



**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 AUŠTREVIIŠ**

on the latest sentencing of journalists in Belarus

Brussels, 18 February 2021 – “We have been appalled to learn that two Belsat journalists have been sentenced today to two years in prison for reporting live from a rally commemorating Raman Bandarenka – a 31-year-old art teacher beaten to death on 11 November 2020 by plain-clothed masked men. Katsyaryna Andrejeva and Darya Chultsova have been found guilty of “organising public events aimed at disrupting civil order”, a far-fetched charge that is commonly used by Belarus' politically-controlled courts to stifle dissenting voices.

These outrageous developments show that the situation of media freedom in Belarus, which was already preoccupying, has taken a dramatic turn for the worse following last year's fraudulent presidential election.

Despite repeated criticism by the international community, Belarusians are still deprived of their most basic rights – as illustrated by last Tuesday's police raids on the offices of the Human Rights Centre 'Viasna' and of the Belarusian Association of Journalists, followed by a new wave of arbitrary arrests and detentions.

Not a single day goes by in Belarus without repressive actions against representatives of the democratic forces, journalists, human rights defenders, civil society activists and independent trade unionists.

Once again, we condemn in the strongest terms these newest abuses committed by Aliaksandr Lukashenka's illegitimate regime. We stand by the brave people of Belarus in their quest for dignity and freedom.”

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