

Answer of the Federal Government to the Minor Interpellation tabled by the Members of the Bundestag Andrej Hunko, Wolfgang Gehrcke, Annette Groth, Inge Höger, Ulla Jelpke, Petra Pau, Kathrin Vogler, Halina Wawrzniak and the Left Party parliamentary group

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Measures by the European Union and the Federal Government on migration control and police cooperation in Belarus

Preliminary remark by the questioners

Interest in EU security cooperation with Belarus increased with the creation of the EU's "Eastern Partnership", which is part of the "European Neighbourhood Policy" (<http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/cae/servlet/contentblob/384192/publicationFile/4340/Aktionsplan-Bericht2-de.pdf>). Since 2009 a labour agreement has been in place between the EU border agency Frontex and the Belarusian border police (Bundestag Printed paper 17/10925). Whilst the European Union has banned 242 members of the Belarus Government from entering the EU, the European Commission is at the same time in the process of negotiating a deportation agreement. As a result of this, undesirable immigrants in the EU could be deported back to Belarus, where they would be detained in inhuman conditions. The international police organisation Interpol also praises cooperation with Belarus (<http://news.belta.by/en/news/society?id=734664>). The EU and Federal Government have at times been reticent on the issue of police cooperation with the Government in Belarus. But Belarusian police officers are again receiving training in the shape of a "Study visit on border control during international sport events" (http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/taix/dyn/taix-events/detail_en.jsp?EventID=55961). At the same time the President of Belarus has announced a complete reorganisation of the border agency, to include the use of drones (<http://news.belta.by/en/news/society?id=740205>). According to other reports, the country will be cooperating with Ecuador on this (<http://www.janes.com/article/31896/belarus-and-ecuador-to-collaborate-on-uav-development>). The EU has allegedly already invested 50 million euros in equipment for the Belarusian border agency between 2002 and 2012, with a further 40 million to follow (<http://belarusdigest.com/story/belarus-eu-border-iron-curtain-or-safety-valve-16842>). The International Organization for Migration (IOM) is also cooperating with Belarus on the projects MIGRAMEL-MIGRAMOL and "Strengthening the Surveillance Capacity on the Green and Blue Border between Belarus and the Ukraine" (www.iom.int/jahia/Jahia/belarus). The EU had previously contributed 2.6 million euros for facilities at the Belarus-Ukraine border in 2011. Most of this money was spent on technical equipment for border posts.

The IOM is now helping Belarus with another project entitled “Risk Analysis in Border Management in Belarus” (RANBEL), which is a continuation of their earlier cooperation (<http://news.belta.by/en/news/society?id=734448>).

The Federal Police Force and public order support forces have provided support to police and militia forces in Belarus in the past, through a number of different projects. According to the Federal Government this cooperation is “an important part of ‘anticipatory strategy’” (Bundestag Printed paper 17/10742). Between 2008 and 2011 German police officers provided instruction in operations and strategy to some 500 officials from Belarus. The support given included the supply of computers and vehicles. According to the Federal Government this was to “bring Belarus up to EU standards, with the German police force serving as an example.” Primacy had been given to the requirement that every policy action had to be “lawful and proportionate” (Bundestag Printed paper 17/194). Germany’s Federal Police Force had also helped out the border authorities at the Terespol border crossing. The Federal Criminal Police Office (BKA) held workshops in Minsk on “Operations analysis”, at which the fundamentals and methods of police information processing were demonstrated. A presentation of the “Analyst’s Notebook” software, which can be used to cross-link individuals, events and locations, was given to members of various police units. Areas targeted included “drugs crime”, “international terrorism”, “human trafficking/people smuggling”, but also “cybercrime”. The criterion for measures of this kind was whether or not the aid to a beneficiary country had discernible “police implications” for Germany. The specific cooperation details were agreed by the Federal Ministry of the Interior, the Federal Foreign Office and the German Embassy in Minsk. Further support was coordinated by the Commander-in-Chief of the Public Order Support Forces of the Länder. The Länder involved were Saxony, Lower Saxony and Baden-Württemberg (Tagesspiegel, 23 August 2012). Partners in Belarus were senior officials of the State Border Committee and the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Specialist units were also involved: in August 2010 four staff officers of the border agency received training with Border Protection Group 9. This covered “management and resources”, and troop selection procedures. The expertise imparted will be used by border guards to combat “illegal migration”.

The Government of Belarus is endeavouring, through a number of initiatives, to normalise its relations with the EU. The Foreign Minister declared that the country was an “island of stability and safety” and was keen to remain “independent and sovereign” but at the same time have “normal relations with the EU” (<http://eapmigrationpanel.org/page47280.html>). But the EU’s demand for the release of political prisoners “should be handled by the law instead of political decisions”. The state news agency reports that “cooperation between Belarus and the European Union was discussed” at the Belarusian Foreign Ministry in February (<http://news.belta.by/de/news/politics?id=740478>).

Deputy Foreign Minister Yelena Kupchina had met for talks with Dirk Schuebel, Head of the Eastern Partnership Bilateral Division in the European External Action Service. The focus had been on “prospects of cooperation in areas of mutual interest”. The Deputy Foreign Minister of Belarus had previously met in January with German Ambassador Wolfram Maas, seeking his help in improving relations with the EU (<http://news.belta.by/en/news/politics?id=738531>). At the same time, according to media reports, the Government is working to widen the laws on declaring a state of emergency and to further curtail press freedom (<http://www.indexoncensorship.org/2014/02/belarus-legal-frameworks-regulations-stifle-new-competitors>). In March journalists intending to report on protests against the secession of the Crimean peninsula were detained (<http://baj.by/en/node/24210>).

We ask the Federal Government:

- 1. What has been the Federal Government’s position at EU level on security cooperation with Belarus over the last two years, and how has its position changed during that period?*

The Federal Government is not involved in any bilateral action to provide help to security agencies in Belarus with regard to (border) police training or equipment. At European Union level too it has advised caution over measures of police security cooperation with the Republic of Belarus. In connection with the Eastern Partnership, the Federal Government opposed the inclusion of Belarus in the Eastern Partnership Police Cooperation Programme. It supports the prolongation of the European Union’s arms embargo on Belarus, including a ban on exports of goods that might be used for purposes of internal repression. This position has not changed over the last two years.

- 2. How far does the Federal Government regard it as necessary at present to assist Belarusian agencies in the control of the country’s borders, of migration or of political gatherings?*

See answer to Question 1.

- 3. To what extent is support for Belarusian agencies deemed more important now than in 2012, when fierce criticism of the Belarus regime prompted a temporary freeze on international assistance?*

See answer to Question 1.

4. Can the Federal Government confirm that the EU has already invested 50 million euros between 2002 and 2012 in equipping the Belarusian border agency, that 72 million have been invested in similar projects and that further spending of 40 million is planned (<http://belarusdigest.com/story/belarus-eu-border-iron-curtain-or-safety-valve-16842>)?

What proportion of these sums was spent on which projects, and which German authorities were involved?

The European Union funds regional measures of integrated border management as part of the Eastern Partnership. In past years Belarus too has taken part in regional measures of cross-border cooperation with funding from the European Neighbourhood Partnership Instrument. Belarus has taken part or is currently taking part in three such regional measures of cross-border cooperation (Latvia-Lithuania-Belarus, Poland-Ukraine-Belarus, and the Baltic Sea Region Programme). The Federal Government does not have a breakdown of the proportion of funds for these regional measures which goes to each of the participating states.

German agencies are not involved in these projects.

5. To the knowledge of the Federal Government, how has the labour agreement between the EU border agency Frontex and the Belarusian border agency been implemented since it was signed?

The Federal Government is aware of the following cooperation activities between Frontex and the Belarusian border agency:

- participation in the EU's Eastern Border Risk Analysis Network (EB-RAN);
- consultation on border management during the ice hockey world championship in Belarus;
- participation in Frontex training events to combat the crime of people smuggling;
- participation in the global conference of national border service heads, organised by Frontex;
- participation in European Border Police Day, organised by Frontex;
- participation in the conference on automated border control, organised by Frontex.

6. What information does the Federal Government have on the "Risk Analysis in Border Management in Belarus" (RANBEL) project of the International Organization for Migration (IOM)? Who are the project's beneficiaries?

The Federal Government has no information on this project of the International Organization for Migration.

7. *What information does the Federal Government have on President Lukashenko's announcement that drones are to be used in border control operations and on other reports of proposed cooperation with Ecuador (<http://news.belta.by/en/news/society?id=740205>, and <http://www.janes.com/article/31896/belarus-and-ecuador-to-collaborate-on-uav-development>)?*

The Federal Government is aware of media reports of these statements by President Lukashenko. It has no further information concerning them.

8. *What does the Federal Government know of the current state of negotiations between the EU and Belarus on visa facilitation?*

a) When were such negotiations agreed, begun, suspended or resumed?

b) Does the Federal Government know what Belarusian Foreign Minister Uladzimir Makey said on the subject at the recent Eastern Partnership summit?

c) Does the Federal Government know the significance of the Deputy Foreign Minister's announcement of the official launch of visa facilitation talks (<http://belarusdigest.com/story/belarus-eu-border-iron-curtain-or-safety-valve-16842>)?

The Council of the European Union gave the European Commission a mandate to open talks with Belarus on visa facilitation on 28 February 2011. The European Union is especially keen to secure an easing of requirements for Belarusian civil society. On 1 June 2011 the European Commission made a negotiation offer to Belarus accordingly. During his attendance at the Eastern Partnership summit in Vilnius, Belarusian Foreign Minister Makey said on 29 November 2013 that Belarus was willing to start negotiations on visa facilitation. During her visit to Brussels at the end of January 2014, Deputy Foreign Minister Kupchina formally agreed to the launch of negotiations. The European Commission gave Belarus a key issues paper for a possible agreement on visa facilitation. Actual negotiations have not begun as yet.

9. What is the position of the Federal Government on the European Commission's resumption of talks on a deportation agreement with Belarus, and what opposition has it encountered in the relevant working parties of the Council?

On 28 February 2011 the Council also gave the Commission a mandate to negotiate a readmission agreement with Belarus. On 1 June 2011 the European Commission made a negotiation offer to Belarus accordingly. An EU meeting at expert level was held on this on 24 January 2014. At that meeting the Commission said that the progress of talks with Belarus depended on how the political situation in Belarus developed.

10. What is the position of the Federal Government on the EU's travel ban on members of the Belarusian Government, and how has it presented that position in the relevant working parties of the Council?

As a result of the clamp-down that followed the presidential elections of December 2010, the European Union decided among other things to impose travel restrictions on Government representatives responsible for serious breaches of human rights or acts of repression against civil society and the opposition. The Federal Government and European Union demand the release and rehabilitation of all political prisoners in Belarus and the ending of repression against civil society, the opposition and independent media. The restrictions imposed by the European Union were recently prolonged in October 2013 for a further year. Resolutions to that effect were supported by the Federal Government in the bodies of the Council.

11. What information does the Federal Government have on the EU project "Study visit on border control during international sport events" ?

a) Who is targeted by the project, and what is the content to be imparted?

b) Who is in charge of the measure?

As the Federal Government understands it, this is a European Commission measure implemented under the aegis of the TAIEX (Technical Assistance and Information Exchange) Instrument. TAIEX is an instrument of the European Commission's Directorate-General for Enlargement and one of its roles is to provide advice to states covered by the European Neighbourhood Policy. The main work of TAIEX is technical assistance with the adoption of EU legal standards. Measures are carried out by experts from the Member States, particularly in the form of study visits and seminars. The Federal Government is not involved in this project. The Federal Government has no information on it other than the details publicly available from the source which the questioners quote in their preliminary remarks (http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/taix/dyn/taix-events/detail_en.jsp?EventID=55961).

12. How does the Federal Government assess the position regarding press freedom in Belarus, and in what terms has it made its views clear in ministerial talks? Which ministers has it talked to?

There are significant constraints on press freedom in Belarus. Radio and television are overwhelmingly state-controlled. Independent media critical of the regime are subjected to pressure from the authorities. They can have their licence withdrawn for political reasons. Independent journalists routinely suffer temporary detention when demonstrations are taking place. In some cases criminal investigation proceedings are opened. Both in bilateral exchanges and in EU-led talks with the Belarusian authorities, especially representatives of the Foreign Ministry, the Federal Government works to improve the human rights situation in Belarus. In particular it presses for comprehensive respect for press freedom and an improvement in the situation of independent media.

13. With which Belarusian authorities have police officers under federal control cooperated? Does the Federal Government know of any cooperation by police officers of the Länder? To which units do these belong, and to which ministries are they answerable?

14. What assistance has been given since 2012 with training or equipment (including mutual work shadowing or other visits) by German police forces and intelligence agencies under federal control? Does the Federal Government know of any such assistance by public order support forces of the Länder? And what plans are there for further projects (please list in an annex, in the same way as in Bundestag Printed paper 17/11077)?

a) What was the aim and purpose of these assistance measures?

b) Who is targeted by the project, and what was/is the content to be imparted?

c) Who was/is in charge of the measures concerned?

The substance of Questions 13 and 14 is related, so they are answered together, as follows.

See the Federal Government's answer to Question 12 in the Minor Interpellation (Bundestag Printed paper 17/10742 of 24 September 2012) tabled by the Left Party parliamentary group. Since 2012 no measures of bilateral (border) police training and equipment assistance have been conducted by German authorities. There are, moreover, no plans for any such activities.

15. *To the knowledge of the Federal Government, how many German police officers have been in Belarus in the line of duty during 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014, and for what purpose were they there (please give details in a table)?*

Federal Police Force:

Year	Purpose	Number of German police officers in Belarus
2009-2012	Posting of a border police liaison officer to the German Embassy in Minsk	1
2009-2010	Posting of a document and visa adviser to the German Embassy in Minsk	1
2009	Two working visits for management-level talks	3
2009	Course "Combating document crime and abuse"	2
2009	Seminar "Introduction to the work of police dogs and their handlers"	5
2009	Seminar "Combating illegal migration"	3
2010	Visit to attend a meeting of the Working Group of Border Service Heads	1
2010	Visit to celebrate the 65th anniversary of the border protection unit at Minsk Airport	1
2010	Visit on the occasion of the accreditation of the border police liaison officer attached to the German Embassy in Minsk	2
2010	Seminar "Illegal migration"	3
2010	Seminar "Document security"	3
2011	Work shadowing (Focal theme: Combating illegal migration at Minsk Airport)	2
2011	Seminar "Risk and crime analysis"	3

Federal Criminal Police Office:

Year	Purpose	Number of German police officers in Belarus
2009	Course "Operations analysis"	1
2009	Course "Vehicle identification"	2
2010	Management-level working visit for talks on international police cooperation	3

2010	Participation in international conference in Minsk "Combating trafficking in human beings"	2
2010	Working visit on "Training management/staff training"	2
2011	Duty visit for talks on the crime of people smuggling	1
2013	Duty visit for talks on serious and organised crime	2

Commander-in-Chief of the Public Order Support Forces of the *Länder*:

Year	Purpose	Number of German police officers in Belarus
2009	Commander-in-Chief's visit to Minsk	2
2010	Commander-in-Chief's visit to Minsk	3
2010	Seminar at the Minsk Police Academy	5
2010	Review	2

16. To the knowledge of the Federal Government, how many Belarusian police officers have been in Germany in the line of duty during 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014, and for what purpose were they there (please give details in a table):

Federal Police Force:

Year	Purpose	Number of Belarusian police officers in Germany

2009	Seminar "Border police analysis and assessment"	3
2009	Introduction of border police to duties and aviation safety at Berlin Airport	3
2009	Visit by cadets from the Belarus Border Service Institute to the Federal Police Academy (BPOLAK)	15
2010	Management-level visit by the state Border Service to Federal Police Headquarters (BPOLP)	4
2010	Briefing on aviation safety organised by BPOLAK and the Federal Police Regional Office – Frankfurt Airport (BPOLD FFM)	4
2010	Work shadowing for Belarusian cadets at BPOLAK	18
2010	Working visit by Belarusian Border Service to Federal Police Special Forces (GSG 9)	4
2010	Seminar "Border police analysis and assessment"	4
2010	Exchange of experience on "Combating illegal migration"	4
2010	Work shadowing for a member of the Border Service at BPOLAK	1
2011	Briefing visit by experts on experience at the Joint Centre in Swiecko	4
2011	Introduction of Belarusian document specialists to the work of the document verification unit at BPOLD FFM	4

Federal Criminal Police Office

Year	Purpose	Number of Belarusian police officers in Germany
2009	Attendance by representatives of the Ministry of the Interior at the 12th European Police Congress in Berlin	2
2009	Working visit on "Human trafficking"	3
2010	Working visit by forensic experts from Minsk on "ammunition casing examination, DNA tests, fingerprint identification and AFIS"	3
2010	Working visit on "Identification of and chemical research on explosives"	2

Commander-in-Chief of the Public Order Support Forces of the *Länder*:

Year	Purpose	Number of Belarusian police officers in Germany
2009	Seminar "Organisation and work of the Lower Saxony public order support force"	4
2009	Observation of policing operations in Leipzig	4
2010	Observation of policing operations at demonstrations on the anniversary of the bombing of Dresden	5
2010	Seminar "Policing of major events"	3
2010	Period of study at the police college	2
2010	Observation of policing operation during protests against the transport of nuclear waste	3

17. How are federal authorities cooperating with Belarus on security arrangements for the 2014 ice hockey world championship? Who are their partners?

Since 2012 no measures of bilateral (border) police training and equipment assistance have been conducted by German authorities. The same applies to measures by the Belarusian authorities in connection with security arrangements for the 2014 ice hockey world championship.

18. What information does the Federal Government have on initiatives by the Belarusian Government to normalise relations with the EU, and what conclusions and consequences does it draw from these?

The Government of Belarus, in discussions with representatives of the European Union and its Member States, routinely seeks closer ties with the European Union. It particularly emphasises the wish of Belarus to play a comprehensive part in the Eastern Partnership. During the Eastern Partnership summit, Foreign Minister Makey said on 29 November 2013 that Belarus was willing to take up the European Union's offer of talks on a visa facilitation agreement.

The Federal Government fully endorsed the European Union's decision to make Belarus a part of the multilateral dimension of the Eastern Partnership and in this context it advocates opening up European cooperation to include Belarus, in the interests of that country's people. It emphatically supports the objective of the European Union to secure an easing of conditions for civil society in Belarus and enhance people-to-people contacts through the conclusion of a visa facilitation agreement. The Federal Government takes the view that significant progress must be made on improving the human rights situation in Belarus before there can be any resumption of comprehensive cooperation between Belarus and the European Union. That applies especially to the matter of political prisoners.

19. To what extent and through what initiatives has the Federal Government itself made efforts towards that end since 2012?

Since December 2010 the Federal Government has strengthened its support for civil society in Belarus and through European Union channels too it advocates greater efforts to help civil society in Belarus. It promotes people-to-people contacts and cultural, academic and scientific exchange and is willing to develop its ties with Belarus further in these areas.

In talks with the Belarusian authorities, the Federal Government routinely calls for significant progress on human rights, before there can be any resumption of comprehensive cooperation. It suggests that offers of support from international organisations aimed at improving the human rights situation in Belarus should be taken up.

20. *What meetings have German ambassadors held since 2012 with which Belarusian authorities or ministries?*

Senior diplomats at the German Embassy in Minsk have held regular talks since 2012 with representatives of the Belarusian Government, opposition and civil society. At these meetings the Federal Government's position on these matters was routinely made clear to the Belarusian Government, in particular to representatives of the Foreign Ministry.

21. *What is the Federal Government's position regarding the EU's demand for the release of political prisoners?*

The Federal Government supports the European Union's demand for political prisoners in Belarus to be released.

- a) *Which prisoners does the Federal Government deem to be political prisoners, what criteria does it apply in defining them as such, and to what extent are those criteria different from those applied by Lithuanian Members of Parliament (<http://humanrightshouse.org/Articles/20048.html>)?*
- b) *What information does the Federal Government have regarding the number of persons held as political prisoners since 2010, and does it know how this figure has changed in the years 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014?*
- c) *To what extent is categorisation as a political prisoner, as applied by the Federal Government or – if it knows this, by the EU too – based on a list compiled by the human rights centre Viasna (<http://spring96.org/en/news/49539>, and <http://palitviazni.info/?lang=en>)?*
- d) *With which human rights organisations do federal authorities – or the EU, if the Federal Government knows this – cooperate on the matter of political prisoners, and to what extent is it these organisations which categorise people as political prisoners?*

Custodial sentences, once known, are examined jointly by the European Union and its Member States to see if they are politically motivated. Persons recognised as political prisoners by the European Union are identified by agreement between the ambassadors of the EU Member States and the EU Delegation to Belarus. The assessment of whether a conviction should be regarded as politically motivated is based on the specific circumstances of each case of detention examined. This assessment draws on a multiplicity of information sources. The Federal Government and European Union also take note of reports from international and local Belarusian human rights organisations. Out of particular concern not to place political prisoners in peril, the European Union does not publicly identify persons it deems to have been detained on political grounds immediately after examining their conviction.

The same applies to the publication of a definitive list of political prisoners.

Since 2010 there has been a decline overall in the number of detentions deemed by the European Union to be politically motivated, most notably because prisoners have been released after serving out their sentences normally and because some of them received a pardon – in some cases after being forced to appeal for clemency.

e) To what extent are anarchist prisoners also deemed by the Federal Government and EU to be political prisoners (if they are not, why not)?

f) What conclusions does the Federal Government draw from the petition, also signed by numerous opposition figures in Belarus, which calls for anarchist prisoners to be included in the category of political prisoners too (<http://www.gopetition.com/petitions/in-defense-of-belarus-imprisoned-anarchists.html>)?

Prisoners espousing anarchist causes are recognised as political prisoners by the Federal Government and the European Union if, on examination of a case of detention of which they become aware, they conclude that in the light of the specific circumstances of the arrest the conviction must be deemed politically motivated.

22. In the view of the Federal Government, are the Council conclusions of October 2012 on Belarus still valid?

In its conclusions of 15 October 2012 the Council reaffirmed the European Union's demands for significant progress towards improving the human rights situation in Belarus and pledged its support for civil society in the country. It also made clear that the development of bilateral relations under the Eastern Partnership was conditional on progress towards respect by Belarus for the principles of democracy, the rule of law and human rights. The Federal Government continues to endorse these objectives.

23. What information does the Federal Government have on efforts by the European External Action Service (EEAS) to improve EU-Belarus relations?

The Federal Government routinely impresses upon the Belarusian authorities the need for significant progress on human rights, before there can be any resumption of comprehensive cooperation. It is cooperating on implementation of the European Dialogue on Modernisation with Belarus, proposed on 29 March 2012 by Štefan Füle, the EU Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy. This seeks to develop ideas for political, social and economic reform in Belarus.

24. To the knowledge of the Federal Government, which “prospects of cooperation in areas of mutual interest” were addressed at the meeting between Deputy Foreign Minister Yelena Kupchina and Dirk Schuebel, Head of the Eastern Partnership Bilateral Division in the European External Action Service?

The Federal Government understands that the meeting in question focused especially on further development of the European Dialogue on Modernisation with Belarus. The Belarusian side placed particular emphasis on the country’s desire to play a comprehensive part in the Eastern Partnership. The plan for a visa facilitation agreement between the European Union and Belarus was also discussed.

25. What was the “significant progress towards an improvement of the human rights situation in Belarus”, insisted on by German Ambassador Wolfram Maas at his latest meeting with the Deputy Foreign Minister (Written question 13 in Bundestag Printed paper 18/459)?

In its dealings with the Belarusian authorities the Federal Government stresses the need for an improvement in the human rights situation. It calls for the release and rehabilitation of all political prisoners in Belarus and an end to repression against civil society, the opposition and independent media. The meeting in question dealt in particular with the issue of political prisoners.

26. To what extent is it true that President Lukashenko also held a meeting with the German Ambassador, seeking his help in improving relations with the EU (<http://news.belta.by/en/news/politics?id=738531>)?

There was no such meeting. The web page cited in the question describes a press release which reports on a meeting between the German Ambassador and the Deputy Foreign Minister on 27 January 2014.

27. To the knowledge of the Federal Government, through which projects is the EU “intensifying its support for civil society” in Belarus (answer to Written question 13 in Bundestag Printed paper 18/459)?

The European Union supports civil society in Belarus through a number of instruments. Following the presidential elections of December 2010 funds from the Stability Instrument were allocated to the Civil Society Stability for Belarus scheme. This scheme is administered by the Nordic Council of Ministers and provides support for civil society organisations and independent media. Through the “European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights” the European Commission provides funding in particular for projects of non-governmental organisations which are designed to improve respect for democratic principles and human rights in Belarus. Through the “Non-state Actors and Local Authorities” programme funding is given amongst other things to measures in the areas of social action, environment, culture and rural development which benefit civil society (for example cushioning the effects of the Chernobyl disaster, social inclusion). In addition the

Annual Action Programme 2013 in favour of Belarus includes, in the context of the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument, a measure which promotes sustainable regional development in the Grodno and Minsk regions and seeks among other things to build the capacity of regional civil society organisations.

28. *To the knowledge of the Federal Government, to what extent is support given to the “opposition”, and who exactly is the “opposition”?*

Measures taken by the European Union are intended particularly to strengthen respect for democratic principles, human rights and the rule of law in Belarus. They are also designed to foster conditions in which all citizens can exercise their fundamental political rights and freedoms. These include the objective of holding free and fair elections, in line with the obligations incumbent on Belarus as a participating state in the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Following the presidential elections of December 2010 the European Union has also supported measures benefiting the victims of political repression.