

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 19, 2011

Baroness Catherine Ashton
High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy
Commission Vice-President
European Union

Dear High Representative Ashton:

We are writing to express our conviction in the importance of a strong, principled, joint response by the European Union and the United States to the crackdown in Belarus. We were deeply encouraged by the joint statement that you and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton issued last month condemning the brutal actions of the Belarusian government in the wake of the December 19 presidential election and by the joint statement you again issued earlier this month in response to the closing of the OSCE Mission in Minsk. We think that such close transatlantic coordination is absolutely essential. To the greatest extent possible, the United States and the European Union must speak with one voice to the government and the people of Belarus.

For this same reason, we also believe that the strong words issued by the United States and the EU in recent weeks should be followed by equally strong transatlantic actions that will carry very real and significant consequences for President Lukashenko and other Belarusian officials who are responsible for the human rights abuses, palpable fraud that characterized last month's elections, and the continued detention of opposition presidential candidates and party leaders. Specifically, this should include both increased sanctions on the regime, and increased support for the Belarusian people.

As you know, in October 2008, the European Union suspended certain sanctions on senior Belarusian officials, in the hope of cultivating better relations with Minsk and encouraging greater democratic freedom in Belarus. Given the outrageous conduct of the Lukashenko regime in recent weeks, we hope that the European Union will now swiftly re-impose targeted sanctions on the leaders of Belarus, including both an asset freeze and a travel ban, as well as on the family members of regime leaders, where warranted.

We believe it is important, however, for additional measures to be put in place as well. In particular, we urge the European Union to join the United States in prohibiting business with Belneftekhim, a state-controlled conglomerate that is critical to the financial well-being of President Lukashenko's regime. Since the European Union constitutes the primary market for Belneftekhim, joint EU-U.S. sanctions would send a powerful message to President Lukashenko that the transatlantic community will no longer tolerate his brutal practices and policies.

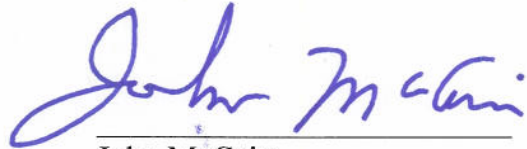
In addition to heightened sanctions, the United States and the EU should also work together to secure the immediate release of all opposition candidates and party leaders as well as to express unambiguous solidarity with the many other brave Belarusians who are now looking to the transatlantic world for strength and support. We have been deeply encouraged by the leadership of the Polish government in this respect, and hope that the rest of the transatlantic community will follow Warsaw's example. In particular, we believe the EU and U.S. should restore and increase both material and technical support for political, civil society, and human rights groups in Belarus. As you know, such support had been a central pillar of U.S. and EU policy towards Belarus prior to last year's attempts at engagement with the Lukashenko regime. The Belarusian people must now know that the European Union and the United States stand united and on their side in their struggle for freedom, and that we are prepared to lend them tangible and significant support in order to help them achieve it.

We thank you for your consideration of these pressing matters.

Best regards,



Joseph I. Lieberman
UNITED STATES SENATOR



John McCain
UNITED STATES SENATOR



Jeanne Shaheen
UNITED STATES SENATOR



Richard Lugar
UNITED STATES SENATOR



Richard J. Durbin
UNITED STATES SENATOR



Robert P. Casey Jr.
UNITED STATES SENATOR

CC: Jerzy Buzek, President of the European Parliament

CC: Foreign Ministers of the European Union