France and Germany at Chevening on 10 September. Also on 10 September, I discussed our approach on Belarus with Lithuanian Foreign Minister Linkevicius. I have just returned from Washington where I agreed the importance of coordinated action on Belarus with Vice President Pence and Secretary of State Pompeo.

The Minister for the European Neighbourhood and Americas has spoken to Ministers in Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Iceland, Poland, Finland and France, beginning with calls on 17 August. She also spoke to State Secretaries in Sweden (17 August), Germany (18 August), and the US (18 August). She has raised the UK's concerns on the multilateral stage at the OSCE Permanent Council on 28 August and the UN Security Council (Arria Formula) on 4 September. The Minister has spoken directly to the Belarusian Foreign Minister and their Ambassador. And she has spoken to members of the opposition, Svetlana Tikhonovskaya and Svetlana Alexeivich.

The UK played a key leadership role to invoke the Moscow Mechanism in the OSCE on 17 September, with 16 other countries joining us, and further support among the wider membership. This has triggered an independent investigation into both the electoral fraud and the extensive human rights violations carried out by the Belarusian authorities. We now look forward to the conclusion of the investigation.

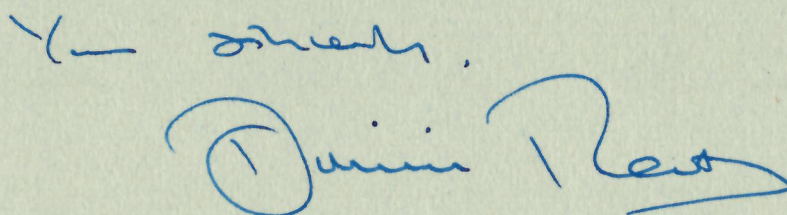
It is critical that those responsible for the fraudulent elections and human rights violations are held to account. The UK will join the EU's adoption of targeted sanctions against those responsible for violence, repression and falsification of election results in Belarus. The UK will implement those sanctions during the Transition Period. We will carry over the EU's Belarus sanctions regime as an autonomous UK sanctions regime when the Transition Period ends. I have also directed the FCDO's Sanctions Unit to consider Magnitsky sanctions for our response to serious human rights violations.

The UK Government has been working with partners in Belarus to support and promote civil society for the benefit of the Belarusian people. I have doubled our financial support to human rights groups, independent media organisations and community organisations, with an extra £1.5m in funded project work over the next two years. This includes stepping up support to a joint UK-Poland programme and other similar projects to promote independent media working to counter disinformation.

We aim to expand our work with UN agencies on women's economic empowerment and support for Gender-Based Violence victims. We are also coordinating with the Council of Europe, International Red Cross and other organisations to ensure they have the resources to respond to medical, psychological and social needs resulting from human rights abuses.

You asked about the role of Russia in relation to events in Belarus. The resolution to the crisis must be determined by the people of Belarus; foreign intervention would be unacceptable. Like the rest of Belarus' neighbours and the wider international community, Russia has a role to play in supporting peaceful political dialogue between the Belarusian authorities and opposition leaders.

We will use all tools at our disposal to hold the Belarusian authorities to account, and to facilitate a peaceful outcome that reflects and respects the will of the people of Belarus.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Dominic Raab', with a stylized flourish at the end.

THE RT HON DOMINIC RAAB MP



Foreign Affairs Committee

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From Tom Tugendhat MP, Chair

Rt Hon Dominic Raab MP
Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs
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Dear Foreign Secretary

29 September 2020

I am writing to you on behalf of the Committee regarding the ongoing crisis in Belarus. The way in which the recent presidential election was conducted, the refusal to invite international observers and the Belarusian government's punitive response to the protests all run counter to international norms and acceptable standards of behaviour. There is also valid concern about growing Russian involvement in the Belarusian government's response to the protests.

With this in mind, I am writing to seek clarity on the Government's response to this situation. I would be grateful if you would address the following points with reference to specific actions the UK has taken, and plans to take:

Multilateral response

- Which multilateral institutions is the UK Government working with, and what progress has been made on formulating a response? What specific actions have been agreed?
- What representations has the Government made on this issue at the United Nations Security Council?
- What work is the Government doing at the OSCE to limit the potential for Russia to take unilateral police or military action in Belarus?
- Will the Government support calls for the current and inbound OSCE chairs to go to Belarus to begin mediation efforts?

Bilateral response

- What conversations have you had with Belarusian Foreign Minister Vladimir Makei about the protests and his government's response to them?
- What conversations have you had with your Russian counterpart about the Russian Federation's involvement with and support for the Belarusian government's response to the protests?
- The Lithuanian government has expressed concern over the possibility of Russian support for the Belarusian government. What support are you prepared to offer the Lithuanian government on this matter?
- What diplomatic support has the FCDO offered to countries neighbouring Belarus who have provided support to the Belarusian opposition?

Civil society and the media

- How is the Government working with international partners to support freedom of speech and assembly for Belarusian civil society actors and groups?
- There are credible reports of detained protestors being tortured by Belarusian authorities in detention facilities. Will the UK apply pressure to the Belarusian government to allow organisations such as the Red Cross access to these prisons, to allow them to ascertain the conditions of those being detained?
- You have publicly condemned the detention of journalists by Belarusian authorities. What local support is being offered offered to journalists in Belarus?
- What is the Government doing to help secure the release of journalists, activists and protestors who have been detained by Belarusian authorities?

Given the pace at which events in Belarus are unfolding, it would be helpful to have a response to this letter as soon as possible. I intend to place your response in the public domain.

Best wishes

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tom Tugendhat', with a stylized, cursive script.

TOM TUGENDHAT