

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

WEBINAR

7TH ANNUAL JUSTICE STEPHEN BREYER LECTURE ON INTERNATIONAL LAW
DEFENDING DEMOCRACY AGAINSTS ITS ADVERSARIES

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Welcome Remarks:

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JUSTICE STEPHEN BREYER
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Keynote Remarks and Conversation:

SVIATLANA TSIKHANOUSKAYA
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Panel Discussion:

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MS. STELZENMULLER: Good day. My name is Constanze Stelzenmüller. I am a senior fellow and Fritz Stern chair at the Brookings Institution, and it is my great honor to welcome you to the 7th Annual Breyer Lecture on International Law. And we begin with a welcome by Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States Steven Breyer, the patron and name giver of this series. He will be followed by André Haspels, ambassador of the Netherlands. Please, Justice Breyer.

MR. BREYER: Well, thank you. I really want to say thank you for having me to welcome people, but primarily, because Brookings gives this series of lectures and it is a world where it's more and more important that people and judges and lawyers and everybody else understands that what happens in other countries beyond their own shores affects them a lot. And I'm very grateful that we have Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya from Belorussia who is here to give this lecture. Terrific, and I am very grateful to the panelists that they've come. And I think it's an important subject and it's really an excellent lecture and an excellent panel.

And as an even better reason, perhaps, for having this lecture. And the reason we're having this lecture, it seems to me, is because of the enormous importance. As a lawyer, I'm biased. But as a lawyer and as a judge, I think it's terribly important that there be something called the rule of law. And the rule of law at its heart, is saying government, king, emperor, you cannot be arbitrary. Because the arbitrary -- the arbitrary is the not just undemocratic. It is the tyrannical. It is the unreasonable. And law, in part, is designed to minimize, if not to eliminate, that.

And now, we have a question. Maybe 10 or 15 years ago, we would have said, oh, it's inevitable. Countries will become more democratic. Countries will become more interested in human and individual rights. Countries will become ever-more committed to a rule of law. Now, we're less certain. But I have been reading something that I think, at least for me, is helpful in this respect. And it certainly is topical now. And that's Albert Camus' book called "The Plague." And my goodness, you read that and you say I don't know how he wrote this. It really does describe what's going on in our lives at this very moment.

But you read through it and see how people in the city of Oran, imaginary perhaps, but

how they reacted to a plague. Some good, some bad, etc. And by the time you get to the end of the book, you think, well, maybe he doesn't mean just the plague. Maybe he means more than that. Maybe he means the Nazi occupation of France. Maybe he means the forces of tyranny suppressing the forces of democracy and human rights. Interpret it as you wish. But if so, he says this at the end, which made an impression on me. The doctor is talking to a friend of his about why did this book, why was it written, and he says I wanted to show how these people reacted to this terrible situation where they were basically prisoners inside their city suffering from disease. I wanted to show what a doctor does. A doctor is a person who just helps. He doesn't theorize. He goes out and helps. He does it.

But the most basic reason is this that the plague germ never dies. It never dies. You never win. It just goes into remission. And when it goes into remission, it just lurks there. It lurks in the hallways, and it lurks in the file cabinets, and it lurks in the carpets. And it's there to awaken one day. And once again, to send its rats for the education or to the misfortune of mankind, to send those rats into a once happy city. So, it's there. It's there. It's always there. It's always threatened to come back no matter where we live, no matter how secure we are.

And in my mind, of course, I think that the rule of law and I think of our working continuously for an expansion of human of human rights for an understanding of their importance for the need to respect other people's points of view even when you don't agree with them. For the need to decry arbitrary actions and tyrannical actions even when you think, well, maybe they were good in this instance. Forget that. It's the principle.

And unless you're working for the principle continuously, well, you're not going to have it. The rats will be back. That's what Camus says. And therefore, I'm glad you have this lecture because the lecture brings together people who are interested in that continuous effort, continuous. Result uncertain. You never know. But you just keep going to stop the arbitrary and to work for one weapon against those rats. One weapon being democracy, human rights, and a rule of law.

MR. HASPELS: Well, thank you. Thank you very much, Justice Breyer, for this important message. And, ladies and gentlemen, thank you for joining us for the 7th Annual Justice Stephen Breyer lecture hosted by the Brookings Institution in close cooperation with the city of The

Hague, the embassy of the Netherlands, and the Clingendael Institute. And I would like to thank all of them.

I'm sure you know that we had to cancel last year's election -- lecture -- sorry -- due to the pandemic. And we are holding this year's event online for the same reason. And though I'm really sorry that we cannot meet in person and that I can't offer you lunch at my residence, I am happy to see that our online audience is bigger than previous years. So, that's a good thing.

We, the kingdom of the Netherlands, strongly supports the Breyer lecture and its goal to advance the cause of international law. My country has a long tradition of promoting the international rule of law starting in the 17th century with the great legal thinker and one of the founding fathers of international law, Hugo de Groot, also known as Hugo Grotius. And we believe that advancing the international rule of law is so crucial that we anchored it in our constitution. The government shall advance the international legal order.

This year, we celebrate the 75th anniversary of the International Court of Justice located in the beautiful Peace Palace in The Hague. And the International Court of Justice is one of the several international institutions that The Netherlands is honored to host to advance the international legal order and promote the rule of law just as Justice Breyer just indicated.

And today, more than ever, it is important for us to come together to exchange views and ideas about the current challenges to democracies, to international rule of law, and the infringement of human rights because in the past decade, it seems that autocracies and dictatorships are on the rise and democracies are losing ground. And I only have to refer to the most recent report of Freedom House.

For instance, in the People's Republic of China, we are extremely worried about the human rights situation in general and about the treatment of workers specifically. The Russian government seems to either poison its critics or lock them up. But also closer to home, democratic movements live under great pressure. And, of course, the same goes for Belarus. And that's why it's so important that we support all defenders of human rights and political leaders who are under threat.

And that's why I'm so honored to have Ms. Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya as our keynote speaker. Personally, but also as a representative of a country that is strongly committed to the

international rule of law, I look very much forward to hearing what she has to say. But before we go to listen to her, I would like to thank you and I would like to introduce a video by the Deputy Major of The Hague Saskia Bruines. And as I just said, The Hague is known also as the city of peace and justice. Please watch.

(Video played)

MS. BRUINES: Ladies and gentlemen, I have always used the Justice Breyer lecture as a platform to speak about human rights, the rule of law, and democracy. But this year, I really feel a sense of urgency about these issues. The Economist Intelligence Unit's democracy index shows people are being alienated from democracy. According to its most recent index, only 8.4% of people are fully enjoying democratic freedoms. A record low score since the index began.

We need to act now if we want to halt this downward spiral. A passive attitude where we wait and see what happens will not suffice. This applies to short-term global challenges that are threatening democracy such as the COVID crisis and it applies to the threats that for the time being, seem further away from home such as climate change. An alliance or platform for democracies will be needed for this rescue operation with a renewed feeling of trust and shared sense of purpose.

For a stable Europe and for a stable international order, President Biden's proposal to convene a summit for democracy is most welcome in this respect. The city of The Hague and its army of human rights defenders are prepared to help. As the international city of peace and justice, democracy is rooted in The Hague's DNA. As a host city of the first peace conferences in 1899 and 1907, we have always provided the platform needed to give the development of international law and respect for human rights an impulse.

And in 2021, the year we celebrate the 75th anniversary of the International Court of Justice located in the Peace Palace, we will continue to do so. The Hague will always offer itself as a meeting place to help stimulate action-oriented solutions for today's pressing challenges. Even in these virtual Corona times just last December, we proudly hosted the World Press Freedom Conference. Thousands of participants came together online to underscore the need for a free and independent media and the protection of journalism. The global rise of fake news is just one of the many polarizing threats to

democracy we now see.

Ladies and gentlemen, we are all in this together. As Dr. Martin Luther King said, injustice anywhere is threats to justice everywhere. Words that still ring true nearly 60 years after they were spoken for the first time by Dr. King. I want to thank the Brookings Institute and the Netherlands embassy in Washington, D.C. for making this event possible. And I wish you all an inspiring session. Thank you very much.

MS. STELZENMULLER: All right, thank you very much for those inspiring words Justice Breyer, Ambassador André Haspels, and Deputy Mayor Saskia Bruines. Brookings is very grateful to all of you for your support and to the Clingendael Institute in The Hague for partnering with us.

So, we're meeting here for the 7th Breyer Lecture on International Law. And Supreme Court Justice Stephen Breyer for whom this lecture series is named himself gave the first lecture in 2014. In this past year, our own struggles with democracy and its adversaries have reminded us that the great debates about the future of international law and a rules-based order and law are intimately connected to the legitimacy of our own constitutional orders. And we wanted our lecture this year to remind us that democracy is not just about abstract principles of constitutional law like representation, rule of law, and protection of civil rights, but a real aspiration for real people in a real fight.

So, it is my immense honor to introduce as our speaker, Ms. Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya -- we're all struggling with this -- but then I have a difficult last name myself. She is the head of the democratic opposition in Belarus. After a rigged national election in August 2020, she has become the leader of the greatest protest movement seen in Belarus since the country's independence in 1991, peacefully mobilizing up to 200,000 people on some days.

President Lukashenko has responded with increasingly brutal repression. And Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya's husband was made a political prisoner like 200 other Belarusians at least. She had to take her children to exile in Lithuania from where she continues to argue the cause of democracy and freedom. The European Parliament awarded her its prestigious Sakharov Prize last December. Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, the floor is yours. Thank you so much for joining us for the 7th Breyer lecture.

MS. TSIKHANOUSKAYA: Hello, everyone, and thank you for this kind introduction. But

before I attend to my remarks, I would like to wish happy Passover to Jewish people around the world. This is a true inspiration for those seeking freedom. So, I am honored to deliver the 7th Annual Justice Stephen Breyer Lecture on International Law and I am truly grateful to speak in front of such distinguished audience.

So, I'm not a lawyer or legal expert, not a trained politician. I am just a proud citizen of my country who has learned the value of democratic principles, rule of law, and just through my own life experiences. I am here first and foremost as a Belarusian who wants positive change for my country and its people. Last year's electoral campaign marked the beginning of my personal journey. And I am humbled that my story has inspired so many people in Belarus and around the world including here in the United States.

A question asked repeatedly by this audience in the past few years, is democracy in decline? According to a recent Freedom House report, in every region of the world democracy is under attack by populist leaders and groups that reject pluralism and demand and shift power to advance in particular interests of their supporters usually at the expense of minorities and other perceived foes.

The year 2020 was recognized as the 15th consecutive year of decline in global freedom. The situation poses global changes to all forces that value democracy. Therefore, the experience of a nation which is willing and ready to fight for freedom and justice has a special significance. Belarusians who have clearly expressed their desire for freedom, represent a powerful ongoing case. It can explain, if not all, many problems and challenges facing democratic societies around the world.

But before turning the international context, I would like to explain why I am deeply concerned that Belarus has turned into a country of lawlessness. In the country of lawlessness, we are dealing with a human rights crisis of unprecedented proportions, worsening by the day. One of the key elements of this crisis is a total collapse of the rule of law or as we call it in Belarus, a legal default.

As of today, over 33,000 have been detained. More than 1,000 cases of torture documented. And we have close to 300 political prisoners and counting. More than 2,500 criminal cases have been initiated against journalists, human right defenders, activists, and peaceful protesters. At least eight protesters were killed. Just yesterday when Belarusians celebrated Freedom Day, more than 240

people were detained all over the country.

We are faced with repressions Belarusians haven't known since the Stalinist times. Meanwhile, not a single government official has been held accountable for the brutality, repression, torture, and murder. In the country of lawlessness, civil society activists, human right defenders, and independent journalist have faced unparalleled harassment and ill treatment. Police raided the offices of Viasna Human Rights Centre, the Belarusian Association of Journalists, and Belarus Solidarity Foundation, with many detained. Homes of activists and their relatives have also been searched and raided.

In the country of lawlessness, defense attorneys are under pressure. They are often the only connection between political prisoners and their families. And instead of defending its members, Belarusian Bar Association has been intimidating such attorneys. And this lack of access to independent defense counsel severely limits the rights of Belarusians to a fair trial.

The government has launched the process of recalling several attorney's licenses. Alexander Pylchenko who represented presidential candidate Viktor Babaryka, Lyudmila Kazak, who represented Maria Kalesnikava, Sergei Zhgirovski, who has been defending several journalists, Maxim Znak, who was my legal counsel and who is now facing 20 years in prison on trumped up charges. And even my husband's lawyer, Olga Baranchik, won't be able to represent him in a month's time. And my husband is facing 15 years in prison.

So, democracy, the rule of law, justice, when deficient or absent, can become the core of the conflict between the state and the people. If there was even an aspiration for democracy in Belarus, the elections would have been free and fair. Instead, when the people cast their votes, they were blatantly disregarded. And this happened before in Belarus. But this time, Belarusians clearly witnessed how their rights to choose leaders had been violated.

Since August 2020, our people have peacefully expressed their disagreement demanding a new democratic Belarus where they participate in governance and their rights and freedoms are respected. And they pursue this goal with unity and persistence. The unity of the entire society in its aspiration for change is evident. Led by women, our protest movement is inclusive and diverse. The

strength and vulnerability of Belarusian women defy the regime's violent rhetoric and methods. Workers, (inaudible), teachers, doctors, scientists, students, have all come together.

The persistence of Belarusians is demonstrated by the acts of everyday heroism displaying the national white-red-white flag. Decorating backyards with ribbons, standing in solidarity chains, jointly paying fines of those arrested, attending court hearings to support the people they have never met before. Our senior citizens lead younger generations by example. One of them is Nina Baginskaya, a real symbol of endurance. People with disabilities demonstrate that their abilities are limitless in fighting for the entire country and human dignity.

Belarusians have been protesting despite the possibility of injury, loss of employment, expulsion from the country, and even murder. If there was the rule of law in Belarus, the government would have been constrained in how it responds to people protest and the freedom of assembly would have been respected. Instead, Lukashenko and his subordinates unleashed unprecedented violence on their own people.

Alexander Taraikovsky was the first victim of police brutality. He was standing with his bare hands and was shot point blank by a police squad in Minsk. Henadz Shutau was shot by military officers with no insignia impressed. In all its absurdity, last month he was posthumously found guilty of disobeying a police order while his killers remain unpunished.

If there was justice in Belarus, political prisoners, people who were beaten and tortured would have been released in the courtroom while real perpetrators held accountable. Instead, day after day, we learn about new sentences that are handed down to the people who did nothing wrong. We are back to 1937 when the verdicts were known before the trial and the right to a fair trial was nonexistent.

A former special operations military officer and an artist, Raman Bandarenka, was murdered by the regime cronies in his own backyard for protecting our national symbols. And this case shook Belarus and the world. As part of their coverup, the regime tried to silence the doctor Artsyom Sarokin. Despite the pressure, he declined to falsify the autopsy and disclosed the true cause of Raman's death. And he received a two-year prison sentence for upholding his oath. Two female journalists, Daria Chultsova and Katsiaryna Andreyeva were convicted of organizing actions grossly

violating public order and were sentenced to two years in prison. Their crime was in live streaming a vigil for Raman.

And all the while, I'm very proud that despite all the state terror, violence, and cruelty by authorities and general lawlessness, our protest has remained peaceful. Our demands have been consistent and firm, an immediate end to violence and repressions, the release of all political prisoners, and free, fair, and international observed elections by fall 2021.

Now, I would like to speak about the international response to the crisis in Belarus. The international community has taken a principled stance on the 2020 election in Belarus, refusing to recognize its officially declared results as legitimate. The U.S. called the elections fraudulent. The EU concluded that the election campaign was neither free nor fair and didn't recognize Lukashenko as legitimate leader. The cooperation between a new democratic Belarus and its international partners will be based on universal values of democracy, rule of law, respect for human dignity, and equality. However, these values have been under pressure worldwide including the West.

The challenges to democracy and human rights in Belarus are not new. They are deeply entrenched in the fabric of political system. And this system has mastered the art of manipulating public opinion and election rigging. This system severely limits the freedom of speech and association. Opposition candidates are eliminated, imprisoned, or are forced into exile. The Parliament is a sleepy rubber stamp institution composed of hand-picked regime supported while other branches of the power are subordinate to one person.

The ambition of this one person and his small group of collaborators to remain in power shouldn't deprive the entire nation of developing the constructive relations with its neighbors and strategic partners. Lukashenko's foreign policy has never served our national interests. The new foreign policy of Belarus will pay close attention to relations with our neighbors, which include not only east and west, but also north and south. This is where an untapped potential for our economic development is hidden in plain view.

And it is crucial that the international community stays true to its own principles, priorities, and policies. Consistency is a key in any complex international undertaking. And Belarus has a history of

an early positive international response to promises and assurance of actors without credibility. And it is very important for those fighting for democracy to feel they continue to have attention and support from the international democratic community.

In the past, after the outpouring of attention, the status quo would set in. Or as in Belarus example around 2014, the West made its democratic strife secondary when it decided to make a deal with a proven devil and improve relations with Lukashenko. At that time, Belarusian civil society received very little support and was doomed to survival mode. I'm pretty sure that this is the reason civil society infrastructure wasn't prepared for the events of 2020.

And while all countries and systems face their own challenges, we need restate that the crisis in Belarus is matter not only of Belarusians. It is in the interest of all international communities to have its result through peaceful means and negotiations, and to avoid further escalation. And a pre-condition to this engagement is to make sure that the international community remains focused on resolving this crisis.

Actions must be swift, practical, and efficient. For example, it took months for concrete actions from the international community in the response to the regime crackdown of protests. But flexibility and prompt action-oriented response are very important to sustain the protest momentum, as we had it in the fall of 2020. It also demonstrates to dictators that their actions will have practical consequences. And often not just the severity of the sanctions, but the inevitability and speed can be impactful in containing their authoritarian power.

Over the past seven months, I have met with a great number of decision makers who have been very supportive of the Belarusian cause. I cannot overemphasize that the efforts of the international community, including political, financial, and economic pressure, are directly connected to the progress in setting up negotiations on the peaceful transition of power in Belarus. In this effort, we ask you to speak with one voice as a global coalition of friends of Belarusian people.

And last week, I announced a national vote and within a week, 750,000 people voted online to support such negotiations through international mediation under the auspice of the U.N. or OSCE. And we would welcome a constructive role of all nations including Russian Federation on the

basis of respect for the sovereignty and independence in Belarus.

Based on the OSCE Moscow Mechanism Report on March 24, Denmark, Germany, and U.K. established an international investigative mechanism to collect evidence on human rights abuses. No one has been held responsible in the well documented cases of torture and ill treatment in the crackdown by the security forces on political dissent. Hence, this confirms allegations of general impunity.

The U.N. has recently strengthened the mandate of the high commissioner for human rights to fight the impunity of the regime, including his special forces. I view this as an important step forward. But most importantly, people in Belarus need to see justice served for those responsible for violence and torture. So, if I had to summarize what the international community can do, I would have them focus on solidarity, support, and consistency.

The international solidarity with Belarusians in their pursuit of freedom and democracy has been overwhelming, and it should be converted into concrete actions. The Belarus Democracy, Human Rights, and Sovereignty Act of 2020 introduced shortly after the crackdown began, was enacted into law within just three months with overwhelming bipartisan support. It created a broader framework to address the current situation, including sanctions, assistance for civil society, and independent media, and efforts to reveal the scale of financial abuse by Lukashenko and his cronies.

And the European Union has adopted its own country-specific targeted restrictive measures. Sanctions do send a strong signal to abusive regimes and individual perpetrators. The next round must target the so-called Lukashenko wallets. oligarchs who he installed to handle his financial cut. And such measures should also target those who have been at the core of their repression machine. Judges, prosecutors, investigators, and state propaganda.

But the key element of the sanctions is their conditionality. It is paramount that any suspension of sanction must be strictly conditioned by the progress in the resolving of the ongoing crisis. This would include all of the foregoing: the end of the violence, and conditional release of the of the political prisoners, restoration of the rule of law, and launch of a genuine dialogue between the legitimate representatives of Belarusians and the regime.

Belarusians need support, especially the civil society and grassroots movement, human right defenders, independent media, unions, and businesses. As the European Union has drafted a comprehensive plan to support Belarus during the transition and after free elections, the U.S. should join this work to start developing a joint marshal plan for Belarus. We need to be prepared.

And I am really encouraged to see that the Biden administration is emphasizing that its foreign policy will make human rights and democracy a priority. And we believe that the United States has an exceptional standing to lead by example and possess its unique leverage to align the positions and coordinate the international community's practical steps on the Belarus situation.

And in the meantime, some might want to try to capitalize on the weakness of Lukashenko by advancing their own interests contrary to the will of the Belarusian people. Therefore, it's essential that the United States, European Union, the United Kingdom, Canada, and other like-minded nations call on the international community not to sign any international agreements with the Lukashenko regime since doing so would contradict the will of the Belarusian people and undermine the sovereignty of Belarus.

Similarly, it should be considered that any contracts to purchase Belarusian state-owned enterprises with illegitimate President Lukashenko, might be revised and void. Ultimately, all the measures and steps taken in the international arena should prioritize the start of the dialogue as the main objective. Such a dialogue in its turn should lead to new free and fair elections with international observation.

So, Belarusians need space and appropriate conditions to rightfully choose their leaders in a competitive process and ensure that the results of the elections are credible and recognized by international community. Most importantly, Belarusians must fully own the results of peaceful transition of power to open a new chapter in the history of our country. Thank you.

MS. STELZENMULLER: All right. Thank you so much, Sviatlana, for this amazing speech, which I found really, really inspiring not least because I've been watching Belarusian democracy movements for a while. It feels like at least 15 years. And I remember vividly feeling anguished at seeing earlier versions crushed by Lukashenko. You may remember the blue jean shirt revolution back in the

day. Other similar attempts to get the West's attention. And I'm really profoundly impressed by how thought out and organized and specific your requests and recommendations are. That to me, is already an immense change in how the democracy movement is presenting itself to its Western allies. That's a huge difference.

We have another 20 minutes until you have to leave. And we do want our listeners to be able to ask some questions too. And I'll be getting those in some way by email. But I'm going to give people some time to think about questions. So, I'm going to start with a couple of questions myself, if I may.

And I have to say I've been looking forward to this conversation for a very long time. Really, I heard you speak at a congressional hearing last week at the House Foreign Affairs Committee. I saw that the members of the House of Representatives were very impressed by you, enjoyed discussing with you. And so, I was really pleased that you had made time in your schedule for us as well.

Let me talk about your Belarusian liberation plan. It has a really ambitious timeline. You would like to have talks with Lukashenko on new elections beginning in May, and to have those new elections in October. That's still the timeline that you have in mind, right? What makes you think that Lukashenko, who appears to be digging in, who appears to be doubling down on repression, and who also appears to have the support of a nervous autocrat farther east in Moscow, what makes you think that he can be brought to the table?

MS. TSIKHANOUSKAYA: First of all, I have to admit that we are not looking for dialogue with Lukashenko himself because for 26 years we understood that everything that he's interested in is keeping power. So, he doesn't care about his nation. He doesn't take care about his country. He takes care only about himself.

But we are sure that there are people in the government or his, you know, nearby circle that also think as the majority of people, who also want to build new country for new generation. Who doesn't want -- who don't want our children to live under the same pressure or under dictatorship as they lived. And we are calling for those people who are responsible, who feel this responsibility. Because the majority of people in government are also on our side. They are frightened. They even may be more

scared than usual people because, you know, they have these high ranks and positions. But we're still sure that there will be brave people there.

And so, as are we are calling for international help in organizing these negotiations of dialogue, we understand that it's easier to have these contacts not with, you know, with Lukashenko himself. I even don't want to pronounce this surname. But with people who are in system who understand that, you know, it's easier to contact them to organize dialogue with these people who wants to, you know, better life for themselves, for a new generation. And that's why we are trying to install these connections.

And we secretly already contacting to some people. We have secret contacts in the Ministry of International Affairs, with riot police. But now, at this moment, they give us information. They give us videos of tortures and violence just to show to the people to remind every day that we are fighting against violence, against brutality, against (inaudible) elections for our future. So, we are sure that we will succeed sooner or later. But the question is what price we will have to pay during this fight?

MS. STELZENMULLER: Of course.

MS. TSIKHANOUSKAYA: Yeah, we don't want any more victims. We have enough already. So, and just maybe, you know, answering the future questions, that's why we are urging in other countries to act now because every day is important for those who are in jail, who are under constant pressure in Belarus, just every day is important. So, the sooner we act in Belarus, you know, and the sooner international society act, the sooner we will have this dialogue we are striving for in new elections, the sooner we will be ready to solve this political and humanitarian crisis in Belarus.

MS. STELZENMULLER: All right, fair enough. Let me come to a question from the Charge d'Affaires, Erik-Jan van Oosterhout -- I hope that's pronounced correctly -- of the Dutch embassy in Minsk. And I'll add a little twist of my own. He asks, how would you interpret yesterday's events?

Now, March 25th, yesterday, was the informal Belarus Independence Day. The anniversary of Belarus' short-lived declaration of independence from Russia in 1918. You had called for demonstrations, and I'd like -- he'd like to hear your assessment of those. And let me add my own question to that. I think we've all seen the comment from the commander of the Belarusian Interior

Ministry troops who said of the demonstrators, they're absolutely the enemies of our state and he said if people do come out, he would repeat last year's crackdown "with great pleasure."

So, how can Belarusians mobilize safely and continue to make themselves heard given the regime's intention to crackdown?

MS. TSIKHANOUSKAYA: You know, safeness of people is our priority. Again, I have to repeat --

MS. STELZENMULLER: Of course.

MS. TSIKHANOUSKAYA: -- that we don't want victims.

MS. STELZENMULLER: Yeah.

MS. TSIKHANOUSKAYA: But we see the escalation of violence from the regime. We all see the preparation of riot police to this day to the 25th of March. We have heard about their threaten of terroristic attack from our, you know, secret sources. That's why we called people like not to demonstrate massively because we understood that riot police is ready to suppress these demonstrations with guns, with, you know, all this power. We called people to act safely. To do different flash mobs, you know, in different parts of cities, not centralized.

We just told them to go out for a walk without any symbolic because it's like a red cloth for the riot police. To make fireworks. To put, you know, our symbol like everywhere, just not showing people. Just to show -- because we understand that even these small signs of presence of Belarusian people, you know, with these symbolic gestures, you know, they are, you know, the regime is afraid even of these ribbons of the small, you know, papers. And, you know, people heard us. But the regime is so, you know, frightened but by usual people. By peaceful people that yesterday preventively more than 200 people have been snatched, you know, from the street.

MS. STELZENMULLER: Yeah.

MS. TSIKHANOUSKAYA: They are afraid. You know, what regime want to do now? They want to show to their international society, to the world, that everything is settled down. Everything is calm. Look, everybody is happy. No one on the streets. But people are not ready to give up. You know, they will show their presence everyday even under threaten of the safeness, under threaten of jail.

You know, everything they will fight with maybe with more safe methods of fighting, but they will continue.

And regime doesn't understand that they can't suppress the wish of Belarusian people for build a new country for changes for new elections. And it will be, again, it can be a very long fight, you know, with many victims from the side of the regime. So, but we want to be settled in the shortest period just for the safe of Belarusian people.

And people will continue to go out. People will be continue to be snatched by the regime to be kidnapped and their houses will be searched and people will be jailed and sentenced to years of -- years in prison. But it will not stop people. So, we want to ask international society how many victims is enough? To act faster. To act stronger, you know, to understand that, you know, regimes -- sorry.

MS. STELZENMULLER: No, no, no, no, no. I don't want to interrupt you. But I just want to say, I think it's -- I think many of us, me included, have been tremendously impressed by the creativity and the bravery of ordinary people in Belarus in the way they've figured out ways of evading the forces of oppression. And honestly, for those of us who are old enough, I was a student, a university student in 1989 when the war came down, and then in the following years when the Warsaw Pact dissolved, and a lot of the former Soviet republics became free. And then, you know, joined the West, the EU and NATO. And I remember how afraid and how thrilled we were. How afraid for people because people died. People in the Baltics died for their freedom. And nobody wants that to happen again in Belarus, but we want the story to have a happy ending.

So, let me ask you a question from Trudy Rubin, who is a world view economist at the Philadelphia Inquirer, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. What more, she asks, can the U.S. do to support democracy in Belarus beyond sanctions? Would you -- do you think President Biden should tell -- should send a message to the regime that it's time to leave, to give up?

MS. TSIKHANOUSKAYA: You see the USA is one -- is the oldest democracy, I'd say, in the world. And it's a very powerful country. And every country in the world is listening to the USA. And I think that the help of the USA can play a crucial role in solving this humanitarian crisis in Belarus. I am just joking. Even if Joe Biden would say like "live long Belarus," in Belarusian, "zhive Belarus," it would be such an inspiration for Belarusian people. We know that the USA with us. Everybody in Belarus heard

Joe Biden words that we are standing with Belarusian for they fight for democracy.

And people, they are so vulnerable now in Belarus. And they want, they need this help very much. And they really like wait for concrete steps from the USA and from Joe Biden. And we are -- no, we see the USA as a very powerful strength, you know, is a very powerful --

MS. STELZENMULLER: Actor.

MS. TSIKHANOUSKAYA: -- I don't know -- actor, thank you. And our story, our Belarusian story can really be successful. We are fighting inside the country and any strong word from outside, and moreover, the coalition of democratic forces like the USA, Canada, European Union, and some other countries, can become the beginning of the end of the regime in Belarus. So, we want Belarus to be on the agenda in the USA. And just we want to show you that this is our pain and we want to pass to you, you know, this is very important to us. We are so far away from you. But we don't become less important to the world because we, you know, we are far away from the USA.

MS. STELZENMULLER: Sure.

MS. TSIKHANOUSKAYA: So, yeah, so, you can -- you understand your power as the country and Joe Biden as president. And we just call him to assist us in this difficult path for democracy. Again, I want once again to underline that we will win sooner or later, but with a price. You can make this price very low.

MS. STELZENMULLER: Yes.

MS. TSIKHANOUSKAYA: I mean, to our people.

MS. STELZENMULLER: Fair enough. I'm conscious that we only have a few more minutes. So, I'm going to try and squeeze in two more questions, if I may. One from Tatiana Termacic, who is a division head at the Council of Europe, of which Russia is a member, as you know. And she is asking a really, you know, a hard question. Is there any way to engage Russia on the democratic transition in Belarus? I mean, as you and I both know, there are very old cultural, social, economic, political binds in Belarus going in both directions, to Western Europe to Poland, Lithuania, but also to Russia. And I think, you know, there's been a recent survey by a German institute called ZOiS, which also shows that Belarusians don't want to cut off these relationships with Russia. Is there any way, do

you think, to engage -- to engage the Russians to say, this is not dangerous for Russia? Or do you think that this is actually that the Belarusian freedom movement is sort of a template for opposition movements in Russia?

MS. TSIKHANOUSKAYA: You know, I understand that this like I don't want to say that we are opposition movement. We are the majority movement. You know, in Russia, maybe they're afraid that it can happen if when we are succeed. So, it can happen in Russia as well, you know, these demonstrations against the regime.

But, you know, this is our fight is not for Russian or for European. Yes, we are fighting inside the country. This is our fight is between past and the future. And we'll always be together with Russia. And it's not fair for them to decide whether we, you know, live with Lukashenko or we want to choose a new president. But to like to make them to involve into peaceful transition of power, international society have to make Lukashenko too expensive to Russia, economically and politically.

So, all the pressure has to be put, you know, inside on the regime just for Russia to understand that there is no threat for Russia. Again, they always will be our neighbors and maybe our -- not maybe, for sure, our future relationships will be better, more transparent, you know.

MS. STELZENMULLER: I mean, you're asking for a choice that ideally the Russians would also have, right? The choice of how the country is governed and by whom?

MS. TSIKHANOUSKAYA: Yes, yes, absolutely. There is no threaten in the future president, you know. Maybe we will, you know, who knows what maybe we'll have closer relationship with Russia in the future, but this is up to the Belarusian people. Not up to one person -- sorry.

MS. STELZENMULLER: Agreed. We have time for one last question, Sviatlana, if I may. And it won't have escaped you that we in America and in Europe -- I'm German -- have our own problems with democracy at home. And that there is a tangible mood of humility about our own ability to support democracy abroad while we have these problems at home. Do you have any advice for us based on your own experience?

MS. TSIKHANOUSKAYA: It's better to admit that people who live in democracy for so long time forget about how valuable democracy is. That people --

MS. STELZENMULLER: True.

MS. TSIKHANOUSKAYA: -- there are people in other countries who are on the difficult path to build this democracy. So, just value what you have. Don't spoil the meaning of democracy because there are people who are dying, who are suffering for building this democracy. And, you know, like when you are overwhelmed maybe with your rights, with your, you know, understanding that you can decide everything, you start to, you know, to how to say, you -- again, I will repeat you. You start to lose these values, you know, of democracy.

MS. STELZENMULLER: Understood.

MS. TSIKHANOUSKAYA: And just value what you have. Don't look for something better because this way from dictatorship to democracy is too difficult. So, try to --

MS. STELZENMULLER: Absolutely.

MS. TSIKHANOUSKAYA: Try to improve what you have and think about those who are, again, dying for the values you already have.

MS. STELZENMULLER: Thank you very much. I think those are fantastic words to end this conversation on. Thank you so much for spending time with us today. It's been an honor and personally, a pleasure. Please stay safe. And I hope we will have the privilege of welcoming you at Brookings in person in the not too distant future. I'd be thrilled. And so, I will send you on your way. Hope to meet again soon.

And for our listeners, we will reconvene right now for a distinguished panel to discuss the implications for Western democracies of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya's remarks, not just for policy on Belarus, but more generally, for the role of democracy in foreign policy and the international order. And I'm hoping now to be joined by our other panelists. Hello, hello?

MR. DEEN: Hello?

MS. STELZENMULLER: Hello. Hi, Bob. Hello. Hi, Ms. McDonald. Hi. All we need is Ambassador Gerard Steeghs, I'm going to have a very hard time with this, and my colleague, Tom Wright. So, but it's good to see both of you there, Bob and Kara. Did you -- were you able to listen to the speech?

MS. MCDONALD: Yes, I very much listened, and I think, like so many, are just in awe, an inspiration --

MS. STELZENMULLER: Yeah.

MS. MCDONALD: -- of the courage and the power of a single act, often without a voice of a ribbon of some colors, and how much power that has.

MS. STELZENMULLER: Absolutely, yeah, I'm impressed as well. Anyway, now we have the entire panel with us. Great to see you all. Let me explain how we're going to do this. We have an hour. I will be asking questions of the panel, but panel members should also be -- feel free to respond to each other, as you -- as we go. I'll be introducing each of you, as I ask questions, and our goal, as I said earlier, is to discuss the implications of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya's lecture, not just for betterers, obviously, but more generally for the question of democracy in foreign policy, and the international order.

But that said, I'd like to stay on the topic of betterer's for just a moment, and stay -- and start with Bob Deen, who is the coordinator for the Russia and Eastern Europe Center at the Clingendael Institute. Bob, you work for the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, more commonly known as the OSCE, for 15 years, and have spent a lot of time on the ground in different adventurous parts of Eastern Europe. What strikes you as distinctive about the democracy movement in Belarus, as it stands now?

MR. DEEN: Yes, thank you very much, Constanze, and also thanks to Brookings for the invitation, and also to echo Kara's words on how impressive the lecture was from Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, and actually the remark that stung most, and it struck closest to home, is that she said, we should value this democracy we already have because their people are dying for it. And I think that's maybe one of things that struck me, of the independence or the opposition movement, of the Democratic Movement of Belarus, is the fact that they're willing to go to such great lengths, for so long, and that they stay peaceful for so long. I think it's really interesting compared, also, to what I've seen in Kyrgyzstan and Ukraine and other places. The actual resolve that they show, for such a long period, to stand up to such intense levels of repression, it is very impressive.

It's not the first time, I have to say. We sometimes seemed to forget, and you mentioned

already, the Jeans Revolution, that was also 2010, and there were other moments, between the other street protests, in 2017. Belarusians have done this before. They braved this level of repression before, but this time it is much stronger, much more intense, and I think they've managed to show that the level of legitimacy of Lukashenko is really zero by now, and I think that's what changed it, compared to previous rounds, and also what made it stronger and more intense than some of the other movements that we've seen, including in Georgia, in Ukraine, in Moldova, and in Kyrgyzstan.

MS. STELZENMULLER: Let me follow on, on that, if I may, and sort of try and draw a more general conclusion about democracy movements in general. Usually, there are three things a democracy movement needs to actually succeed. It needs to win over the political elites and the security services. It needs support from -- external support, and it needs well organized actor. In the past, we've usually said, that it means, it needs political parties, and notably the -- in my experience, the Belarusians, in the past, have appeared fairly -- you know, the Democracy Movement leaders have appeared fairly at odds with each other. That seems to have changed, but can you give us -- can you give us a more granular assessment of where you think the Democracy Movement is now, based on those criteria?

MR. DEEN: Okay, yeah, thanks a lot. I think one of the things that was really important in this process, Lukashenko, tried to remove all the potential leaders from the playing field, there were no political leaders anymore left, outside of prison, and he deregistered everyone, except Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, whom he totally underestimated, to his peril. So, it was almost a leaderless movement, where the leader sort of grew into the role, which made it so powerful, actually, and it was also a movement --

MS. STELZENMULLER: Can I just say that, that sort of reminds me of Germany in the early 2000's, with a certain Angela Merkle.

MR. DEEN: Yep. Yeah, but it -- that --

MS. STELZENMULLER: That's just a, you know, a very opinionated foot note.

MR. DEEN: No, and it also showed how much Lukashenko was out of touch with society. It had shown that before, during the COVID pandemic, that he just wasn't able to respond to the actual pressures coming from below. He totally underestimated them. But that was the first thing. I think

the second thing that you mentioned, the external support. I think, that is the main problem at the moment, that we face, and you saw it in your last question, with Tsikhanouskaya, the role of Russia.

In this sense, there is a degree of external support for the Democratic Movement. But there is a much higher level of support through the regime, from a large neighboring country, that is willing to go to great lengths to prop it up. I think that's one of the main problems they face, at the moment. Russia was immediately sending in, for example, journalists to the state tv, at the very beginning, when the journalists went on strike, supported the security forces, economic support. So, actually, there the wind is not blowing in their favor, that's an uphill struggle for them.

So, I think the third point that you mentioned, the degree of organization, is that many of the social structures in Belarus are sort of run by the state, things like unions. There's a very high level of people affiliated with unions, in Belarus, but they're actually more instruments of control, than they are instruments that allow for a bottom-up movement to take place. So, I think, that sums up, sort of, some of the challenges that this movement faces, and because they stay peaceful, and that is one of their main strengths, actually, their resolve to stay peaceful and disciplined in that.

They can't pose enough of a threat to the regime because it has, still, the backing of the security forces. So, that last element is that they can't overtake it, at the moment, at least, they don't have the numbers, they don't have the strength to basically break through that iron wall of resistance and the increased level of repression. So, that is what makes this, unfortunately, as Steven Oscar said, at the end, a very long and drawn-out process, and without quick fixes.

MS. STELZENMULLER: One last question, and then I'll move over to Kara McDonald. One element that also seems to be missing, to me, if you compare it to Ukraine, and I suspect that's for the good, and that's the presence of oligarchs, with their own Security Forces. Am I right?

MR. DEEN: Yes, well, in Ukraine, there was a degree of pluralism, always, because the different oligarchs competed among each other, and they all have --

MS. STELZENMULLER: Right.

MR. DEEN: -- their own parties, or people within different parties, basically.

MS. STELZENMULLER: Right.

MR. DEEN: That doesn't exist as much, in Belarus. There are, of course, oligarchs, and additional, and, as I mentioned already, Lukashenko's wallets. There are people with large stakes in the economy. One was actually, I think, getting in trouble, in the Republic of Congo, very recently. So, there are people that have these economic ties, but it's not the oligarchizing of politics, that has been plaguing in Ukraine for so long, and that has made those reforms, in Ukraine, so incredibly difficult to take hold.

So, that's a real difference between the two indeed, and the thought -- if I may, with Ukraine, is the lack of a strong geopolitical movement, from below. So, the protests, and that's really an important distinction to make, they are not geopolitical in nature. They don't ask to either join the EU, or the Eurasian Union, or the Union State. They are actually focused on Belarus itself.

MS. STELZENMULLER: Yeah, thank you for making -- that's a really important point, and that also comes through in this recent survey that this German think tank's conducted. Is that that Belarusians don't want to be made to choose?

MR. DEEN: Yeah.

MS. STELZENMULLER: And I think that that's a very important, as a guiding factor, for Western policy. Let me turn, with that, to Kara McDonald, who is the deputy assistant in the State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, A DAS DRL, in the alphabet soup, of the State Department. Thank you, very much, for joining us, and taking time out of what, presumably, is a horrifically busy day for you.

Ms. McDonald, yesterday, President Biden said, in his first press conference, autocracy and democracy, that's what's at stake here, we got to prove democracy works. And you're one of the people, I presume, based on your title, who has to turn that democracy agenda of this administration, which is so prominent, into actual policy. Neither the U.S., nor the EU, have recognized the 2020 elections in Belarus. So, what exactly will you do, on top of what you have already done, to support democracy there? Can you actually tell Lukashenko, it's time to leave?

MS. MCDONALD: Thank you so much, Constanze, for the opportunity to join you today. Let me address your question in two parts. The first is related to the citation that you mentioned, and the fact that democracy and human rights is at the heart of our foreign policy, and what that means, and what

-- how we translate that into practice. We do get this question often, and I think the first thing I want to just say, from the outset, is that we reject the notion that somehow values, and interests are at odds, or zero-sum gain.

We very much see that it is through democratic principles, that we demonstrate a power of an example, that it is through democratic principle and upholding them and human rights, that we pursue strategic interests, and we can talk more about that in actual practice, as we go through, because it is -- it is a complicated process, obviously.

Related to Belarus, specifically, the first thing I want to say, from the outset, is our tireless support to the Belarusian people and the realization of their democratic aspirations. We very much continue to push the Belarusian government to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms. We do this both privately and publicly. We call for the release of all political prisoners. We look to all tools that we have at our disposal, to hold accountable those who engage in abuse and those who look to undermine democratic values. We have called for genuine dialogue. We are very much in support of what Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya has outlined.

As you can imagine, we are in very close contact. We believe, very much, that a dialogue leading to new elections is important, that the OSC is well suited and right for this fit. But when you talk about, what can we do? We very much are constantly assessing, really, all tools across the -- across the field, from frank discussions and tough diplomacy to -- for an assistance, and how, and -- and where that is provided, and how, and, then we -- and then looking at coercive tools and coercive measures, also looking at emergency assistance, some of the very important, immediate assistance, that so many activists find themselves in need of, from legal aid to relocation costs, to reestablishment costs, to new equipment, all these kinds of threats that they are under, to help support in that environment. I stop there for a moment, just -- I don't want to go on.

MS. STELZENMULLER: No, no, no. We -- these are all important questions. Let me just ask you, you have an ambassador in Minsk, Ms. Fisher, I think, who, I think, so far has met with Tsikhanouskaya, but has not submitted her argument to the government, is that correct?

MS. MCDONALD: Our ambassador, to my knowledge, has not yet arrived in Minsk.

MS. STELZENMULLER: Right.

MS. MCDONALD: She is still waiting for a visa, as far as I understand, but she has done some work, with meeting with various counterparts. She has met with Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya and other counterparts, in Vilnius and Warsaw. We are very hopeful, and, you know, we have urged the government to welcome her in. We feel that it is a very important step, for her to arrive in Minsk, for her to begin her work there, in this -- in this process.

MS. STELZENMULLER: All right. Thank you, so much. I obviously have tons more questions, but we'll take -- we'll wait for a second round and let me move to, and this is where I take a deep breath, muster all my courage, and try to get the pronunciation right, Gerard Steeghs, the director of multilateral organizations and human rights of the Dutch Foreign Ministry. Mr. Steeghs, the Biden administration, genuinely, unlike its predecessor, wants to develop common policies with Europe on a variety of issues.

Do you think there ought to be a trans-Atlantic democracy support, and if so, what would Europe, which is, after all, closer to the situation in Belarus, and to many other sort of fragile democracy movements, surrounding Europe in the south and in the east. What would you -- what would we look for from America, and where would we like to say, to America, please take our advice on this, and do X rather than Y?

AMBASSADOR STEEGHS: Well, that's quite a tall order. I think, first of all, there is already an ongoing Atlantic partnership, and I think we do see democracy objectives, in a similar way, and I very much agree, also, with what Kara said, there is no opposition between values and strategic interests. Our values, democracy, democratic values are of strategic interest. So, that ties us together because if the Transatlantic connection would be the last one to represent democratic values in the world, then it would be, for all of us left, a very unfriendly world, indeed. So, it is a strategic interest to promote this kind of formula for government.

What I think we should concentrate on, together, is that we translate our activities, not just into sort of punitive actions, but also in positive messaging, in making very clear, why democracy, as a system of government, however imperfect, is able to unlock the potential of a society, in the political

sense, in the cultural sense, in the economic sense. And I think, by providing other countries with a positive message, we can also then start to put our own cooperation in that framework, in that context.

What we are doing, and very often, very much, in partnership with the United States, is trying to support movements, individual defenders, in other countries, in their efforts to broaden the base to get the attention of their own governments, in order to start reforms. I think it's a slow process in the best -- in the best scenario, where you try to sort of convince and seduce those in power, to let in a little bit more of a democratic format. I'm thinking back of my time, in China, for example. I was there that, I'm sorry, at the time, as deputy ambassador, and there was, under Hu Jintao, a very small experiment with local democracy. They were really looking into it to try and see if it would be, indeed, risky or bad at the local level, to allow people to make more free choices, when it came to who was governing them, because the context there is the Chinese people in power are afraid that pluriformity will not work and that anybody in opposition to the government will be a destructive force. Now, if you can have small experiments that show that opposition is not necessarily a destructive force, that it can be a constructive force, then you start to build a case, why democracy is working, why it is unlocking certain things that you might otherwise miss out on. So, I think, if you talk about the partnership between the United States and Europe, we should showcase why we think it's such a positive force for our societies and why we think that other societies might similarly benefit, while, of course, respecting that there are many roads to roam. There are many ways to conceive of democracy in other countries. We should definitely avoid lecturing other countries on one format, one way forward. It is with respect for local tradition that we should invite others with us to unlock the potential that you get when you let people decide for themselves, about their government, when you give them influence on their form of government.

MS. STELZENMULLER: Right. I have to say, I couldn't agree with you more. I think one -- I think we've seen the blowback that is possible, from slightly over, shall we say, over muscular promotion, both in Ukraine and in Georgia, where the sort of local democracy movements got caught in the middle, between Western and, at the time, American assertiveness, and Moscow's will to pull things back. That said, let me -- I know that Bob wants to come in here, as well, but let me -- actually, no. Bob, why don't you come in on the lecturing point, and then I have another question for Gerard, and then I'm

going to go to my colleague, Tom. Bob?

MR. DEEN: Yes, thanks a lot, Constanze, and just to add to what Ambassador Steeghs was saying, this point of lecturing, I think, it's a really important one to make. I have seen this change in my time during the OECD. At the very beginning, and that was well before my time, actually, the '90s, there was still something of a normative consensus. There were -- like, there was a common agreement on values, that also Russia signed up to, many other countries signed up to, and then we developed a habit of basically holding them accountable to what they had signed up to in the '90s.

That continued throughout the 2000's, and eventually that normative consensus just broke down, and I think, what we've just seen with Borrell, in Moscow, and also with State Secretary Blinken, in Anchorage, is that Russia, and also China, they are just not taking it anymore, and they will just do the opposite. They'll just lecture back, in this what about-ism style, and if I -- you know, every time I heard, what about Guantanamo, during my time in the OECD, that brings me to this last point that, Ms. Tsikhanouskaya made, about coherence. We have to be extremely careful that we are coherent in what we say, what we project elsewhere, in terms of our values and what we do at home, because, otherwise, it's going to be extremely difficult to make these points, and I think we'll get to that later, also, about the state of democracy in our own European Union and in the U.S. But we have to be, with this lecturing, very careful that it becomes -- that it doesn't become too monologues, and that we really try and keep a conversation going.

MS. STELZENMULLER: Yeah, I think that's a very, very fair point. I will, if I may, Ambassador, sort of needle you a little bit more, on the point of consistency, and it seems to me, quite startling, that the EU has just generated a lot of ire in Beijing, with its sanctions on behalf of the -- the mistreated Uyghur minority. But on the whole, it seems to me that the EU has been rather more circumspect, on democracy movements in Eastern Europe. Is that because location makes a difference? Are we worried about the -- an overreaction from Moscow, and that we might not have an answer to that?

AMBASSADOR STEEGHS: Well, I don't know whether we have been actually much more careful with Eastern Europe. We have made very clear statements, I think, about how we see the recent developments and what we would like to see happen there. But, obviously, this is right at our

doorstep. There are other considerations that go into the full position that we can take, but I would not necessarily agree that we take a different kind of moment of stance on what happens in Belarus, than on what happens in China.

I think the difference, however, is also in China. There is no public -- publicly visible broad democracy movement, that is trying to sort of make its mark. In Belarus, you do have that, and what the threat, all the time, is, in a country like Belarus, is that it gets seriously violent and that a lot of people will actually be victimized.

MS. STELZENMULLER: Oh.

AMBASSADOR STEEGHS: I think that also dictates a different and sometimes more careful approach, this threat of the level of violence that might be pursued, either from within the country or from the neighboring country. I mean, both have been on the cards, so to speak.

I think, when it comes to China, we have a sort of violence monopoly of the government of China, that prevents this kind of civilian, well, what -- how do we say it? The use of violence against large groups of civilians that are resisting themselves. We have, there, an institutionalized violence against a whole group in Singyung. It's a different kind of risk, I think, that you're encountering, which requires, also, a different position.

MS. STELZENMULLER: Fun. Okay, thank you very much. I will just perhaps -- I think -- I take your point, actually, that there is a need for prudence, here, and also a, I think, for a strategic patience, the ability to play along there. And we -- I think there is one thing that we haven't mentioned, but which is really quite important, in which is that a safety valve exists for Belarusians, and of a democracy movement, which didn't exist during the Cold War, which is that people can now move and leave.

There is a fairly significant Belarusian diaspora, in Vilnius and also in Germany, and they're organizing there, and from there, and that's a new aspect here, and I think its effects are probably neutral, in that it both keeps people safe, but sort of keeps them out of the -- or takes talent out of the country, of course. But let me move to Tom Wright, my colleague, who's been waiting much too long. He is the director of the Center for the U.S. and Europe, at Brookings, and to which I belong, and a very

eloquent writer, in his regular column at the Atlantic Magazine on geopolitical and geostrategic issues, and you've -- recently, you've repeatedly turn to the issue of democracy in those essays, and you've argued forcefully against some opposition, here in Washington, that America's domestic troubles should not prevent it from standing up for democracy in human rights, globally. You and I both know that there is a ground swell here, of people arguing for that, and saying that the Biden administration risks overextending itself. Can you layout your argument for us?

MR. WRIGHT: Sure, thanks. Thanks, Constanze, and thanks for your leadership in this event today and the moderation of the discussion, but to plan it, said was very inspiring, and moving, and I think, it's been a terrific session so far, and I've learned a lot, already, in this panel.

Yeah, I think, this sort of became an issue, the point you raise, after the insurrection on January 6, and some people said, with all of the problems that we have, in Western democracies, we can't really sort of lecture other countries, or try to impose democracy, or promote, or even protect democracy overseas, that you basically have to deal with it here, at home, first, and then maybe look at it in the future, and the point I -- and I think also, you know, to be fair, the Biden administration is, you know, very much a, you know, wants to continue to speak out for democracy, too. The point really is that it's the struggle of the U.S. has with democracy at home, that gives us a -- it gives us a stake in the outcome of this debate, internationally.

Like it's precisely because the outcome is important, domestically, that the outcome is also important, internationally, that we have a stake in whether or not liberal democracy prevails here, but also in countries, like Hungary and elsewhere, where it's under stress, and there is a broader contest of competition of different governance systems going on, probably do see sort of an authoritarian alternative, and that authoritarian alternative has benefitted from these four years under the Trump administration of relative silence, certainly at the highest levels on democracy, and sort of a tolerance acquiescence, in some of the greater sort of measures of repression, that they engaged with, and that's why, I think, Freedom House has come out and said, you know, that we are, year on year, experiencing a recession of democracy.

I think the other point, Constanze, too, though, is that, if you look at Belarus, or Hong

Kong, or many different other sort of examples around the world, it's not the people who are struggling to have their rights realized and to have their voices heard. It's not those people who are skeptical of the U.S. or the EU weighing in and speaking up for those universal values. It's the autocrats, right? They're the ones who are sort of leveling the charges of hypocrisy, and they're going to do that, anyway. You know, the Soviets did that during the Cold War. They're, of course, going to engage in that argument. They're, of course, going to throw back our imperfections at us, but that is not something they are doing in good faith, right?

It's not as if --

MS. STELZENMULLER: Right.

MR. WRIGHT: -- those things went away, they would say, well, maybe now you have a point.

I just want to make one other point, too, because I do think I probably disagree, a little bit, with some of the other panelists on one issue, which is, you know, this is not, I think, a question of a discussion that can happen in good faith, with Moscow, Beijing, and others, that if they're sort of convinced, you know, that chaos wouldn't result from political liberalization, that they will be willing to experiment with that, right? They, I think, are correctly of the view, from their perspective, that any liberalization could spell the end, you know, of their control, at home, and they are determined to hold on to that, and they realized, I think, in the late 2000's, around '10, '11, '12, that their regimes were sort of existentially challenged by liberal democracy, and they undertook a number of steps, Putin and Xi, most prominently, to push back, and that's what we sort of see today, and so, I think, that's sort of where we are.

But I think they are very much involved in an effort to make the world safe for Putin-ism or for the CCP. They feel like it's a vulnerable sort of environment for them, and so, I think we have to recognize that, and I think, you know, when we talk about not lecturing, yeah, no one wants to lecture, I don't think that is what anyone would say a policy should be about, but I do think it is important to make clear that there are certain sort of values and human rights that, you know, we're not going to sort of paper over, that we will sort of make a big deal out of those, and that the price of egregious violations of

those, whether it's in Hong Kong, or Belarus, or elsewhere, will be high, you know, and that they will have to defend that because I think that is -- that that does affect their calculus, when it comes to, you know, making decisions. I think one of the reasons China cracked down on Hong Kong, last year, is because they felt they could get away with it, without much comment.

MS. STELZENMULLER: Fair enough. I think that the -- it is a very important point, that Belarus is closer to home, to Moscow, and to Putin's source of power, than any of the previous democracy movements, it seems to me, in either Georgia or in Ukraine, and particularly, given the fact that Alexei Navalny now seems to have energized a fairly large group of younger disillusioned Russians, who no longer believe in the social contract model, that their elders subscribed to, and that centers around the astounding degree of corruption of Putin and his own inner circle. I think that's a point that's very well taken.

On that note, let me perhaps -- I've gotten a ton of questions, but let me perhaps ask Kara McDonald on one, I think, particularly, sensitive issue, that is, I think, something the Transatlantic allies aren't perhaps quite ready yet to talk to each other about, but maybe you can remove me of that, relieve me of that doubt, and that is pursuing kleptocracy networks and dark money flows in Europe and America, which as we know are a very important source of political influence for autocrats and for -- and tools for them to engender political divisions in Western democracies. How high is that on the political agenda of the Biden administration, and what kind of cooperation would you want to see from Europe?

MS. MCDONALD: Yeah, thank you. Thank you, Constanze, for that question. Just before I dive into that, I did want to make a quick comment because I do associate myself quite -- with much of what Tom said, I think -- you know, our secretary at NATO, this week, said, and I think he said it very well, that perhaps the greatest threat we have is losing public confidence that democracy and democratic institutions can resolve these challenges, can meet these challenges, can overcome this pressure, and can self-correct. And I think, Constanze, I also really appreciated your tangible tone of humility comment, at the beginning of our discussion, because I think you have seen and will continue to see, from our administration, very much, that tone.

But I think I would say that in that humility and that desire to ensure that we have

consistency between the democratic work, at home, that has to be done, and then representing, also, and pressing for those values abroad because of the stake that we have in it, that there is also a strength in that. It's as President Biden said, the power of our example, but it's also -- there comes a strength in also going through a lot of those challenges ourselves, and I think being able, then, to come to the table, as equal partners, to discuss, and to call each other out, and to say we want to be called out, when we are not living up to our international obligations. And that's another comment I would make, is that these are not just U.S. values or European values. These are enshrined in international treaty obligations, that countries have signed up for. So, I think there is very much, in our view, the importance of holding each other to account for those obligations that we have signed up for.

Now, turning quickly to your question about corruption. So, this, I have to say, is an area that I have a particular interest in, especially because we see the nexus between corruption and repression. I like to say that corruption is often a currency of repression. It is a facilitator. It is a way in which it is facilitated, empowered, and enabled. I think, very much, when we talk about, and I'll speak generally here, but as we talk about the full range of tools that we can look at to address these questions, very much the issues of financing of autocratic regimes. Financing of authoritarian behavior is very much on our radar screen and very much in our sights, in our crosshairs.

I think, in terms of the importance of working with European allies, likeminded countries, we know that most of the challenges that we face, and particularly the challenge of democratic backsliding flirtations with authoritarianism, and authoritarianism well entrenched requires -- it's not the problem of one state. It requires a multilateral response, and I think, as we have those discussions, the breadth and depth, obviously, of those discussions is quite great, this is a piece of that, and I think you've seen that. We certainly recognize that sanctions are not the only tool, but they do have an important role to play, and we've been very encouraged by some of the European development of tools, to look at how to hold to account, and many of our sanctions focus on kind of two different channels.

There are those that are -- have authorities that are focused on violators of human rights, and there are those that are focused on corruption, and so, often, we find that those two are channels that there's a lot of --

MS. STELZENMULLER: Okay.

MS. MCDONALD: -- intermixing and intersectionality between those, but that is very much part of our discussion.

MS. STELZENMULLER: All right. Thank you very much. Let me move immediately to Gerard Steeghs. Do you see any scope for a European-American corporation on kleptocracy networks?

AMBASSADOR STEEGHS: I'm sure.

MS. STELZENMULLER: I mean, Europeans are sensitive about their banking secrets. Germans are particularly sensitive.

AMBASSADOR STEEGHS: Not all of us are the same. Not all of us, to the same degree, but, no, I think the mood is changing. I think we're all working together. We have now, in Europe, and I think Kara was referring to that human rights sanction regime, where we are now, as 27, cooperating and listing people who are -- seem to be instrumental in human rights violations. But very often, indeed, I couldn't agree more, Kara. You see that there is a connection to people who are also assisting and betting in the corruption schemes that autocratic systems use to keep themselves propped up. We saw that, for example, very clearly, in the case of Syria, where a lot of big business leaders are very close to the regime, and by listing them, you, on the one hand, make it harder for the regime to play its normal corrupt game, and on the other hand, you also come down on concrete human rights violations that you know are connect to some of these people.

So, yes, there is a great scope. We are developing the instruments now, in Europe, to get on top of these kinds of problems, and I think, in the partnership that we definitely feel with the Biden administration, with the United States, we can tackle these things together. We are doing that, already, in another area of, well, at least law enforcement trafficking. We have good cooperation emanating from New York, the United Nations University, on how to combat the financial side of human trafficking, how to sort of track the circuits around which the money is being made with illegal trafficking. There, we work very closely with the United States, as well. In a similar way, I can see us working on the autocratic corruption circuits, as well.

MS. STELZENMULLER: Thank you very much. I have a question from Trudy Rubin,

again, from the Philadelphia Inquirer, and that goes, again, to our own domestic orders, and it's this, how should NATO and the EU deal with illiberal democracies in their midst? Now, there have been some efforts, famously, to deal with that. Do you think there's been enough? Do we need to do more?

AMBASSADOR STEEGHS: We --

MS. STELZENMULLER: I'll start with you, and then I'll go to Kara McDonald, and ask Bob and Tom to weigh in on this one, which --

AMBASSADOR STEEGHS: Yep.

MS. STELZENMULLER: -- is key, I think.

AMBASSADOR STEEGHS: I think there is a two-prong approach there, unnecessary. On the one hand, if you sign up to the EU, you sign up to the rules of the club, and there's an enforcement mechanism. So, if you are violating the principles of the rule of law, if you are violating the principles of independent judiciary, then there is a European mechanism that will come down on you and will fault you for not towing the rules, so to speak. So, that's the sort of more punitive side of it, and it is being used. You know that my fellow countryman, you know, Timmermans, is, indeed, gearing up to take action on Polish judiciary infractions. There is similarly an exercise undertaken to see how we, from the European institutional point of view, can do something about infractions that are taking place in Hungary.

But there's also another side. There was a book, which, in Dutch, was called "Failing Light," were by Ivan Krastev and Stephen Holmes. In that book, they tried to determine why, in several Central European and Eastern European countries, after a sort of a very hopeful start, there's this move towards a more populist, a more anti-democratic type of rule, as has become evident, and what they see, and in coming -- that's a bit coming back to the point of lecturing, what they suggest is that, in some of these countries, the feeling has been that the norm setting, the standard setting, has been unilaterally from the old membership of the EU.

New membership member countries were always asked to perform up to the standard that was set from somewhere else, and it was never good enough was the feeling. They were always faulted for this, faulted for that, and that increased frustration, and, in some cases, anger, and was feeding into the dialogue or the narrative of populist leaders that are now, indeed, in some of these

countries, in power. So, we also need to, there again, what we already talked about, practice with more, I think, smart outreach policy, that makes it also clear why it is better for those countries, for all of us, if you stick to the rule of law, if you stick to democratic principles, if you unlock the potential of your society in the most efficient way, by letting everybody play their part. So, there's two sides of it, I think, the enforcement side and, indeed, the political side, where you try to understand. Where is it coming from? How do you counter that?

MS. STELZENMULLER: So, let me push you a little bit, if I may. The Netherlands are famously part of the frugal group of European member states, in their -- in the Emergency Recovery Program negotiations. Is it rude to me to suggest that this, if nothing else, might be a motive for the Netherlands to suggest, quite forcefully, to, say, Hungary or Poland, that they will be cut off from European funding, if they persist in turning their countries into one party states?

AMBASSADOR STEEGHS: No, I don't. I don't think so. You're making the wrong connection there. It's not about just saving a little bit of money, and it's not about --

MS. STELZENMULLER: No, I'm joking. I was being (overtalking).

AMBASSADOR STEEGHS: No, no, no. But it won't be -- you -- if you were serious, you wouldn't be the only one, probably, I'm sure. No. What is very much engrained in the Dutch national character is that if you make an investment, you do your due diligence, and you agree on a set of terms under which the investment can go forward. There's a sort of deal between money made available and what you do with the money that is made available. And the Dutch are very much, on the one hand, about, before you get into the deal, make it clear what the obligations on either side are, and then the other part of what the Dutch feel very strongly in, once you have made the deal, you stick to it. If the money is given under certain conditions, then the conditions must be applied. And I would be not -- well, let's put it this way. Personally, I can see that the frugal image is hurting the possibilities for us to do the outreach and, well, the more soft kind of policy side that I was mentioning before. I can see that. And as a diplomat, I think it's possible to do the one and not leave the other outside.

MS. STELZENMULLER: Oh, absolutely.

AMBASSADOR STEEGHS: We should voice it in a sort of way that it gets understood,

as to why are the Dutch sometimes so stringent on certain of these conditions.

MS. STELZENMULLER: I was -- I'm sorry. I was just trying to --

AMBASSADOR STEEGHS: No, no.

MS. STELZENMULLER: -- to push a couple of buttons.

AMBASSADOR STEEGHS: It's a thing, and we know it.

MS. STELZENMULLER: Let me ask Kara McDonald, there have been a couple of suggestions, in the past, of how to address the issue of illiberal allies within NATO. You may remember a foreign affairs essay, by Celeste Wallander, suggesting that Hungary be thrown out of NATO. I checked the legal options for that, and they are, I fear, nonexistent. But what other options are there, to express disapproval, and to perhaps point out that the government in Budapest has, you know, concerning -- concerning warm relations with both Moscow and Beijing, and that that's an issue for NATO?

MS. MCDONALD: Yeah, thank you, Constanze. I think, in fact, you have the answer there, in your question. I think, you know, the point of standing by our democratic principles is about calling out and engaging with our friends and our allies and our likeminded, when we see ourselves or them coming up short, and I think, you know, the strength of our alliances is based on the strength of those values on which they are pinned, and if we see backsliding on those values, that affects the strength of the alliance. So, I think there is very much, not just a bilateral equity here, but really one about the effectiveness, whether it's NATO or within the EU structures, the effectiveness of those alliances and the values on which they are based.

You know, I'm reminded a little bit, I had to testify, on Tuesday, on Georgia, and I remember saying, at one point, you know, we can't want it more than they do. So, these countries have signed up for these obligations, and we are very much of the view that we have to have those frank conversations. We are concerned about what we have seen happening in Hungary, about questions of independent judiciary, about corruption, about the LGBTI community, antisemitism, the media pluralist environment, the media environment and lack of pluralism. So, I think those are all part of, and I very much want to reassure that these are very much issues on which we engage with Hungarian counterparts, and they will be an important part of our bilateral agenda.

MS. STELZENMULLER: All right. Thank you very much. Bob, I've left you out of the conversation a bit. Is there anything here that you would like to come in on?

MR. DEEN: Well, certain conversations I don't mind being let out of, especially about frugal Dutch, but, yeah, just -- just to come back on the --

MS. STELZENMULLER: I'm sorry. And again, I don't want to be rude --

MR. DEEN: Okay.

MS. STELZENMULLER: -- either, to our partners.

AMBASSADOR STEEGHS: Don't worry about it. Don't worry about it.

MR. DEEN: Sometimes, I'm happy I'm not a Dutch diplomat having to explain these things abroad, but, you know, to come back to the struggle of intergovernmental organizations, it's NATO, and it's the EU, but it's also the OECD and the Council of Europe. They all actually have the same problem. Once a country is in, it's pretty hard to enforce the values that it stands for because has a veto on decision-making. If it's alone, you can still apply certain mechanisms, like the Moscow mechanism or others. If there's multiple backing each other, it's even harder to enforce anything at all, and then you eventually come to discussions, like we've had in the Council of Europe with Russia, is it better if the country is in it, when you can still exercise certain amounts of pressure through the mechanism of that organization --

MS. STELZENMULLER: Right.

MR. DEEN: -- or if there's a point that their values are so far apart from what the organization stands for, that it's better if they leave. Now, that last decision, because it's irreversible, it's not been taken much at all. Sometimes, memberships can be suspended briefly, but expulsion doesn't seem to happen much because you lose the ability to engage each other behind the scenes, in that dialogue, and I think, just to back up what Kara McDonald was saying, I think these conversations need to be had. This holding each other to account needs to be done. Not all of it needs to be done through Twitter, maybe, and not all of it needs to be done through long monologues in intergovernmental settings, but it's very important that they take place, and at last, maybe, to come to Fidesz.

It took us an incredibly long time, and, here, including also Germany, played a certain

role on Fidesz and the European People's Party, in the European Parliament. It only just left, I think, last week, and so, for a very long time, it was shielded from too much criticism from its own peers within the European People's Party, due to, I have to admit this, just political interests and the large amount of votes, also, that it brought to the table. So, sometimes, we're good at holding sort of public statements denouncing things, but when it comes to touching our real interests, we actually tend to shy away from actually making changes that could make a difference.

MS. STELZENMULLER: Okay. Bob, I can only say, guilty as charged. I think that Germany has played an unhelpful role, and particularly, the German Conservative Party, the Christian Democratic Union, and I have to say I think one needs to lay that, then, at the feet of the Chancellor, herself, for far too long, really for a decade, shielding Fidesz from criticism, when Fidesz behavior and Orban's behavior was becoming ever more egregious. Anybody who has ever read any of Orban's summer school speeches will know exactly, you know, what kind of vision of Europe he has and that that gels quite nicely with the visions of Stephen Bannon, and other people, and other sort of -- of the most egregiously far right ethnonationalists, both in Europe and in America. And I feel that that is a blame that is perfectly correct to lay at Germany's door. I feel quite strongly about that.

Tom, let me ask you to come in. I think this question about how important it is -- you know, what's the point at which you say, enough is enough, we clearly can't do anything anymore by talking with -- to a country, or to its leaders, behind closed doors? There needs to be -- we need to expel them from a group or a -- like, Russia was expelled from the G8. What's your take on that issue, keep or expel, at this point?

MR. WRIGHT: Well, you know what, I think Kara had it right, particularly with regard to Hungary or similar cases. I mean, one could potentially, you know, say, Turkey, as well, and maybe there are others. I mean, my view is that, you know, we have to make clear that, if this continues, it will materially affect the relationship of the alliance, right? So, it'll have a material negative impact on sort of the long-term alliance between the United States and that country, and that's sort of a choice they have to make, but my view is, if Orban continues going down the road that he's going, I just find it hard to imagine how the United States and Hungary are allies in 10- or 15-years' time.

I don't quite know how that happens, but I think we are entering into a world where the value's dimension of foreign policy and this choice between authoritarianism and democracy, you know, these will be fuzzy lines, and there'll be lots of different sort of exceptions and all of that, but it will actually matter, I think, and countries do, to some degree, have to choose. I mean, obviously, countries will stay engaged with China, and in some cases Russia, and they'll still be allies of the U.S., and the U.S. will still be engaged with China, economically. But there will be a choice on certain sort of key matters, including the rule of law, like who you basically align with, and I think that's -- that's what they have to think about.

And the other point I would just make, Constanze, is, you know, sometimes, I think of the analogy to the 2% emphasis that the Trump administration had, right? Trump said, if you don't spend two% of your GDP in defense, then we may not defend you, right, or this will -- we're so aggravated by that, you know, that we will maybe overstep the mark in our alliance, and if not withdraw, like something bad will happen, right? Now, I thought that was totally wrong on that issue, that he did that, but there's nothing to stop us from doing the same thing on democracy and human rights, and to say that we regard that as much of a litmus test as he regarded, you know, defense spending as a percentage of GDP, in that if you completely eviscerate your democracy, like, don't expect everything to be fine.

And actually, you know, I mean, it's very, very simple to change the alliance to NATO. It can be done unilaterally by the United States, right, because all NATO is it's an interpretation of Article 5 of the founding treaty, right? So, you know, there's nothing to stop any President from reinterpreting that for any country, at any given point. So, I think the question is -- that's really the question. It's whether or not we want to remain allies with a country, if there's no prospect of redemption or of, you know, sort of the salvaging of democracy. So, I think that's a long ways down the road, but I think it's important, you know, for leaders, like Orban or Erdogan, to sort of understand that, you know, this is a permanent alliance based on values, and if that value dimension is gone, then that's going to be a problem, right, and we have to work through that, but they can't expect to have a cake-ism policy, where, you know, they have their cake and eat it, too.

MS. STELZENMULLER: Fair enough. I'm conscious that we're -- we're very nearly out of time. So, I'm going to throw one last question at you, and give you the opportunity of combining that

with your sort of final thoughts, and I will go in reverse order. This is a question from Driss Larafi, who is a professor at the University of Ibn Tofail, in Morocco. So, you see, we have people watching us from Morocco, which is amazing. Thank you. And he says, do you think the best way to sustain democracy is to bolster international human rights law, through the endeavors of the U.N. and its agencies? And this raises, of course, brings us back to the original, you know, the purpose of the lecture, which is international law.

Last year, when we wanted to do the Breyer Lecture and had to cancel it because of the pandemic, our working title was "Normative Disarmament," in other words, the rollback of international law and human rights, by governments around the world, and in some ways also by Western governments. Tom, what do you think we should do, on the international level and through international institutions to keep these -- to sustain democracy?

MR. WRIGHT: It's a good question. You know, I think the most important task, Constanze, is for liberal democracies to work more closely together, effectively, as a caucus within these institutions, to ensure that the normative way they are interpreted and implemented, you know, remains, you know, as it was intended, when they were brought in, and, you know, to some extent, that's a -- you know, that's keeping a pace with China and others, who are also exerting an influence in those.

And then I think there's also a domestic component, of course, too, and this is more of a problem in the U.S. than in Europe, but basically in maintaining the legitimacy of those laws and by showing, you know, that we're abiding and respecting those, too. And I think that's where sort of setting that example or living that example is an incredibly important thing.

MS. STELZENMULLER: Ambassador Steeghs, the Dutch really have played an outsized role in their defense of the U.N. and its institutions, not just by hosting the International Code of Justice and the International Criminal Tribunals, in The Hague. What more -- what do we need to do to shore up international law, in a time of great power competition and really aggressive actions against democracy by authoritarians?

AMBASSADOR STEEGHS: What we tried to do, and we've, jointly, with likeminded countries, have sent a letter to the secretary general of the U.N., recently, on this matter, is to protect one

of the pillars of the U.N., which is the human rights enforcement, the compliance with the human rights declaration. What we see is that, bit by bit, the funding for human rights, instruments for the Human Rights Council, for the right of individual citizens and to use instruments to seek justice, is getting less and less. What we see is that there is a continuous attempt to change the language that is used, when you talk about human rights and when you talk about taking a measure of compliance of human rights, in certain countries.

So, what we need to do is push back against it, and we're getting more deliberate on that. We're getting more organized on that. Pushback, on the one hand, the things that go on in human rights bodies. On the other hand, make sure that the structure, as it is now, remains in place, remains doing what it is supposed to do, and keeps the funding that it needs to do that. What is now a big risk is that the countries that believe in human rights are also tasked for the financing of the U.N. human rights institutions. That would be a perversity, in my view. The U.N., as I said, has one of its three pillars, human rights. If that pillar, which is universal, which is relevant for all member states is going to be funded only by voluntary contributions, on the countries that happen to think that it's actually quite important, then we have lost a huge amount of influence and an importance of how we see human -- of how we see human rights being enforced in the world, and that is something that we will not get back easily, if we lose it. So, there, we are getting increasingly organized with likeminded countries to push back, to get the funding properly arranged, for all of the body of member states, etc.

MS. STELZENMULLER: Thank you so much, Ambassador. Kara McDonald, yesterday, the State Department released information that it had, among other things, cosigned, an EU resolution condemning continuing human rights abusers in Belarus in the U.N. Human Rights Council, which is amazing, I real -- you know, not something anybody would have expected anymore, after the past four years. So, thank you for that. What else do you think is necessary for all of us to work together, to preserve and expand international law, for the benefit of all?

MS. MCDONALD: Yeah, thank you so much, Constanze. When we speak with a common voice and a common purpose, that is how we're going to meet these challenges, whether it's COVID, whether it is climate change. That is how we have to meet these challenges, and while we

recognize that there are certainly flaws in these institutions, we continue to believe in the mandate. We continue to believe in the architecture that established them. And I think that's why you've seen this administration engage, so robustly, back in the Human Rights Council.

Thank you for mentioning the Belarus resolution. As leading one of the teams that worked so hard behind the scenes on it, I take that back with me. But I think it, of course, is not just that. You know, we were also very proud of the 156, 156 countries joined us in a statement on racism. That is tremendously powerful, when 156 countries sign up to those kinds of issues. So, we are very much looking to work with and through the multilateral institutions and recognize, just very simply, that one nation can't do it alone.

AMBASSADOR STEEGHS: If I just may a little thing to that, what I'm also very proud of is that, and I think it was initiated by the U.S., that we also had a resolution in the Human Rights Council, last session, that actually pushed back on attempts by countries, like China, to change their language, to change the concept of universality of human rights --

MS. MCDONALD: Yes. Yes.

MS. STELZENMULLER: Yeah, it's great.

AMBASSADOR STEEGHS: -- and to put all sorts of ifs and buts in the way. We now had a very clear statement. It was supported. It was clear for everybody. And I think it's one of the first times that we, this explicitly, pushed back on attempts to change the whole architecture, as Kara was saying. So, that, for me, was also a gratifying moment. Thanks.

MS. STELZENMULLER: All right. Well, Bob, you have the last word, before me.

MR. DEEN: No, Constanze, I think the points have been made. The importance is to come to the defense of multilateralism, and I think, if anything, the last four years, with the previous administration, it did a lot of damage to this ideal of multilateralism, and it even made many other countries, including my own, unite in an alliance for multilateralism, exactly to make the points that Kara just made. We are much stronger if we try and defend these things together, and I think the case of Belarus is a case in point. These human rights are most needed in the places where the autocrats crack down on them hardest, and the international institutions need to be equipped with knowledge, with

political support, and, yes, with funding, in order to be able to respond adequately and quickly because, if anything, we've seen sort of a breakdown over the last years of investment in these type of organizations, also investment in this type of knowledge, and that's why I want to conclude by thanking Brookings for actually paying attention to it, in the way that you do, because this is really important to also secure societal support from bottom-up, for this very important multilateral work. Thank you very much.

MS. STELZENMULLER: Well, thank you for those kind words.

AMBASSADOR STEEGHS: Here, here.

MS. STELZENMULLER: Now, it's to me to thank all of you, Kara McDonald, from the State Department, Ambassador Steeghs, from the Dutch Foreign Ministry, Bob Deen, from the Clingendael Institute, and my own dear colleague, Tom Wright, from Brookings, for what I thought was a fabulous panel discussion. I also want to thank Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya for giving us, I thought, a memorable and moving lecture, seventh Breyer lecture, and finally, our partners, the Clingendael Institute, and the Dutch Foreign Ministry, and the Municipality of The Hague, for working with us on this distinguished lecture series, now in its seventh iteration. And finally, Justice Breyer just wrote me an email, saying that he would've -- he wanted to join us for the panel, but his case conference this morning, at the Supreme Court, lasted until 12:30. So, he thought he would interrupt us, if he joined at the very end, which I'm immensely grateful, frankly, that he even gave this consideration. We'll send him the link of the lecture and the discussion.

And let me perhaps end by saying that I think, when we talk as Westerners about democracy promotion, what we're talking about is practical solidarity. We have nations in civil society who seek freedom, self-determination, and democracy, on their own terms, who want to live in decent societies, and it should -- I think that our -- we need to keep underscoring that our goal is not a hegemony of Western-style democracies, but an expanding collaboration of countries, that derive their legitimacy from good governance and the free consent of their citizens because anything else just isn't right. With that, I'm going to conclude this. Thank you so much. It's been wonderful discussing with all of you, and I hope to meet you all in person very soon. Thank you for your time in your busy days. Stay well. Stay safe and healthy, above all, and goodbye.

AMBASSADOR STEEGHS: Well, thank you, Brookings, and everybody there.

MS. STELZENMULLER: Yeah, and thanks to all the Brookings organizers behind the scenery, who are important, as always. Bye-bye.

MR. DEEN: Bye-bye.

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I, Carleton J. Anderson, III do hereby certify that the forgoing electronic file when originally transmitted was reduced to text at my direction; that said transcript is a true record of the proceedings therein referenced; that I am neither counsel for, related to, nor employed by any of the parties to the action in which these proceedings were taken; and, furthermore, that I am neither a relative or employee of any attorney or counsel employed by the parties hereto, nor financially or otherwise interested in the outcome of this action.

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