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CENTRE FOR ADVANCING CANADA'S INTERESTS ABROAD

SPECIAL SITUATION MEMORANDUM

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THE SITUATION IN BELARUS

The world is watching ongoing crackdowns and human rights violations in Belarus. An Alexander Lukashenko-Vladimir Putin summit was held while opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya assembles a government-in-exile. Meanwhile, we've also seen the flagrant abuse of commercial overflights in Belarusian airspace to seize political prisoners,

It is in Canada's interest to confront emboldened authoritarians and their threat to the rules-based order. The circumstances around the grounding of Ryanair Flight FR 4987 in Minsk on dubious allegations constitute major risks to international security. What should Canada's leaders do in response?

Recommendations

- Explicitly and clearly declare Canada's support and solidarity with the Belarusian people's desire for a free and democratic Belarus by recognizing President-Elect Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya's government-in-exile, and the end of Lukashenko's regime.
- In coordination with like-minded partners, withdraw recognition from the Lukashenko regime, place Belarusian diplomatic representatives under a controlled engagement policy, and commence accrediting nominated officials by the President-Elect as official representatives of the Belarusian people.
- Establish a Friends of Belarus contact group at the UN and in key regional capitals, with Baltic countries, Ukraine, and Poland to coordinate diplomatic, legal, and economic policies.

- With Five Eyes and European allies, organize a coordinated expulsion of Belarusian KGB agents to degrade the Lukashenko regime’s ability to surveil, threaten, and intimidate Belarusian democracy activists abroad.
- Develop a coordinated plan with transatlantic allies to encourage defections from Belarusian intelligence and security forces.
- At the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), engage member-states to ban Belarus’ national airline in individual jurisdictions, suspend commercial overflights in Belarusian airspace, and support a robust investigation into the forced diversion of Ryanair Flight FR4987.
- As Canada partners with G7 nations to advance Taiwan’s participation at the World Health Assembly and the World Health Organization, Canadian diplomacy at the upcoming G7 Summit in the UK should unite leaders in opposition to Belarus’ recent ascension to the WHO’s Executive Board.
- Establish a long-term Canada-led World Bank “Free Belarus” investment envelope, leveraging the EU’s €3-billion commitment of grants and loans, to provide substantial technical, political, and economic support for the Belarusian government-in-exile. The investment envelope would develop a roadmap for economic reform and growth for a democratic Belarus, once a democratic transition is fulfilled for the Belarusian people.
- Establish, with like-minded partners, a special democracy assistance program to Belarusian activists and media through the European Endowment for Democracy.
- Provide material support to free and independent Belarusian diaspora media to combat the regime’s disinformation. Facilitate the transfer of knowledge, expertise, and training by Canadian Eastern European and Baltic civil society in support of a free and democratic Belarus.
- Support the creation of a Belarus Accountability Centre, staffed and operated by Belarusian democracy activists, to document human rights abuses by Lukashenko’s regime for use as evidence in a future tribunal at the International Court of Justice.
- Pursue a series of special economic measures:
 - Impose Magnitsky sanctions upon Belarusian political, military and state-controlled commercial leadership;
 - Bar Belarus from the SWIFT international banking system;
 - Impose Magnitsky sanctions on Russian oligarchs responsible for financing the transnational repression of Vladimir Putin and Alexander Lukashenko; and,
 - Ban the trade of Belarusian bonds by imposing sanctions on Belarus’ sovereign debt.
- Create special visas for Belarusian democracy activists and journalists to immigrate to Canada.