



**JOINT STATEMENT BY THE CHAIR OF THE DELEGATION FOR RELATIONS
WITH BELARUS, MEP Robert BIEDRO , AND THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT’S
STANDING RAPPORTEUR ON BELARUS, MEP Petras AUŠTREVII IUS**

on the need to remove the 2021 hockey world championship from Belarus

Brussels, 13 January 2021 - “We have been dismayed to see that René Fasel, President of the International Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF), who has just enjoyed a warm embrace with Aliaksandr Lukashenka in Minsk, remains committed to holding the world championships in Belarus, despite the regime’s brutal and widespread crackdown on peaceful protesters.

This year’s ice hockey world championship is due to take place from 21 May to 6 June. Given the unprecedented level of repression that has followed the fraudulent presidential election of 9 August 2020, leading to a record-high 33,000 arbitrary arrests and detentions, including hundreds of political prisoners, as well as at least eight protests-related deaths so far, and the regime’s poor human rights record at large, we believe that it is simply inconceivable to hold this tournament – as well as any major international sportive events – in Belarus while its people are being deprived of their fundamental rights and freedoms. Therefore, we strongly call on the IIHF, its member national associations and other sports federations to take a firm stance and to bar Belarus from hosting and participating in such events.

We also take note that the co-organiser of the tournament, Latvia, has already expressed its opposition to Minsk hosting the event and has stated its readiness to host the event on its own. As history has shown on numerous occasions, it is naive to think that one can just keep politics out of sports. Lukashenka maintains a tight grip on his nation’s sports as the head of the National Olympic Committee. In fact, some of the most famous Belarusian athletes have also been subject to merciless persecution by the authorities.

Last but not least, as the epidemiological situation remains dramatic, organising such a large public event in Belarus would be reckless. In this regard, we would like to recall the IIHF’s decision to cancel last year’s championship in Lausanne and Zurich over public health concerns.”

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