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EU Lifts Sanctions Against Belarussian President Lukashenko

By The Moscow Times

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Belarus' President Alexander Lukashenko

The European Union has lifted most sanctions against Belarussian President Alexander Lukashenko and his administration officials, the EU Council said in a statement Monday, praising Belarus's role at a time when Russia has been pushing to reestablish control over former Soviet republics.

Relations between Belarus's authoritarian president and the West have improved markedly since the start of Russia's meddling in Ukraine a couple of years ago. Lukashenko criticized Moscow's annexation of Crimea and the Russian-backed separatist insurgency in Ukraine's east, and hosted peace talks in his capital Minsk between representatives of the Kiev government, rebel leaders, Russia, Germany and France.

The EU Council "acknowledges the steps taken by Belarus over the last two years that have contributed to improving EU-Belarus relations," and "values Belarus' constructive role in the

region," it said in a statement.

The EU suspended sanctions against Lukashenko and 169 other Belarussian individuals last year, and lifted them altogether on Monday. The sanctions, which included asset freezes and visa bans, had been in place for over a decade.

The release of all political prisoners by late August last year, and improvements during the October presidential balloting after a series of flawed elections in the past contributed to the EU decision, the statement said.

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