



Prime Minister of the Republic of Lithuania, Saulius Skvernelis
Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement, Olivér Várhelyi

Cc:

Prime Minister of the Republic of Latvia, Krišjānis Kariņš
Deputy Director-General for DG NEAR, Maciej Popowski

Brussels, 8 October 2020

Dear Prime Minister Saulius Skvernelis,
Dear Commissioner Olivér Várhelyi,

We are writing to express our concerns regarding the negligent behaviour occurred when implementing the EU supported project “New forensic technologies for crime scene investigation and ensuring public security” under the European Neighbourhood Instrument Cross-Border Cooperation Programme Latvia-Lithuania-Belarus 2014-2020. This particular project is implemented by the Lithuanian Police Forensic Science Centre and the Central Office of the State Forensic Examination Committee of the Republic of Belarus. It came to our attention that under this project the Belarusian authorities have recently acquired 15 surveillance drones. We deplore such an act, as we see it as directly benefiting the Belarusian power structures and possibly enabling them for further repressions and brutalities against peaceful protesters. These drones could be used to monitor and control the civilian population and strengthen the regime’s surveillance abilities. The scope of the project includes Grodno and Minsk counties, encompassing a third of the Belarusian population. Moreover, despite its (initial) intentions to fight crime and natural disasters, these drones could pose a direct threat to the Belarusian people, who are exercising their universal right by protesting against an illegal government.

In its resolution on the situation in Belarus of 17 September 2020, the European Parliament voiced a clear position of non-recognition of Aliaksandr Lukashenka as President of Belarus, which, we believe, is shared by your respective countries. Furthermore, it states that the EU support to the Belarusian authorities should be frozen until free and fair elections have taken place in Belarus.

We call upon you to thoroughly investigate the acquiring of these surveillance drones by the Belarusian authorities and to prevent recurrence of any similar actions. Adding the civilian drones to the European Council approved list of equipment¹, which might be used for internal repression in Belarus should be a start. Any projects under the European Neighbourhood Instrument or any other programs must be immediately reviewed and, if appropriate, suspended. Moreover, the situation calls for an improved coordination and monitoring from the European Commission's side. As the case of this implemented project shows, a bureaucratic execution of project activities while ignoring the situation on the ground might result into jeopardising the safety of the Belarusian people. Instead, we need to channel the EU and its Member States' assistance directly to the Belarusian people, including to the victims of political repression and police violence.

We rely upon you to support the European Union's strong stand against the human rights violations in Belarus and to ensure that all institutions under your authority do the same. We look forward to hearing from you and remain ready for further cooperation in supporting the people of Belarus in their fight for democracy.

Sincerely,

Petras Auštrevičius, Renew Europe, Lithuania
Malik Azmani, Renew Europe, Netherlands
Bart Groothuis, Renew Europe, Netherlands
Liesje Schreinemacher, Renew Europe, Netherlands
Radosław Sikorski, EPP, Poland
Viola von Cramon-Taubadel, Greens/EFA, Germany
David Lega, EPP, Sweden
José Ramón Bauzá Díaz, Renew Europe, Spain
Robert Biedroń, S&D, Poland
Hilde Vautmans, Renew Europe, Belgium
Reinhard Hans Bütikofer, Greens/EFA, Germany
Olivier Chastel, Renew Europe, Belgium
Abir Al-Sahlani, Renew Europe, Sweden
Hannah Neumann, Greens/EFA, Germany
Barry Andrews, Renew Europe, Ireland
Miriam Lexmann, EPP, Slovakia
Nicolae Ștefănuță, Renew Europe, Romania

¹ Annex III of the Council Regulation (EC) No 765/2006 concerning restrictive measures in respect of Belarus

Claudia Gamon, Renew Europe, Austria
Kim van Sparrentak, Greens/EFA, Germany
Ivan Štefanec, EPP, Slovakia
Gianna Gancia, ID, Italy
Nils Torvalds, Renew Europe, Finland
Dominique Riquet, Renew Europe, France
Tineke Strik, Greens/EFA, Netherlands
Javier Nart, Renew Europe, Spain
Markéta Gregorová, Greens/EFA, Czechia
Nathalie Loiseau, Renew Europe, France
Aušra Maldeikienė, EPP, Lithuania
Katalin Cseh, Renew Europe, Hungary
Andrius Kubilius, EPP, Lithuania
Ivars Ijabs, Renew Europe, Latvia
Bas Eickhout, Greens/EFA, Netherlands
Rasa Juknevičienė, EPP, Lithuania
Leopoldo López Gil, EPP, Spain
Jan Huitema, Renew Europe, Netherlands
Sandra Kalniete, EPP, Latvia
Isabel Santos, S&D, Portugal
Tomasz Frankowski, EPP, Poland
Fabio Massimo Castaldo, NA, Italy
Andrzej Halicki, EPP, Poland
Caroline Nagtegaal, Renew Europe, Netherlands