

117TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. RES.

Expressing the sense of the Senate on the political situation in Belarus.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

Mrs. SHAHEEN (for herself, Mr. CARDIN, Mr. WICKER, Mr. DURBIN, and Mr. PORTMAN) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on _____

RESOLUTION

Expressing the sense of the Senate on the political situation
in Belarus.

Whereas the United States Senate has long maintained strong bipartisan concern regarding the troubling lack of democracy in Belarus, highlighted by the passing of the Belarus Democracy Act of 2004 (Public Law 108–347; 22 U.S.C. 5811 note);

Whereas the 116th Congress, as referenced in H.R. 8438, the Belarus Democracy, Human Rights, and Sovereignty Act of 2020, and Senate Resolution 658, which both passed with unanimous support, stated its deep concern regarding the fraudulent election in Belarus on August 9, 2020;

Whereas on September 17, 2020, the Moscow Mechanism of the human dimension of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) was invoked by 17

participating states with regard to credible reports of human rights violations before, during, and after the presidential election of August 9, 2020, in Belarus;

Whereas, following Alyaksandr Lukashenka's inauguration on September 23, 2020, the United States, the European Union, numerous European Union member states, the United Kingdom, and Canada announced they did not recognize the legitimacy of the election results;

Whereas after the August 9, 2020 presidential election, the Government of Belarus responded to the resulting peaceful protests, the largest in the country's history, with a violent crackdown, including the detention of more than 10,000 peaceful protectors, according to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus;

Whereas the Government of Belarus, under the misrule of the Lukashenka regime, continues to engage in a pattern of clear and persistent violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms and disrespects the basic principles of democratic governance by subjecting tens of thousands of pro-democracy political activists, peaceful protesters, and ordinary citizens to harassment, beatings, abductions, forced deportations, and imprisonment and by committing acts of transnational repression to punish any dissent expressed by Belarusian citizens;

Whereas the Lukashenka regime continues to silence independent media, such as Nasha Niva, tut.by, and Belsat, and has unlawfully raided the offices of media outlets, including Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, and arrested journalists;

Whereas on September 11, 2020, then-Deputy Secretary of State Stephen Biegun said that “we stand by our long-term commitment to support the sovereignty of Belarus as well as its territorial integrity, as the aspirations of the Belarusian people to determine their own path remains in front of us”;

Whereas on May 23, 2021, the Lukashenka regime forced a commercial airliner flying between two European Union member states to land in Minsk in order for the regime to arrest journalist Raman Pratasevich and his partner Sofia Sapega, an action that resulted in near universal condemnation from the international community and co-ordinated sanctions by the United States, the United Kingdom, and the European Union;

Whereas on May 28, 2021, the White House announced the re-imposition of full blocking sanctions against nine Belarusian state-owned enterprises and announced a new Executive order to increase sanctions on elements of the Lukashenka regime;

Whereas the Lukashenka regime has actively encouraged over 4,000 migrants from other countries to cross through Belarus into European Union member state Lithuania, amounting to people smuggling and obliging Lithuania to declare a state of emergency;

Whereas on June 9, 2021, the Committee on Foreign Relations of the Senate held a hearing regarding the political situation in Belarus, in which United States Ambassador to Belarus Julie Fisher testified that “Despite the oppression, the violence, and the turmoil that followed the events of the past year provide glimmers of hope. A new generation of brave Belarusians, with courageous women at the front, have emerged. They represent a Belarus de-

terminated to chart its own path. They represent a Belarus in which wearing a red and white dress, hanging a flag, or playing a particular song will not result in torture, forced confessions, or even death.”;

Whereas on July 27, 2021, President Biden met Belarusian opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya at the White House and declared that “The United States stands with the people of Belarus in their quest for democracy and universal human rights.”;

Whereas on August 9, 2021, President Biden—

(1) announced an Executive order authorizing the imposition of blocking sanctions on certain sectors of the Belarus economy, including the potash, tobacco products, and construction sectors; and

(2) pursuant to such executive order and Executive Order 13405, issued additional sanctions on Belarusian individuals and entities, including Belaruskali (a state-owned potash fertilizer company) and the Belarus National Olympic Committee; and

Whereas Belarusian opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya continues to represent the widely shared desire of the Belarusian people for free and fair elections and democracy: Now, therefore, be it

1 *Resolved*, That the Senate—

2 (1) continues, on the first anniversary of the il-
3 legitimate presidential election in Belarus on August
4 9, 2020, to refuse to recognize Alyaksandr
5 Lukashenka as the legitimately elected leader of
6 Belarus;

1 (2) condemns Lukashenka's ongoing crackdown
2 on members of the pro-democracy movement, senior
3 members of the Coordination Council, peaceful pro-
4 testers, employees from state-owned enterprises par-
5 ticipating in strikes, independent election observers,
6 independent journalists and bloggers, medical profes-
7 sionals, professors, teachers, athletes, and cultural
8 leaders;

9 (3) continues to call for the fulfillment by the
10 Government of Belarus of Belarus' freely under-
11 taken obligations as an Organization for Security
12 and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) member and
13 accept the OSCE's offer to facilitate a national dia-
14 logue and fully participate in the OSCE process;

15 (4) calls for new presidential and parliamentary
16 elections to be held in Belarus, conducted in a man-
17 ner that is free and fair according to OSCE stand-
18 ards and under the supervision of OSCE observers
19 and independent domestic observers;

20 (5) welcomes the United States Government's
21 close coordination with the European Union, the
22 United Kingdom, Canada, other allied and partner
23 countries, and international organizations to pro-
24 mote the principles of democracy, the rule of law,
25 and human rights in Belarus and encourages contin-

1 ued coordination to apply maximal pressure on the
2 Lukashenka regime;

3 (6) continues to call for the immediate release,
4 without preconditions, of all political prisoners in
5 Belarus;

6 (7) welcomes the recent release of Radio Free
7 Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) journalists Aleh
8 Hruzdilovich and Ina Studzinskaya and calls for
9 the unconditional release of all political prisoners
10 and journalists detained on dubious charges, includ-
11 ing opposition candidates Sergei Tikhanovsky and
12 Viktar Babaryka, pro-democracy activist Maria
13 Kalesnikava, and RFE/RL journalist Ihar Losik;

14 (8) condemns the forced diversion of Ryanair
15 Flight 4978 to arrest Raman Pratasevich and his
16 partner Sofia Sapega, which violated international
17 civil aviation law and risked the lives of innocent
18 passengers and crew, and calls for their immediate
19 unconditional release;

20 (9) commends the bravery of Belarusians who
21 have created innovative ways to protest
22 Lukashenka's autocracy and applauds the
23 Belarusian diaspora's efforts to maintain inter-
24 national focus on the deteriorating political situa-
25 tion;

(11) calls on the Lukashenka regime to immediately halt exploiting and instrumentalizing migrants and to stop directing individuals to Lithuania's borders;

20 (14) emphasizes that the United States sup-
21 ports the people of Belarus in their quest to main-
22 tain their sovereignty, choose their own leadership,
23 and live in freedom, and recognizes the extensive ef-
24 forts of the Belarusian opposition to coordinate ef-
25 forts with the United States, the European Union,

1 the OSCE, and the United Nations to bring free and
2 fair elections to its people.