



**DELEGATION FOR RELATIONS WITH BELARUS
- The Acting Chairman -**

STATEMENT

**by Mr Jacek PROTASIEWICZ,
Acting Chairman of the Delegation for relations with Belarus**

on remaining political prisoners in Belarus

Strasbourg, 15 July 2009. I observe with deep concern the criminal cases brought against three opponents of the Belarusian government. Mr Mikalay Awtukhovich, Mr Yury Lyavonaw and Mr Uladzimir Asipenka have been in pre-trial detention for nearly 5 months since February 2009. They were formally charged with “deliberate destruction of or damage to property caused in a way dangerous to the public or the intentional infliction of large-scale damage” on 18 February. The investigation period was to expire on 3 July. The fact that the three detainees have not been released until today means that the investigation is extended. In this context I am especially concerned about the health of Mr Mikalay Awtukhovich who has been on a hunger strike for almost 80 days already.

Moreover, I would like to condemn the one-year prison sentence that was imposed on young opposition activist Artsyom Dubski on 7 July 2009. Mr Dubski was one of the 11 persons arrested during the demonstration in January 2008 and condemned under the Article 342 of the Criminal Code of Belarus for "taking part in or organizing actions that gravely disturb public order" and sentenced to between one and a half and two years of restricted freedom. Furthermore Mr Artsyom Dubski was facing prosecution under Article 415 of the Criminal Code for violating the conditions of his sentence resulting in the mentioned above court decision of 1 year imprisonment. I underline that all those young people participated in a peaceful protest in Minsk in January 2008 and I believe they have been sentenced to a punishment which amounts to imprisonment for the peaceful exercise of their rights to freedom of assembly and expression.

I would like to remind the Belarusian authorities that the European Parliament expressed in its last resolution of 2 April 2009 on the bi-annual evaluation of the EU-Belarus dialogue that the “intensification of the political dialogue between the EU and Belarus must be conditional on the lifting of restrictions on freedom and cessation of violence against participants in opposition protests and human rights activists” and called “for the immediate release of entrepreneurs Mikalai Awtukhovich, Yury Liavonau and Uladzimir Asipenka and youth opposition activist Artsiom Dubski; as well as for a review of the "restricted freedom" sentences imposed on 11 persons who participated in a demonstration which took place in January 2008”.

I would also like to recall that Amnesty International in its letter dated 5 May 2009 informed the Prosecutor General of Belarus that the organization considers the aforementioned 11 young people who are serving sentences of restricted freedom, to be prisoners of conscience. Therefore I would like to declare that this issue will be one of the key factors in the evaluation process of the human rights situation in Belarus as regards the six months visa ban suspension period. We also call on the Belarusian authorities to review the case of Mr Dubski and others who were imposed restricted freedom sentences, as well as to release Mr Mikalay Awtukhovich, Mr Yury Lyavonaw and Mr Uladzimir Asipenka.

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